

# WORKING WOMEN

STRIKE

# FOR FREEDOM

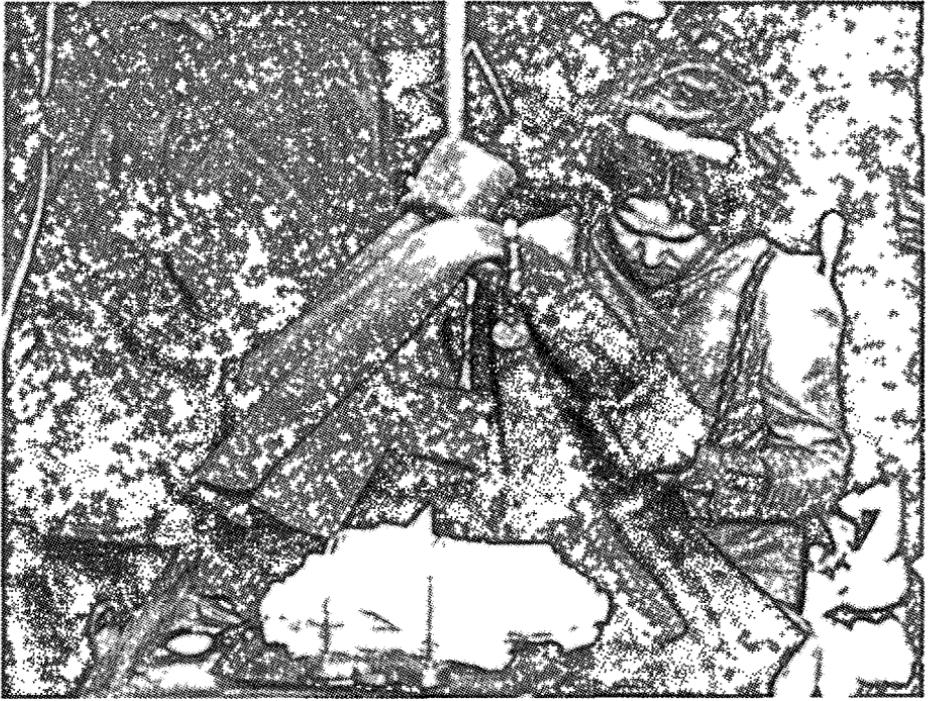
By  
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Appendix: "Women as Thinkers and as Revolutionaries"  
by Raya Dunayevskaya

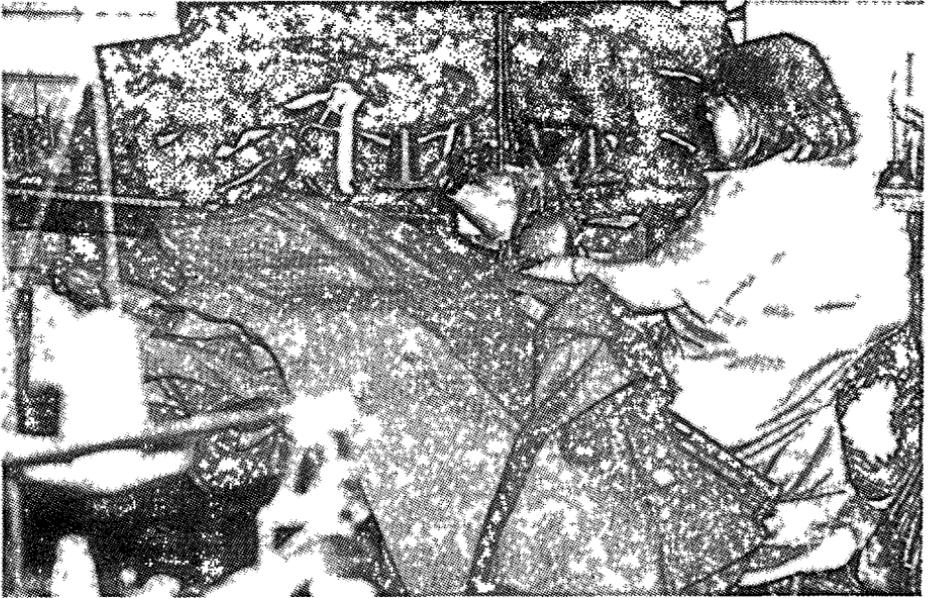
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*To the memory of Will Stein, who, as a Marxist-Humanist, was proud to be an activist in the Women's Liberation Movement, and who, in the early stages of this pamphlet, creatively helped it to be.*



**THEN AND NOW:** above, garment sweatshop in N.Y. in 1900; below, garment shop today in Pennsylvania. Only the machine has changed.



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**To Our Readers:**

Many of you will recognize yourselves in this pamphlet. It was written by more than the three authors. In the collectivity, we did not wish to lose the individuality, whether as activist, as thinker, or both. Thus, at times, we used the "I" whether it was one of us or one of you speaking. At other times, we told stories as "they", or commented on events whether we were or were not there, so long as we discussed it with others and saw something new in the way it was told.

Where do we go from here?

Because workers think their own thoughts, they are every bit as "intellectual" as professionals who delude themselves that all originality resides in their thoughts.<sup>1</sup> In all cases, working women, here and now, whether in production or in the home, or in political activity or just thinking things through, are hewing out new paths to liberation, and it is their stories that must be told and become the basis of the new action and the new theory. **Let the deed and the dialogue begin.**

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1. See Appendix, Raya Dunayevskaya on "Women as Thinkers and as Revolutionaries."

# I. On the Winds of Freedom

- **The Black Revolt of the Sixties: Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Gloria Richardson, Mary Hamilton, “Woman Power Unlimited”**
- **Terry Moon: a White Young Women’s Liberationist**
- **Working Women’s Struggles Across the Land**

On the winds of freedom released by the Black Revolutions sweeping the world and this country, giving birth in the 1960s not only to the youthful Free Speech and anti-Vietnam war movements, but to a whole new generation of revolutionaries, the Women’s Liberation Movement found it had to confront not only the Right but the Left who relegated “women’s issues” to something that would get attention “after the victory of the revolution.”

Despite all attempts to invalidate the need for an independent movement of women, the facts are that only with the birth of this, **just this** Movement, was it recognized that Women’s Liberation is an idea whose time had come.

The greatest achievement of the Women’s Liberation Movement, which is active and vividly a part of our everyday lives, has been that it gave proof to the idea that none can “give” us freedom. We, and only we, can free ourselves. The idea that women’s liberation is the task of the women themselves came out of the concrete struggles of the 1960s, reaching a crescendo today, in the 1970s.

- Thus, although **before** the 1960s it was Rosa Parks, seamstress, who had initiated the whole Black Revolution in the South in 1955 by refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man; and although in the 1960s, before Mississippi Freedom Summer, Fannie Lou Hamer had not only initiated but had been a leader in that movement – still, as women, they were treated as the exception, if not sheer “accident.” Indeed, Gloria Richardson, the recognized leader of the movement in Cambridge, Md., was told to step back by the male SNCC leadership when they arrived on the scene because, they said, nobody would accept a woman as leader. She didn’t, not for anybody.

And totally unnoticed to this very day is the fact that when white and Black Freedom Riders were thrown into those miserable Southern racist jails in 1961, they found there was a group of Black women who called themselves “Woman Power Unlimited,” who tried to make life halfway tolerable and waited for them when their terms were over to speed them back North to spread the word of freedom. We alone recorded what a white Freedom Rider wrote about “Woman Power Unlimited” in the same pamphlet in which Mary Hamilton recorded not only her own experience as a Black Freedom Rider, but her new awareness of the continuity between that and the historic struggles of the Abolitionists 100 years earlier.

“I felt,” she wrote, “that we were part of the historical movement for freedom which began with the Abolitionists. I remember the Boston ragpicker, David Walker,



**ROSA PARKS**, top left, launched Black revolt in U.S. by refusing to give up bus seat to white man in 1955 in Montgomery, Ala.; woman at right walks to support bus boycott with groceries carried on her head. **FANNIE LOU HAMER**, bottom left, was a leader of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in the 1960s.



**FARAH** strike won nationwide support — and union victory for workers in 1972.

and his **Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the United States** in 1829, that caused such a sensation that legislatures in the South were called into special session to enact laws against reading it . . . 50,000 copies of this 76-page pamphlet were sold and circulated from hand to hand. Those who could not read had others read it to them. The South trembled at the simple words of an obscure Negro." <sup>2</sup>

• Thus, in the North, the young white middle class Women's Liberationists found many on the Left resisting their movement. One of the young founders of the movement in Michigan, Terry Moon, described her experience:

"The small groups that began getting together all over America in 1967 and '68 signalled a new stage. In the same city there might be several groups, none of whom knew about the other. Most of the women were young, white and middle class and usually one or two in each group had some contact with the Left. They were thoroughly disgusted with it because of how they had been treated because they were women, but none of this had yet been verbalized. It was these women who took the brunt of the Left's hatred and fear of the emerging women's movement.

When we read about the attacks on the Women's Liberation Movement today, by men in the Left in Portugal, we had better not think it could only happen in a "backward" country. The truth is that is exactly what happened to us right here. I will never forget going to a peace march in Washington, D.C. A white middle class male Leftist told me, "You aren't oppressed, you white middle class bitch." When we marched in a demonstration to protest the racist policies of **The Detroit News** and carried signs opposing sexist segregated want ads, we were pushed and shoved, laughed at, and men tried to take our signs away from us. In a peace march down Woodward Ave., the main drag in Detroit, one Gay Liberation group — all men — threw garbage at us and in one of the last big marches in Washington, D.C., we had stones as well as insults hurled at us. That might not happen now, of course, but I will not forget."

• Above all — or more precisely put, from below — arose working women's struggles. They found they had to fight not only the company, but the labor bureaucracy, and not only male but female labor leaders, as they began their own self-organization.

A new dimension in class struggles burst forth all over the land. In Texas, 2,000 primarily Chicana workers struck the Farah clothing factory for 21 months and inspired a nation-wide boycott to support them. In Northern California, 4,000 registered nurses struck 40 hospitals, demanding better patient care. Telephone workers broke out in nation-wide wildcats, not only before, but **after** their union reached a settlement with Bell. In Norfolk, Va., Black women who processed clams and oysters for Campbell's soups struck and found they had to face dogs, cops and scabs.

Not all the struggles expressed explicit links to the women's liberation movement — but it was "in the air," whether it was the Welfare Rights Organization or the Black nurse's aides of Charleston who led thousands of people into the streets week after week; or whether, later, it was the Freuhauf office workers strike, which was kept alive by the Women's Liberation groups in Detroit joining the picket lines;

2. Mary Hamilton later won an historic Supreme Court decision requiring that Blacks in Alabama be addressed by the title "Mr.," "Mrs.," or "Miss." She was co-author with Louise Inghram and others of **Freedom Riders Speak For Themselves**, News & Letters, 1961.



**WOMEN** marchers in N.Y. massed on Aug. 26, 1971, demanding end to sexism in society.

or, most recently, two New York cleaning women in their sixties and seventies, who complained that men were paid more, and when asked what they thought about WL, declared, "We are women's liberationists!"

New women's voices began to be heard everywhere. A Black dormitory worker at California's UCLA, with whom Women's Liberationists there began to work, declared:

"We who work in the dormitories are just as unhappy as the students about the conditions of the buildings. We know that the students deserve better working conditions and fair treatment. We are Black, we are all humans and cannot be expected to do a superhuman amount of work in an eight-hour day. The university wants you to be loyal to your job. But I ask, is UCLA loyal to the women? I say no.

In the dormitories they expect women to do the same amount of work, or more, than the men, but they receive less pay. We have women working on the weekend, doing the restrooms on the men's side. The students are running around nude, using the restrooms, while the women are trying to do their job. I wonder, if these same women weren't Black, but were white women, would the manager expect them to do this?

This is a place where they don't care anything about a woman, and if you are a Black woman, they care even less."

### **"You Get So Disgusted With The System"**

Because these are facts and we want, first and foremost, to begin with these working women's voices, we tell you from the very beginning that it is not only new voices you'll be hearing and new actions you'll be witnessing initiated, but new thoughts, original thoughts that go to the very root of the task.

"You Get So Disgusted With the System" is one such tale of a Black working woman, Pat Carter, telling it not only as it is, but as she'd like to **uproot** it:

"It is important to women that they have the same privileges as a man in things that have to be done. If you're the head of your house, you've got the same responsibilities he has, as far as going out, having a job, and making a living for your household. But they always seem to hire a male before they'll hire a female. For some reason they think, "He's a man. He needs a job."

And when you do get in the plant, it's the same thing. For some reason, they don't want women in there. They always put women on the hardest jobs. They figure you won't be able to do them and then they can send you back out into the streets. People seem afraid to speak up for fear they might get fired. They talk a lot about the pressure put on them with the company saying, "If you don't do it, we'll hire somebody else." They think that the union is not really working in their behalf so they take it and go on.

**Production never stops. If you have a grievance over something that is dangerous or harmful to you, you've got to do it until that line stops. Then you go see the committeeman to see what can be done about it. But you don't stop that line for anything.**

They have some jobs where two persons do it. If the foreman gets ornery, he'll put you on it alone. You call the committeeman and he says, "Well, it looks like one person can do that." These committeemen are supposed to be for the workers, but after they're in there, they really aren't. They say, "Well, you women wanted to be liberated. You asked for this." To them, liberated means you want to do the dirtiest jobs in the plant.

To me liberated means you don't want to be bound down, you want the opportunity to do something for yourself, to be independent, not to have others think for you, to be free to speak up for yourself and do some of the things you want to do. Men have felt that you didn't have any rights to do anything but stay home, rear children, take care of the house and look after their needs. Men think they are superior to women. But I don't think so.

A job makes you independent. Why is it that men want you to be dependent? Nobody should have to depend on one individual to help them that way.

It's the woman's drive that keeps her going. Women do twice the work men do because housework is never done. You put in eight hours at the plant, and when you come home you've got to cook, wash, iron, clean your house, mop your floors, wash your walls. So why do they want to put you on the hardest jobs in the plant?

**Why should we have to continue this suffering? Why should we continually be exploited? How do we go about making some basic changes? We need to begin. You get so disgusted with this system. You can't just sit at home and think everything will take care of itself. Because it doesn't.**

How long will a total change in society take? We've got to do something now, not 100 years or 50 years from now. We need it now. Lots of people are going through what I'm going through. You have to hope that people will come together in unity to bring about a change. If we keep it within ourselves, nobody knows how we feel. When you find out that other people feel the same way, you know you're not in this alone, and if we get together, things can change.

We need to put together work and thought. Without that, we won't be moving."

How is it that labor, in general, which produces everything, is always on the bottom of the heap — the bottom of the economic ladder as well as the so-called

intellectual one?

How is it that women are placed even lower, forced to suffer the additional weight of male chauvinism?

How is it that there is still a further division, between white and Black women, with Black women burdened by the additional weight of racism as well as male chauvinism?

Since so-called "women's jobs" and "men's jobs" change with the winds of time, why is it that no sooner are wars that drove them to the factory over, than women are thrown out on the street?

Haven't women as laborers always been used . . . from the unpaid labor within the family, to their "unskilled labor" in any and every occupation as the necessities of class society demanded?

Haven't the great leaps from necessity to freedom been from those who labor, working women as well as men?

Let's look at history and see the continuity and the discontinuity of our age and the past.



**NURSE strike in California included improved patient care in demands.**

# II. Long Hidden From History and Philosophy

*"To recognize, in principle, the equality of right between men and women as being the sole means of establishing Human Unity." — Proposed by Flora Tristan, in Union Ouvriere, 1843<sup>3</sup>*

*"I come from another field — the country of the slave. They have got their liberty, so much good luck to have slavery partly destroyed. Not entirely. I want it root and branch destroyed." — Sojourner Truth, 1867<sup>4</sup>*

The question of putting work and thought together, which the Black working woman, Pat Carter, raises today, is the red thread that runs throughout the history of working women. Women's struggles and thoughts have so long been hidden from history and philosophy that even now, when women historians are finally unearthing many untold tales, they are still told as if the facts were shorn of meaning — as if they didn't really add up to philosophy, to women as thinkers.

Whether we take two pages from the 19th century — Flora Tristan in England, raising the question of a new international for working women and men, or Harriet Tubman, the Black conductor of the Underground Railroad and general in the Civil War<sup>5</sup> — or whether we look at the questions that confront us today, we will see what Sojourner Truth was raising when she criticized men for being "short-minded."

Whether we go as far back as the very first recorded Maid's Petition of 1647 demanding from the British Parliament "liberty every second Tuesday," or whether we come all the way to the present-day Black Women's Liberationist, Doris Wright, asking, "When the time comes to put down my gun, will I have a broom shoved in my hands?," there is a long, tortuous trek to freedom in thought as well as in fact.

## Pages from the 19th Century: Flora Tristan, Sojourner Truth, Clara Lemlich

Take these three facts of 19th century history, when Karl Marx was discovering a new continent of thought, which he called a New Humanism:

- In 1843, the year before Marx wrote his now-famous Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts, Flora Tristan had already proposed a world-wide Workers' International to abolish the division between mental and manual labor. **She was the**

3. **Union Ouvriere** was the first published project of a world-wide Workers' International. See Chapter XVII, "Flora Tristan" in **A History of Socialist Thought**, Vol. I, by G.D.H. Cole, Macmillan & Co., London, 1962.

4. In this speech before an Equal Rights Association meeting, Sojourner Truth continued: "Then we will all be free indeed. I feel that if I have to answer for the deeds done in my body just as much as a man, I have a right to have just as much as a man. There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be master over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before." For the story of this great woman thinker and doer see **The Narrative of Sojourner Truth**, Ebony Classics, Johnson Publishers, Chicago, 1970.

5. See **Harriet Tubman** by Earl Conrad, Paul S. Eriksson, N.Y., 1969.

first person ever to do so. The fact that she died suddenly the very next year, and couldn't possibly have developed a comprehensive philosophy, cannot detract from that germ of a new continent of thought it would take Marx a quarter of a century to fully develop.

- Sojourner Truth was a former slave who, though illiterate, was so total a thinker that she (1) inspired the educated middleclass white women and creatively gave birth to the first women's convention in this country; (2) continued even after slavery was abolished to work with the women's movement, even to the point of breaking with the great Black leader, Frederick Douglass, as she accused all men of being "short-minded" not to see that freedom can't be total if women are excluded from that totality; and (3) from the very start of her freed life not only gave up her "slave name," but included the whole of her philosophy in the new name she claimed God gave her – Sojourner Truth.

- Clara Lemlich, an immigrant garment worker, described as "a wisp of a girl, still in her teens," got up at a mass meeting in New York City in 1909, where the extension of the Triangle Shirtwaist strike was being debated in long hours of speeches, and asked for the floor. "I am a working girl," she said, "one of those on strike against intolerable conditions. I am tired of listening to speakers who talk in general terms. What we are here for is to decide whether we shall or shall not strike. I offer a resolution that a general strike be declared – now!" The next day, 30,000 unorganized workers answered the call. In 13 weeks, 312 shops had full union contracts.

The histories of women are now many and varied<sup>6</sup>, but we wish here to limit history to our own age and to take up only the last four decades, beginning with the birth of the CIO. It is a history of women, white and Black, who live in this pamphlet through their experiences as production and office workers, and who wish to uproot this whole exploitative, racist, sexist system.



6. Such histories include whole books such as *Century of Struggle* by Eleanor Flexner, Atheneum, New York, 1973; *Women, Resistance and Revolution* by Sheila Rowbotham, Pantheon Press, N.Y., 1973; *Black Women in White America*, edited by Gerda Lerner, Vintage Books, N.Y., 1973, pamphlets such as *Working Women and Their Organizations* by Joyce Maupin, Union WAGE, Berkeley, Cal., 1974; even picture-histories such as *What Have Women Done?*, a photo-essay on the history of working women in the U.S. published by the San Francisco Women's History Group. For the hidden dimension of women and Blacks in 1776, see *America's First Unfinished Revolution*, published by News & Letters, Detroit, 1976.



**WOMEN'S Emergency Brigade, armed with two-by-fours, played crucial role in Flint sit-down strike leading to first auto union contract in nation in 1936.**

## **The Hidden Dimension of the 1930s: The Women's Emergency Brigade**

The whole question of the birth of the CIO, which transformed the face of industrial America, depended on three forces that had entered the historic arena in an entirely new way. Where, before, the unskilled workers were always subordinate to the skilled, it was the unskilled who created the new category of industrial unionism. Where, before, only the Left, such as the IWW, had a great Black organizer such as Ben Fletcher, now the Black workers as masses in motion became pivotal to industrial unionization. And though women were active in organization drives from the earliest days of the labor movement, this was the first time that even those not in industry were critical to the struggle, and transformed entirely the concept of "auxiliary" into the Women's Emergency Brigade.

It was in Flint, Mich., in 1936, that the wives, sisters and mothers of the 4,000 men occupying four different plants of the powerful GM corporation, organized themselves to provide strike support. But far from remaining just in the kitchen making the sandwiches, they soon found themselves in the front lines, armed with wooden two-by-fours against the police.

Genora Johnson, who was central to the creation of the Brigade, described the women who volunteered by the hundreds:

"We were filled with determination to win our struggles. We were reaching for the stars and were willing to lay down our lives to win this fight for the betterment of humanity . . . In one of the crucial battles, six women of our Brigade were outside one of the plants while men were inside welding and barricading the doors so they could take over the plant. The women saw the police and knew they had to stop them from entering the plant, while the men inside were fighting with the scabs and ordering management out. One woman went to call the rest of the WEB while the five strung themselves over the plant gate. First we tried to reason. When they started pushing, we clenched

our fists and told them, "Over our dead bodies!" In that moment of procrastination and hesitation, we looked up and at the top of Chevrolet Avenue we saw the band of red berets of our Brigade coming with the American flag, singing "Solidarity," and we knew we were safe. Those women played a very decisive role in that strike."

It is fantastic to reduce this activity to being "just supportive." It was these women, as women, who not only helped to turn the tide toward recognition of the union, but also helped establish the unity of employed and unemployed, women and men, Black and white.<sup>7</sup>

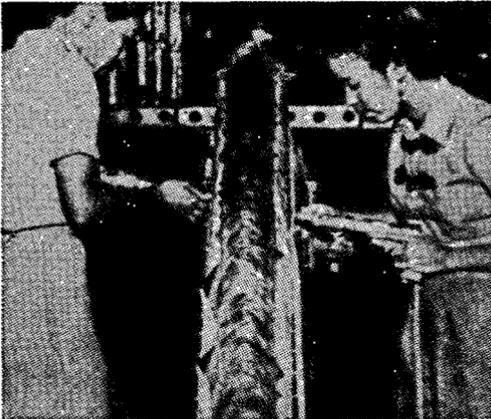
## From World War II to Today: Four Women's Experiences

Now listen to the living histories of four other women, from the outbreak of World War II to the present day:

### Ethel Dunbar: Black Production Worker

"The first factory job I ever had was in a shirt factory in Montgomery, Ala. They had five or six men over all the women who were sewing and they kept us flying on those machines. Every time they brought someone to see the factory, they took him to the one who was the fastest worker to see how fast she could go. Then they'd come to the rest of us and tell us we'd have to go a little faster. We made \$15 a week. That was in 1942.

Then I got to Detroit. The day after I arrived I went to the Holbrook shop at Chevrolet and got hired that day. We were working 10 and 12 hours a day, and we made \$80 a week. They took us to whatever machine we were to work on and showed us what to do. It was the same as in the South. They had men walking around whose whole job was just to make the women work harder. The women, wherever I have worked, have always had harder jobs than the men. I never minded telling the foreman what I liked and what I didn't like. And what I didn't like was that no matter how fast I worked, he always wanted me to do more. I always told



**BLACK women swelled defense industry ranks during World War II . . . and were thrown out when war ended.**

7. While Genora Johnson has long been recognized for the crucial role she played in the Flint strike, it was not until 1975 that the full story of the WEB was finally recorded by Pat Yeghissian. See "Papers in Women's Studies," Vol. 1, No. 4, June 1975, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

him to show me — whatever he would do, I would do it, too.

I was on a drill press at first. Then they put me on a heat treat. I never did any more than the foreman could show me he could do. So they put me on grinding the pinions. The foreman kept wanting to stand over me and make me do more. I always told them, "I'm keeping my word — you show me — and I'll do just what you do."

I worked on three different machines all during the war. And then, the day after VJ day, there wasn't a Black woman left in the plant. They told everybody to go home, the war was over. The union told us to come to the union office the day they laid us off, and pay our dues so they could fight to get our jobs back. We never heard another thing from them. Not one of those Black women ever got back in."



This is no individual story. In less than three years after World War II broke out, more than four million women were recruited in the war manufacturing industries and were found capable of handling all jobs. If the load was too heavy, the company simply adapted the machinery. More than 75 percent of the new workers were married women, and 60 percent were more than 35 years of age. More than two-thirds of all restaurant workers entered war work. The number of Black domestic workers fell from 72 percent to 48 percent of employed Black women, and the number in agriculture fell to 7 percent. The women joined the unions, but had to sign an agreement to give up the job when the war ended.

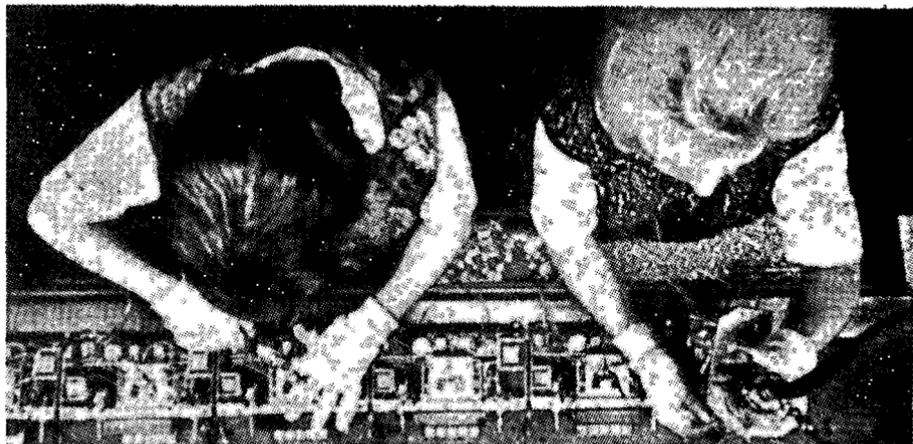
## **Angela Terrano: Electrical Worker**

"The first job I got in an electrical shop was at Olympic Radio and TV in New York in 1950. They had just had a strike. The workers were trying to get their own union in, and the company wanted a company union. They were hiring new people and making them sign up with their choice as soon as they hired in, right in the office.

The second week I was there, the workers went out on strike again. Those two weeks were an education. The company had goons standing around, not doing any work, just heckling the workers, especially the women as they walked to the toilets. It finally exploded into a riot on our floor. One woman who was pregnant got so upset she had a miscarriage.

After the "riot," the company had Pinkerton guards standing at the head of each line. So we had a sit-down strike. We sat at the lines and benches for several hours just banging our tools on the tables before we were made to leave. On the picket lines, the women described to us the earlier strike and the fact that New York City's "finest," those men in blue, didn't care if you were a woman. The women finally got equality with men on the picket line. One story they told with special glee was about a cop who started to sock a woman striker he had pinned against a tree. She managed to move her head at the moment his fist came down, aimed at her nose — and he struck the tree instead.

In 1956 I worked at Burroughs in Detroit, wiring up teletype keyboards. They had "dossiers" on us. They called them "character charts" and the foremen had access to them. One day, after the foreman had heard some rumbling among "his girls" about the pay raises that were coming up (foremen and foreladies like to



### **ELECTRONICS workers began organizing after World War II.**

call factory women “their girls”), he called us into his office one by one. I remember him telling me about the charts, and that work habits, days out, character gradings and all sorts of things were on them. He questioned me about the fact that every month I took two days off, no matter what. His parting word was not to talk to anyone, at the bench or in the toilets, because “you don’t know if they are bugged or not.” Shades of Watergate! It is obvious that keeping workers separate – women from women, women from men, young from old – is a life and death question for the capitalist.

In the electronic shops, job classifications are devised to be able to pay men workers higher wages. It is the same in the garment shops. The cutters are called the skilled workers and have their own local. I would like to see a man sit down and run a sewing machine without someone showing him how to do it. He has to be taught to cut, just as the woman does. Nor can the difference in “strength” be an excuse – way back in 1949 when I worked at Lilly of France, the cutting machines were electrical.

It is two decades since I began working in shops and even with the rise of the WL movement here is where we are:

In the last electronics shop in which I worked in 1968, a very nice male co-worker and I were doing the exact same job for about four months. He was getting \$145 a week, and I was getting \$80 a week. I don’t know if it was coincidence or not, but when I began asking for more money, he was classified as a technician which entitled him to the higher rate of pay. I was happy for him. He was a Puerto Rican worker and very few had a chance to get better-paying jobs. I didn’t want to cause him any trouble, but I couldn’t tolerate the disparity in our wages so I confronted one of the bosses. He refused to answer why I shouldn’t receive the same amount for the same work. Finally, I cornered him in his office. My co-workers were delighted when they saw me plant myself side-ways in the doorway. I was seven months pregnant and he didn’t dare push his way through. I received a \$10 weekly raise, but by then it was too late. I had to quit working very soon after.”

## Marie Dignan: Office Worker

“While I was working at a social agency funded by the United Foundation (UF) in 1969, the workers — clerical, maintenance, para-professional and professional — went out on strike for a union and a contract. Fifteen offices were involved.

We were 85 percent women and more than half of us were Black. Inspired by the Black struggle as well as Women’s Liberation, we decided we were sick of paternalism on the job. Racism and sexism in the UF kept our wages intolerably low at the same time that it kept funds from going to those in the community that needed them most. We were especially angry that not one penny of the millions in the “emergency fund” had been spent after the Detroit Rebellion in 1967, when hundreds of homeless families were desperate for jobs, food, clothing and shelter. We wanted to do something about all these things.

I worked in a very small office with all women, and at first we picketed all day long, up and down a major highway in front of our offices. We became angrier as the days passed with people ignoring our picket line or laughing at “the girls.” But when the sanitation workers respected our picket line and let the garbage pile up at the office, we were greatly inspired.

We were out for over two months, during which time our strike headquarters was open to everyone all day long. We met at least twice a week, but we didn’t have any strike fund and we were really wondering how we were going to win. We decided that all of us and our supporters would picket a big UF fund-raising dinner that was being held. We couldn’t believe our eyes when we saw two of the big-shot labor leaders, Doug Fraser, UAW vice president, and Tom Turner, president of Metro Detroit AFL-CIO Council, cross our line by sneaking through a side door. But the waitresses who were supposed to serve the banquet refused to cross,

**OFFICE workers are now launching militant organizing drives.**



even though they would lose their wages. The labor leaders were shamed into rushing back outside, but I know that none of us would ever trust a labor bureaucrat again.

Another time, we showed up one morning to picket enmasse at one of the worst offices, where they had threatened to fire all the women strikers, and were greeted by a lot of cops in riot gear. They began to surround us with their long guns. We didn't know what might happen. The Black women in the neighborhood saw what was happening and came out of their houses, some still in their night-gowns, to help defend us from the police. Outnumbered, with women on both sides, they put their guns away and a commanding officer rushed to the scene to apologize for their "mistake."

After 13 weeks we won a contract, but the most important thing was that we learned who our friends were and who made up the forces lined up against us.

Two years later, when the sanitation workers went out on a wildcat strike against inhuman working conditions, many of us walked off our jobs in support of them. Their strike was won over the week-end."

## **Mary Holmes: Auto Worker**

"I work for one of the Big Three auto companies. Today in the plant there is a lot of discussion about women's liberation. One woman I worked with told me the foreman had sent her to the chassis line, where she had to lift up suspension springs and hold them up while she installed them. She said she had tried to do the job because she didn't have her 90 days in yet, and she was afraid if she complained she'd be out on the street. I talked with her on her 89th day, and she said that even after all that she had done, she was being laid-off.

One day we saw the foreman take a woman who was obviously pregnant to a job where you have to push and pull a heavy press all night. She refused to do it. All the time, the foremen are saying, "You wanted women's lib. Now do this job." Or some of the men who don't like women working in the plant will say, "You want equal pay, so do equal work." This is what we're facing today. They are taking "women's liberation" and turning it around to use it against the women.

One sister who works in the Uniroyal tire plant put it this way:

They are using "Women's Liberation" to add more on to our jobs. We used to have service workers who did lifting. But since they eliminated a lot of those guys they just say, "Well, let the girls do it." When I first started working there, a woman wasn't supposed to lift over 30 pounds. Now you have to lift as much as they want you to. In one department, they eliminated one job where two service men would push huge rolls with tons and tons of rubber on them. Now they just tell the women to help change the roll. If the wheels on the caster get locked you're in trouble.

When you complain to the union about it, they also bring up "women's lib." They say the contract is a package deal and the company can require you to do whatever they want.

"Women's Liberation" might work for office workers to get an executive position or something, but it goes against us in the factory.



When this same woman started talking to the Women's Liberation, News and Letters Committee about it, however, she decided that the women in her shop did not have to accept a twisted definition of "women's liberation." She helped write a leaflet asking "Can Women Be Liberated at Uniroyal?", which called for their own women's organization at that plant and was distributed to women and men at the plant gate.

The main error the National Organization of Women (NOW) has made on the whole question of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has been in not working it out **with** working women who know the real problems; could tell how it has been used against them; and would know how it would have to be phrased so that equality meant not taking away women's rights and protections but expanding men's.

Now that the most reactionary elements — the same groups who are trying to turn back the laws on abortion and have the gall to call themselves the "right to life" movement — have gathered all their forces and money to defeat the ERA, it is more necessary than ever for the professional and middle class women in the movement to listen to us.

Where I work, you fill out a code on your application as to race and sex. These figures from the front office are for the government to see how good the company is on WL. But do they show the real figures on how many women were harassed off their jobs? One Black woman at our plant got branded a "trouble-maker" because they put her on a job in trim by herself that two men had done before and she couldn't do it. The foreman figured she was easy to get rid of because she was still on probation. He started to argue with her, but she gave it right back to him. When he tried to fire her, she took her case to labor relations and got the job back, no thanks to the union. But for every woman who has had to fight it out by herself and won, there are countless others who didn't win.

The reason that many plants began hiring women again is that they were forced to do so by the women's movement. It is one thing when there is a war, and they need women to work in the shops. It's something else when the women are demanding that they have the same right to do a job as a man, and that is what happened in the early '70s. But now we're living in the worst depression most of us have ever known, and women are getting laid off first. The company is always getting rid of the women, either by lay-offs or harassment.

A GM plant here eliminated a whole department, cut and sew, that was mainly women workers. They spent millions of dollars to move this department to another state. It wasn't for "efficiency," but because those women had been so militant in the wildcats there earlier. They had a revolutionary memory that GM wanted to get rid of. After they moved the department, they bumped the women back into the main plant, totally disregarding seniority, and the union did nothing about it. Many women got stuck on jobs they couldn't do. Men were surprised to see women in departments they had never been in before, like paint. One worker said he wouldn't be surprised to see women in the body shop one day.

There are quite a few women working in the body shop now, in my plant. There are twice as many Black women as white. They try to keep most of the white women where the section is cleaner and the work easier.

The one thing that hasn't changed is that our foremen are white and male, and the most racist are also the most sexist. They treat you as though you are dumb

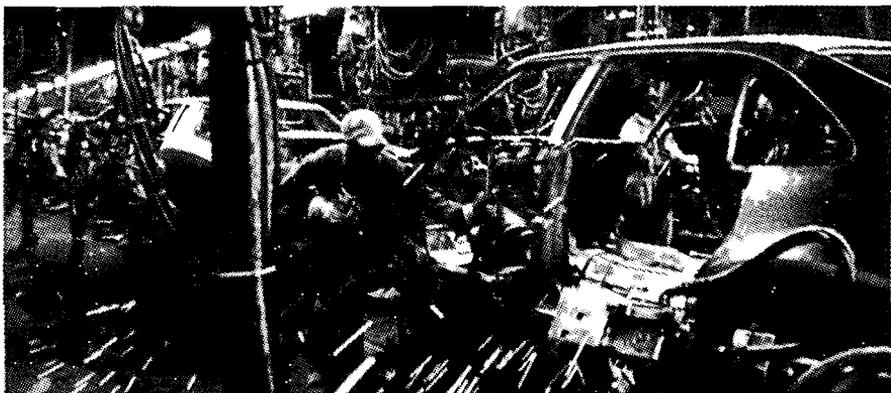
and will never learn the job. They either stand behind you and make remarks, or they just show you the job and walk away. One foreman I worked for put me on a job where I had to push a big gun. It took me half the shift to get the job. The men helped me out if I began slowing them down. The foreman would come back and watch, and all he would say was "Get moving!" When the night was over, he asked me how I liked working for him. I didn't come in the next day.

Racism in the plant doesn't just mean the way the foremen put Black women on the worst jobs. When lay-offs begin and they don't have to go by seniority because the workers don't have 90 days in yet, the whites stay and the Blacks go. Anyone can see that the plant is becoming whiter. All the Black women talk about this. They also talk about the difference getting laid-off can mean, especially with this depression. Even in the worst job situation, the white woman is more likely to get a job, and the Black woman to end up on welfare.

One experience that all the women share is that when you first come to work, the men always ask, "Are you married?" Or they say, "How does your man let you work here? I wouldn't let my wife." There is still the attitude that women are weak — and not only in the back, but in the head; that women belong at home and that the factory is "a man's world." That doesn't mean that men and women don't discuss serious things at work. But there is a constant fight to break down the attitude that women are for only one thing.

It is difficult to overcome this attitude because it is how they have always seen what women are "supposed" to do. We aren't waiting for them to change their minds. And it is a question that goes beyond the time spent at work. Many women who get off second-shift after midnight, still get up early in the morning to see their children off to school.

But the women in the shop are refusing to accept any of the imposed ideas of what Women's Liberation means for us, whether it's the company saying we must work like a man, or the men saying we shouldn't work at all, or the radicals saying we are not women, but workers, as if you could separate the two. We are deciding and acting on what it means to us."



**\* WOMEN auto workers have fought for many improvements in auto shops and contract.**

# Ill Masses in Motion — White, Black, Brown and Red: Unorganized Working Women Organize Themselves

*"We mean to make things over;  
we're tired of toil for naught  
But bare enough to live on:  
never an hour for thought . . .  
We're summoning our forces  
from shipyard, shop and mill:  
Eight hours for work,  
eight hours for rest,  
eight hours for what we will."*  
— Song of workers during eight-hour day strikes, 1886

*"Let no one ask me,  
tempt me, force me to  
return to others' cloisters."*  
— New Portuguese Letters  
(The Three Marias), 1972

Never have women been more in the forefront of the struggles to "do something" — and not separated from the thinking — about their conditions of life and labor, **as labor and as women**. Many are fighting within their unions against the labor bureaucracy. Others are organizing independently of the established unions, as the Maryland Freedom Union women did in the '60s.<sup>8</sup> They have no more intention of waiting for the bureaucracy to organize them than the Blacks had of waiting for "Operation Dixie" — the promise the UAW made to organize the unorganized as far back as 1952. That still-birth is not even remembered today. **The unorganized are now organizing themselves.**

Consider the scope and depth of these drives, involving primarily women, that have recently developed:

**Seasonal cannery workers** in Northern California, primarily Chicana, formed a loose network of rank-and-file committees to challenge the abuse of workers' rights by giant food processing corporations and Teamsters Union bureaucrats. They organized around three major issues: racism and sexism in hiring, promotion and pay; health and safety conditions; and the exclusion of worker participation in the Teamster locals which have had sweetheart contracts with the canneries since the '30s and '40s.

**Publishing employees** in New York City from over two dozen different houses, inspired by the successful strike of Harper and Row employees, launched their own unionization drives, despite mass illegal firings and intimidations, and severe setbacks by the National Labor Relations Board.

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8. The idea for the MFU that CORE set out to organize in Baltimore in 1966 was inspired by the Mississippi Freedom Union, organized earlier by SNCC, and the grape workers of Delano, acting without the labor bureaucracy. But it was the Black, all-women workers at Baltimore's Lincoln Nursing Home who organized themselves and then called CORE to report they were already on strike, that gave the idea life. See *The Maryland Freedom Union: Black Women Thinking and Doing*, by Mike Flug, News & Letters, 1969.

**Domestic workers** have been organizing in unprecedented numbers to fight against deplorable conditions. (A 1975 study reported that 75 percent were the sole source of earned income for their households; they had an average annual wage of \$2,243.) The California Homemakers Association — the first union to win collective bargaining rights for domestics — organized 10,000 women in 1974 alone. In September, 1975, they struck when the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors subcontracted home care for aged, blind and disabled welfare recipients to a subsidiary of Upjohn. Welfare recipients, including some in wheelchairs, joined them on the picket lines.

**Chinese garment workers**, after 50 years of unsuccessful attempts, successfully organized the sweatshops in San Francisco.

**Clerical workers**, particularly in the finance industry, more regimented than ever by electronic machinery, have also begun to organize. The 600 employees at Master Charge, whose starting wage is \$450 a month — typical of the banking and insurance industries, which have remained unorganized until now — began a spontaneous organizing drive and then went in search of a union to join that would let them control their own drive and write their own leaflets.

**The Iron Foundry workers** in Birmingham, Ala., who are 60 percent Black women, went on strike and drew up their own contracts.

**Clerical and technical workers** in Boston, at prestigious schools like Harvard Medical School, earning \$6,000 to \$7,000 a year, declared, "We can't eat prestige," and launched an organizing drive that came directly out of a group of woman students, faculty and employees who had met for a year to discuss common problems. One of their first actions was to convince the scientists with whom they worked to hold meetings to explain the overall purpose of the research being done.

The list could go on and on. When white and Black women at **Onelta Knitting Mills** in South Carolina forged a new unity on their picket lines and finally won a contract, one of the white women said, "It was necessary for Black and white to stick together, but what made the difference was the Black people were so together and strong. They carried the strike." Following the victory of the **miners' wives** in Brookside, Ky., UMW picket lines have been run jointly by miners and wives as far away as Sheridan, Wyo. And there has been a decade of continuous activity by **farm worker women**.

The new voices from below have been rising in crescendo across the length and breadth of the entire land. Listen to some of the newest voices — Black, Brown and Red — speaking for themselves.

## **Mary Maddock, United Farm Workers**

"I remember when I first told my dad I was going to a union meeting. He had been active in the union for years, but that was men's business. He finally agreed that I could go, but not my mother. That made her mad. She said she was paying union dues the same as he was, and after that she went, too.

It was 1973 when a lot of women got more involved. We were on the picket line breaking the injunction. They kept jailing only the men and one day there were only women, so we all joined hands and they dragged us all in. When we got before the judge he said the women should be released because they had children at home. The women said, "No, we're not going out. We want the men to go first,

**ONEITA Mills workers in South Carolina, Black and white together, celebrate union recognition victory. In July, 1973.**



**CHINESE women strike sewing machine company in 1975 for union recognition.**



**DOMESTIC worker in California demonstrates for protective laws.**



**FOUNDRY workers in Birmingham, Ala., sign up for picket duty.**



**CANNERY workers are organizing against company and sweetheart contracts.**

then we all go. The men have children too; it takes two to make a child." The next day they let us all go because the women refused to leave."

## **Lupe and Maria, United Farm Workers**

"When we got the contracts, we noticed a lot of difference by having the union in the fields. Before the pay was \$1.05 an hour, with the union it is \$2 an hour, but still with only one working we could not make it.

When we didn't have a union, even the kids had to work in the fields. At five they were in the field already. The UFW has a regulation that says they have to be 16 or over.

When we were working by contractors — men who get contracts from people to work in the field — if they liked one of the women, they went after her. The women had no freedom. If a contractor liked a woman and she didn't listen to him, and do what he wanted, he wouldn't give her any work. There are no contractors with our union. We know there are going to be a lot of contractors back with the Teamsters; that is one reason we fight them.

Before the union we didn't have a rest room, even in the fields. There was no water to drink. Now we have a restroom and they bring us water, too. What we would really like is two restrooms, one for the men and one for the women.

We have also fought for a hiring hall. And with the union we also have a clinic.

Farm workers have a hard time. We suffer during the rain, we have no protection, no unemployment, no welfare. These are some of the reasons why we are fighting."



Farm workers and peasants have been organizing in other countries as well. In Peru, where peasants struck the Hacienda Huando, demanding that the military junta live up to their Agrarian Reform Law, a woman member of the Huando Strike Committee Union said, "I would like to say that women have become politicized in this process. We have matured. We no longer feel that we are useful only for cleaning house, washing and taking care of children. The women of Huando have gone far beyond this. They feel they should be able to participate as the men do. We have shown, here in this struggle, that we have great potential and strength."

## **Rosario and Maria, Puerto Rican women**

There is a triple oppression for those women who must fight, at one and the same time, racism, imperialism and sexism.

This is true of the conditions Puerto Rican women face, both in Puerto Rico and in the U.S. In Puerto Rico, women have not only been used as literal guinea pigs for U.S. drug companies to experiment on birth control pills, but forced sterilization has been practiced on no less than one out of every three women of child-bearing age. Women, who comprise 35 percent of the labor force, average about \$70 a week in wages, although the average price of basic necessities is 25 percent higher than in New York City. In the U.S., where many have come in search of some-

thing better, some become trapped in prison-like conditions as migrant workers on East Coast farms, while others wind up in the garment sweatshops of New York City.

Listen to one garment worker, Rosario, describe her conditions: "There is no union. If you go to the bathroom you can't stay long or else the floor lady goes in to see why you are taking a long time. If you get a raise it is only a few cents extra and the boss is always on your back so you can work more. You don't get paid if you are sick. You get a one-week vacation after a year, but without pay. The boss insults workers he doesn't like. We are forbidden from talking to each other. I make \$80.50 a week and after taxes are taken out I take home \$63. Some of the older workers make \$83. We have no choice. There are very few jobs available. They are all similar and the pay is the same. In some places it is even worse."

María, a student living in New York, summed up her feeling this way:

"Up until the mid '60s, when I became more aware of the economic and political problems of colonial domination, my understanding of the women's struggle was very limited. As I got involved in the student movement in Puerto Rico, I realized that injustice, oppression and discrimination were unevenly distributed among our population. As it is true that all Puerto Ricans (in the island and in the U.S. mainland) are subjected to the colonial and class oppression, women are twice oppressed – first for being Puerto Rican, secondly for being women. There is colonialism within colonialism, even among men who consider themselves as radicals but maintain attitudes which discriminate against us. What does this mean? Simply that Puerto Rican women must not only fight for national liberation, but also for human liberation and equality."

## **Shainape Shcapwe, Native American**

"Yvonne Wanrow faces the possibility of as much as 30 years in prison because she shot and killed the man who had more than once molested her children and those of a friend and neighbor. Her friend reported to the police that this was the same man who raped her seven-year-old daughter and gave her a venereal disease, and the police did nothing.

In Armstrong County, Pa., Norma Jean Serena, a Creek Shawnee woman, not only had her three children taken away from her, but was sterilized without proper consent. The hospital reported the reason she was made infertile was a "socio-economic" one.

On reservations, children are taken from their families, especially when the head of the family is a woman. They are placed in homes of white families and never know or see their mothers again.

Some people act as though these things couldn't happen to people right here in the U.S. To women who are either underprivileged or a minority, these things happen too often. Women from all walks of life are going to have to know that. The only way we can change this society is by uprooting the whole system.

It was the mass movement around Wounded Knee that became a turning point. What has seldom been pointed out in the non-movement press is the fact that many of the 110 trial defendants were women, many with small children, who were stirred to their first active seeking of justice for Indian people by the inaction of the authorities in the brutal slaying of Raymond Yellow Thunder in 1972. A Lakota



**YVONNE Wanrow, Native American woman fighting for her life, with family at left, and speaking at defense rally.**

woman who participated at Wounded Knee, described it this way:

"This tiny piece of land was surrounded by U.S. troops, armored personnel carriers, helicopters, a daily barrage of bullets, a blockade of all medical and food supplies. No services were supplied except by the Oglala people in their own independent nation.

"For the first time in many years, the Oglala people could organize themselves according to their ancient spiritual values and ways of life — the Indian way. We were freed. It was the first time we had ever known freedom. We ran a hospital, a school for our children, we had a common commissary, we ran our own security force to enforce our borders.

"People got married, babies were born in a free land. For 71 days there was power in the hands of the Indian people. Men and women stood side by side in the kitchen, in the bunkers, on patrol, in the hospitals and in the schools, and at the constant negotiations with the U.S. government. The governing body of the Oglala Independent Nation consisted of every resident."

This was a great beginning. Now the question is: where to now? "

## **Audrey Williams, Black Hospital Worker**

"We are the women who were kidnapped and brought to this continent as slaves. We were raped and are still being raped. We are the women whose bodies are sacrificed in the white man's hospital for the sake of white medicine. We are the women whose bodies were and are still being used as cheap labor for Miss Mary's kitchen and Master Charlie's bed. We are the women who dwell in the hell-hole ghettos all over the land — lusted after, sneered at, yelled at, grabbed at, tracked down by whites in poverty neighborhoods. And are called jealous and prejudiced if we protest this invasion.

We have watched our fathers, husbands, and sons denied, deprived and driven mad. A big proportion of Black women become welfare mothers usually

without a husband, because capitalism found it necessary to create a situation where our men can't find meaningful employment.

Black women are expected to be primarily mothers, domestics and prostitutes. Teaching, social work, typing and other office work are only possibilities if they have finished high school or college.

If we, as Black women, are to get basic, the first job is to find out what liberation for ourselves means. We have an obligation as Black women to project ourselves into the revolution to destroy those institutions which not only oppress Blacks, but women as well.

I am not mad at the Black man, but I am mad that he hasn't rejected what the capitalist system is doing to him. My husband would go off to work, get mad at the boss man . . . but knock my head off. We had better get together and understand what this system is doing to us as a whole."

## **Worker and Intellectual: A Critical Review of Angela Davis' Autobiography**

Whether we talk of white or Black, Chicana or Puerto Rican or Native American, the division is within each group, not only as capitalist vs. worker, but as worker and intellectual. The intellectuals always act as if the workers must learn from them. It is the other way around.

Take the question of Angela Davis. None was more popular among the Black masses, and they were the ones fighting the hardest for her freedom. That did not mean that they were ready to follow her on the specific political line she had chosen — Communism. Tommie Hope, a young Black laundry worker, who came from the same state of Alabama as Angela Davis, wrote what we consider the most objective-subjective review of her autobiography that appeared anywhere:



"This book begins very dramatically as Angela puts on a wig, to make her



**LAUNDRY workers are among the lowest paid and most exploited.**

escape from California, but since I did not understand why an autobiography begins that way, I turned at once to where the story of her life begins, on p. 78, at age four, in Birmingham, Ala., where she already lives near a white neighborhood. The very next page, she begins to talk of the Scottsboro Boys' case, in which her parents had been active, and I couldn't figure out how she knew all those dramatic events when she was eight.

What struck me throughout this period is that from childhood on, she wanted to escape from being Black. And, sure enough, when she is still in grammar school, she does begin thinking of escaping from what she calls the "provincialism of Birmingham." One thing is clear – she is not involved in any Black struggles. She is not swept up by any civil rights movement. And she doesn't choose a Black University, Fisk, in Tennessee, but a white high school in New York, when both schools offer her scholarships. I just couldn't relate to any of it.

She travels in white groups not only in New York, but then off she goes (in 1962) to the World Youth Festival in Helsinki, to universities in Germany and in France. It is in France where she reads of the bomb that struck down the Birmingham church and killed the four little Black girls. She is very moved; she is in deep grief and leaves her white friends to be alone. But still she does not return home . . .

But the most serious point is, of course, the arrest, trial, and work for the Soledad Brothers. It is first then that I did return to the early chapters of the book. I could then relate also to the McCarthy type of atmosphere that the U.S. Government was trying to use to rush her to death, against the "Free Angela" Committees where I was active. The shock came where – at this exciting moment when we all worked so hard to free her and the Soledad Brothers – she introduces a separation between herself and Ruchel Magee.

They had a big disagreement on whether or not to fight in the state court or the federal court. She also made one attempt to end the disagreement between them: if Ruchel's motion in the federal court were denied, they would jointly fight in the state court. She later stated that she was equally certain beyond a doubt



**WELFARE mothers demonstrate for just treatment and human dignity.**

that the motion would, in fact, be denied so she never earnestly considered the possibility of fighting the case in federal court. Then she went on and on about her defending herself. Never again do I remember a thought or a word concerning Ruchel Magee.

This is not the Angela Davis I thought I knew and heard so much about. She is a totally different person. I laid down the book, a very sad person, because instead of really learning her life or that of the whole anti-racist struggle, I felt I was getting a Communist tract with not a single word of truth of what they really stood for. It was all just propaganda and no feeling for us, the Blacks, the "lower" people who worked so hard for her freedom and wanted to continue the fight instead of subordinating it to white Communists and their plans.

And last, in her Epilogue, she thanks all her Communist comrades here and abroad for her freedom. She forgot the Black people and poor people who helped to free her. She claimed that they were proud to have "forged unity among Communists, Socialists, radical Democrats, and nationalists; . . . between workers and students." But, in fact, these lines only cover up that she still doesn't understand the Black Movement or people, because she escaped from our world long ago."

## **"Women For Freedom": Employed, Unemployed, Welfare Mothers**

This division between worker and intellectual characterizes not only the divisions within the Black movement, but in the shops between the labor bureaucrats and the rank and file — and even within the rank and file between male and female. It is seen in the shops, on the unemployed lines, and among those on welfare. Here are three such stories:

### **From a woman worker at Uniroyal**

"Why is it, when they say they have done away with male and female job classifications here, the work is still not equal? When we work with the men in teams, where we have the same efficiency sheet, and we work on putting out the same number of tires, we get 65¢ an hour less. The men couldn't build if we didn't feed the machines, so aren't we an equal part of the team, and shouldn't we get equal pay?

And what about the "solidarity" we're supposed to have? Why is it, with some of the women working on "men's" jobs now because there is nothing else left for them to sign up on, the man is in a position to tell the foreman if he thinks she can't keep up, and she can be disqualified and put out on the street? Why do they always go to the men when they want to raise the standards? Could it be they know a lot of the women feel, "Why build all these extra tires for the company?"

They are always using Women's Liberation against us at Uniroyal. We all know that the company and union are lined up against us. But we can change things. Can't Women's Liberation mean that we begin our own women's organization at Uniroyal?"

### **From two women on welfare**

"There are many problems facing you if you are a woman worker, and the biggest obstacle I've found is child care. I'm divorced with two children and no

relatives or neighbors to babysit. My children have to leave for school at 8:35 and return home around 4. That means I'd have to find a job from 9 to about 3:30. The one time I thought I had everything going for me was when I found a job from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. at a place 100 yards from my door. I could go home and wake the children for school.

But a neighbor threatened to report me, because state law requires that children under 12 be supervised by someone 12 or older, 24 hours a day. That meant the welfare authorities could break in my door, wake my children, and take them into "protective custody."

My only solution was to hire someone to sleep for eight hours while I worked. That would cost about \$50 a week, and it was impossible with the wages I was making, so I had to quit."

"They recently raised all the rents in the city projects. In the project where I live they are trying to move out all the families with children on assistance. The city has a "plan" and we are definitely not part of it.

Some buildings are being reserved for senior citizens only. When a family with children moves out, they only let a senior citizen move in. They maintain those apartments, but the buildings with families with children are a mess. There are no fire escapes, and if a door or a mailbox gets torn up, that's the way it stays. They want the project to be only for senior citizens and those with jobs.

Everyone was mad when we first got news of the rent increases. The housing department quickly called a meeting to tell us that Social Services would pay the new rent. I think they were worried we might get together on our own and have some different ideas on how to live together in these buildings. They are trying to turn the working people and the senior citizens against the welfare families. Our lives are being led down the drain by this system, but we are part of the world, and we are going to help to change it."

## **From an unemployed working woman**

"I was laid off from GM in December, 1974. Once you've been laid off for longer than you worked there, you lose your seniority. I feel they do this deliberately to women – last hired, first fired – because they don't want us working in the plant in the first place.

The thing that really gets me mad now is all the overtime they are giving out to the people who are working, 10 and 12 hours a day. That means that people out in the street are just going to stay there.

The union isn't doing anything to stop this.

When I got laid off, I felt I'd be back to work soon. But now I've been out over a year. I've gone to so many plants, over and over, but they aren't hiring. I'm trying to feed my family on unemployment compensation, but that is going to run out in a few weeks, and I worry that I may have to go on welfare. I don't want to go through that harassment.

It's important to me that people who are still working are thinking about those of us who aren't, because we have to do something about the whole problem."



The significance of these stories is that they appeared in a newsletter that combined the stories of welfare, unemployed and working women together. It was called "Women For Freedom" and was distributed at factory gates, unemployment offices and welfare offices. The appearance of shop leaflets and papers like this is as important a feature of women organizing themselves as women going on strike to get union recognition.



**CHICANA farm workers faced with backbreaking, low-paid labor, have battled and broken power of growers and their police in organizing United Farm Workers Union.**



## IV. Where Do We Go From Here?

*"The secret of the relationship of man to man finds its unambiguous, definitive, open, obvious expression in the relationship of man to woman, and in this way, the direct, natural relationship between the sexes. The direct natural necessary relationship of man to man is the relationship of man to woman."*

Karl Marx, 1844 "Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts"

Standing aligned against this decadent world system are four undeniable forces of revolt — Blacks, labor, women and youth. The women's voices are being raised everywhere, demanding a new reality. That the demand for the right to control our own bodies includes regaining our heads is seen in the tremendous demonstrations in both West Germany and in Italy for the right to abortion. In Bonn, 25,000 demonstrated with signs reading: "Fight for a life worth living" and "The unborn are protected — the living are exploited." In Italy, where 20,000 women die each year from illegal abortions, another 25,000 women demonstrated in Rome on Dec. 6, 1975.

In this Catholic country, where women do not leave the house easily without their husbands' or fathers' permission, women came from all over, some traveling with their children on trains for more than 20 hours. One of the working class women who came from Sicily — where they had earlier forced the fall of the Mayor of Palermo after their marches, occupations of City Hall and street blockades protesting the lack of water and decent housing — said:

"To take to the streets to struggle has meant and still means leaving our homes dirty, not sending our children to school, not cooking for our husbands, quarreling with our husbands. Before, we were the ones who told our husbands not to strike, to be careful. Now we are the first ones to go out on strike and we are the most firm. We have discovered in our struggle for water and for decent housing that life can change, that we are changing it. It is terrible to remain at home alone, each woman alone with her problems without knowing that they are shared by other women, and we no longer want to do it. When we will have our houses we will not stay inside them but will come back out immediately to fight for consultori (neighborhood health centers), day-care, and to discuss everything. The world is changing and we are the ones who are changing it!"

**Only a few months later, on April 3, 1976 — and again in Rome, Italy — over 100,000 women marched for the right to safe abortions. The demonstration was the greatest Italy had ever seen, not only because it was so massive and spontaneous, but because it so clearly revealed women as Reason, in action. The dem-**

onstration was not only against both the ruling Christian Democratic Party and against the Pope, but many of the slogans denounced the Communist Party, as well — despite the fact that it supported the demonstration — because of its attempts to work out a “compromise.”

On the other side of the world, women in Japan have not only been attacking the deep forms of sex discrimination within Japan — where the typical union-



**100,000 Italian women demonstrated in Rome for abortion reform early in 1976 —and brought down the government.**

company contract includes a mandatory retirement age for women of 30 years, after which they are forced into the lowest-paid, temporary and part-time jobs — but have brought to life the works and struggles of Ting Ling, one of the most outstanding women writers and Communist activists in China, who was purged in 1957 because of her criticism of the Chinese Communist Party's treatment of women, and has been a “non-person” ever since.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Two Worlds of Actual Women's Struggles and The UN's IWY**

It was in the face of such total revolt that the rulers had evidently decided, “If you can't lick 'em, join 'em”, and toward that end the United Nations had declared 1975 to be International Women's Year. We were immediately confronted with men — the U.S. delegation was actually to be headed by a male until the pressure of the Women's Liberation Movement managed to demote him, at least, to “co-leader”; while others in woman's form, like Madame Marcos, served as representatives of their male-chauvinist husbands; and still others, like the Egyptian and Israeli women, merely repeated the political lines of their respective states.<sup>10</sup>

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9. **Ting Ling, Purged Feminist**, and other important pamphlets on the women's movement in Japan can be obtained from Femintern Press, Box 5426, Tokyo International, Japan.

10. This underlines the importance of the independence of the women from Israel, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Syria who came to the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women held in Brussels, March 1976, and issued a joint statement that said: “We understand that our oppression is by men and not by opposing nationalities.”

All the UN Conference in Mexico revealed was how far removed from the working masses were all the rulers – a fact that was as clear at the unofficial Tribune as it was at the official UN gathering. Almost the only thing the UN's celebration of International Women's Year accomplished was that the minute the UN so declared it, they were immediately confronted with a petition of grievances from their own women employees.

The important voices heard at the conference in Mexico were not the delegates, all speaking for their particular state power. The Russian delegate and her male counterpart were among the most vulgar when they dared to declare all Russian women liberated – enhanced by the increased importing of washing machines to lighten the Russian women's labors!

The important voices were those like the Algerian woman who spoke of their revolution against France. Although the women fought alongside the men, as hard and as brave as the men in that struggle, the men now want so much to break with all that is French and return to "Arab ways" that the women are worse off than they were before.

One lesson that did emerge from the conference is that even within the two worlds of rulers and ruled in each country, the special oppression of women, both economically and culturally, has existed from time immemorial and still exists today, in every state on earth. The women in the poor countries live in the most insufferable conditions. While state-capitalism, East and West, can send men to the moon and land cameras on Venus, and while Indira Gandhi and Mao can exert all efforts to make H-bombs, women in many of the poor countries have to spend fully six hours a day just in the task of grinding corn and fetching the most elemental necessity for life – water.

Women are abused in every facet of life. We see the women in the textile mills of China working the same kinds of machines as American textile workers and





**WOMEN handwash laundry in Ecuadorian hospital.**

under similar conditions, and the Chinese grandmother left with the children so her daughter can work in Mao's factories — to say nothing of child labor itself, in China. We see the Russian women so overworked by their full shifts in the factory in addition to having sole responsibility for rearing the children and doing all the housework, that it is clear the only thing the State has "liberated" them for is to be drudges. All are kindred souls to the American working women who have been speaking in these pages.

As its contribution to the 1975 International Women's Year, the International Labor Organization (ILO) prepared a report on the 562 million women workers around the world. The available statistics confirmed women's low status in the labor market of every nation, whether it called itself "capitalist" or "socialist." Women earn 50 to 80 percent less than men for the same work time, are primarily confined to the lowest paid jobs, and are seen everywhere, in times of high unemployment, as "intruders in the male domain."

In the poor countries of the Third World the women do the major part of the work, producing the food, household implements and other marketable items as well as hiring out as wage labor. Women in sub-Sahara Africa provide as much as 80 percent of the labor necessary for food production, working 8 to 10 hours a day. But when training, improved seeds and machines are available, they go to the men. All modern technology has done in these countries is throw women as well as men out of work. Hundreds of thousands of the poorest women in Indonesia and Bangladesh have lost their only source of income, rice-husking, to machines.

The world about us is being torn apart by the myriad crises we face within each country — economic, political and social. The fear that we are standing on the nuclear brink is felt anew with each rattle of the sabres as the nuclear powers scurry to line up sides and then realign them when a new "trouble spot" erupts. Every revolutionary upsurge in any part of the world is immediately crushed whether it be in Czechoslovakia by Russian tanks or in Chile by American CIA agents. The Sino-Soviet conflict embroils all in their tug-of-war for influence over the Third World, as in Africa, while Congress has to stop Kissinger from sending troops to Angola to fight on the side of the apartheid South Africa.

The recession in the U.S. has pushed unemployment in areas like Detroit to depression levels at the same time that inflation continues to eat away at the standards of living of the poor and the workers. The economic crisis is world-wide, hitting alike at industrialized and Third World countries, where it is not unusual for 75 percent of the family income to go for food, if it can be gotten at all. Starvation continues to face more than 400 million of the world's population.

Statistics prepared by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission on "Women and Poverty" in our own supposedly "advanced" land <sup>11</sup> show that while the government was estimating that the bare essentials to sustain a healthy life require a minimum of \$7,386 yearly income for the average family, the median income — from wages or assistance — was \$2,600 for all women, while it was \$7,450 for all men. The median wage for women working full-time, year-round was \$4,181, while for men it was \$8,850.

Indeed, women's wages have been continually declining in proportion to men's. In one of the most highly industrialized states, Michigan, the 1970 census revealed the median income for women was \$3,894, only 44.4 percent of the men's. In 1955, women earned 65 percent of what men earned.

Families headed by women suffer the most severely, especially the non-white families: 54 percent of all families headed by Black women live on incomes below the poverty level, and this figure climbs to 65 percent for Mexican American and Puerto Rican female-headed households.

As the economic situation has worsened, the number living in poverty continues to grow. And the 1976 unemployment rate for adult women was almost double that for married men.

Combine these facts of life with the fact that women are working primarily in unorganized shops, offices, stores, hospitals and laundries, and you would think that the labor "leadership" should have its work cut out for them. Instead, it has proved to be as narrow in outlook and shortsighted in vision as was the AFL in the 19th century.

## **CLUW, Union W.A.G.E., NAM, and the Black Dimension**

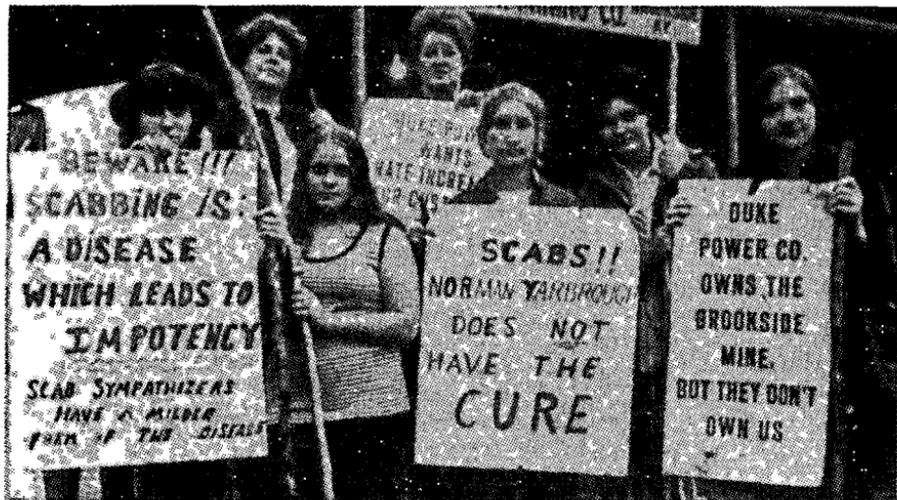
The formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) in 1974 shows the two different worlds of the rank and file and the bureaucracy, whether that bureaucracy appears in male or female form.

The founding conference for CLUW saw women who did not join the early Women's Liberation Movement flock to its door, especially to the call to organize the unorganized. They got as far as the door and found it barred. Only those women whom the male-dominated labor bureaucrats (in the guise of women labor leaders like Olga Madar) wanted, were allowed in.

The most serious restriction on attendance was in limiting admittance to union members only — which automatically excluded almost 90 percent of all working women, including those actively engaged in trying to organize their shops. It also

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11. The report was prepared in 1975, and based on 1972 figures.



**WOMEN** in coal communities, such as those above in Brookside, Ky., were crucial to United Mine Workers Union victory in 1974 in organizing drive which is bringing union back to eastern Kentucky. At right, Josefina Flores, the only farm worker permitted to take the floor at founding CLUW convention.



excluded the Brookside miners' wives who had wanted to speak to CLUW about their work in trying to re-establish the United Mine Workers of America in Harlan, Ky. They decided not to go since the odds were strong they would not even get inside the door. Women from Welfare Rights Organization and Wounded Knee supporters were also told they were not welcome.

The specific issue which polarized CLUW was whether or not they would formally support the UFW. Throughout the conference, the UFW received the strongest, most vocal support from the women who attended. The only rank-and-file worker to address the convention was Josefina Flores, a Chicana farmworker-organizer from Chicago, who was "allowed" to speak before the final session began. Her description of conditions in the fields was the only time that working conditions came up at all. She received a long, standing ovation, and there were even crocodile tears on the part of the labor bureaucrats. But then it was "business as usual" as they tabled the whole issue and proceeded to jam through, among other things, their own "election."

The singing of "Solidarity" after this debacle made those of us who attended sick. CLUW is a stillbirth — but a decent burial is being denied it because the new-old radicals continue to hang on to it as if this is the new form of working women's organization.

Some real attempts to organize the unorganized have been those mounted by Union W.A.G.E.<sup>12</sup> They have started something new in this direction. Because they work directly with rank and file, results have been positive even where there has been a defeat. In the organizing drive for Master Charge, one of the reasons the workers lost was that the bosses knew how to play the old game of white against Black. A Black woman active in that drive explained the feelings of the Black workers this way:

"If Black women are the majority, why is a white woman over us? It throws your whole point out of focus. You are so busy seeing that one white over fifty Blacks that you lose the perspective of all women being together. The white woman gets the first chance; if they have to hire a woman, they will hire a white woman first. At Master Charge the women they are finally putting into lower management are all white. We have one who had been there less than I have, cleaning the machines. She knows nothing about the job at all. The women in the office are Filipinos. They put a white woman over them because they can't speak English. If she can't speak Filipino why should she be over them? One woman who has been there seven years can't get a promotion because her English isn't good enough. All the women working with her are Filipino and can understand her. But a white woman is her boss. She is going to see the white, not the woman. I know I would."

Black women have been struggling to clarify their relationship not only to white women, but also to Black men. Here are excerpts from a leaflet distributed by Black women in California:

"There have been a lot of myths perpetrated against Black women. We have been accused of castrating Black men by being too dominating and outspoken. Some Black men have defined our role as being submissive "African Queens" who should stay in the home and breed the race's next generation.

If Black women are to have an equal role in the Black liberation struggle, we have to counter the attitudes of many Black men such as Stokely Carmichael who says that the woman's position is prone and Eldridge Cleaver who says that Black women should use their sexuality to lure more Black men into the movement. It is Black men like this who demand that Black women not use any type of birth control because **they say** it is a form of genocide. We are against being forced to take birth control, but we cannot allow these men to deny us the right to choose for ourselves. We must have control over our bodies.

Women's liberation is said to be only a white women's thing. There is a vicious rumor going around that Black women are already liberated because they work outside the home. We know that working outside the home doesn't mean you are free, especially under the conditions that Black women labor. Just as Black men, we are trapped into unskilled or low skilled jobs, the last hired and the first fired. And Black women earn less money than any

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12. Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality, PO Box 462, Berkeley, Cal. 94701.

other group in the nation. We reject the idea that women's liberation means a job outside the home just as we reject the ridiculous assumption that Black liberation means getting a piece of the rotten American pie.

Black women have always been fighting for their freedom as women. And this fight cannot be separated from the whole Black people's fight. Joining women's liberation is not a selfish move on the part of Black women; it is necessary for us to be able to develop our own potential and contribute all we can to the liberation of all Black people. We should join women's liberation not to alienate ourselves from Black men, but to bring us closer together in a new relationship of equality and mutual respect."

One group that seemed to recognize this, the New American Movement (NAM), proposed the convening of a Socialist-Feminist Conference, though they had neither proletarians nor Blacks in their women's group. Insofar as the objective situation was concerned, the correct timing achieved a truly massive attendance at a conference called in Antioch in 1975. So passionate was the hunger for philosophy, so great was the disgust of the true women's liberationists at what transpired at the UN Conference in Mexico, so magnetic was the pull of the very words "Socialist Feminism," that 2,000 women tried to get in to what was billed as "Socialist Feminist." Hundreds were turned away, and the 1,500 who did get in found that: 1) they were confronted only with one more type of elitism; 2) there were practically no Black or working women present; 3) it was so sectarian that not only did it keep papers of other Marxist tendencies from being presented, it did not even allow such papers to be distributed. As if just pronouncing that "interaction" between women and "Left" equalled "theory" and thus a new banner, it then proceeded to call women out of order when they said they represented any group other than what NAM called "Marxist-Leninist."

About the only positive result was individual contacts between women from all over the country, and a determination that they would look for a total philosophy of liberation that would not separate philosophy from revolution. That was precisely the pull of the Portuguese Revolution. The continuity as well as the contradictions seen there remain the challenge for all revolutionaries.

## Portugal, an Ongoing Revolution

The totally new dimension that arose in the ongoing revolution in Portugal, which is now under the whip of a counter-revolution, existed even before the elemental anti-fascist revolt broke out in April, 1974. Take the question of the book, **New Portuguese Letters** (known in this country as **The Three Marias**), which had landed the three authors in jail, on the excuse that it was allegedly "pornographic," but in fact because it was a feminist, humanist, political outpouring of opposition to the existing patriarchy. Whether it was the international women's movement that freed the three Marias from jail, as Maria Barreno holds, or whether it was the revolution itself that freed them, the two are surely not mere coincidence. Both prove the multi-dimensionality of social revolution.<sup>13</sup>

13. See "Maria Barreno Speaks For Herself," a transcript of a speech by Maria Barreno in Berkeley, Cal., printed in **News & Letters**, April 1975. See also **Portugal: A Blaze of Freedom**, Big Flame Publications, 632 Bristol Rd., Birmingham 29, England, which has a substantial section on the role of women and is both an objective and comprehensive revolutionary study.



**"We will never go back to the old system; we will never give up the land," declared woman wheatcutter in revolutionary Portugal in 1976.**

Long before 1974 three new forces of revolution – the peasants, the youth, and the women – joined the workers on the historic stage. The agricultural workers' strike for the eight-hour day erupted as early as 1954; and Catarina Eufemia, a peasant woman assassinated by the National Guard during that revolt, has become the symbol of today's working women's movement in Portugal. The Portuguese youth wrote their own chapter during the worldwide student revolts of 1968, leaving the traditional Communist Party to form their New Left, including one of the most revolutionary groupings, the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat/Revolutionary Brigades (PRP/BR), which is headed by a woman, Isabel do Carmo.

Also previous to 1974 came the great strikes of 1973. They came from the new proletariat that had been brought onto the scene by the multinationals – Timex, ITT, Plessey and the garment industry – who moved into Portugal after 1968, looking for safer profits and cheaper labor; and a great proportion of these new workers were also women, including those in the shipyards where they were 25 percent of the workforce.

There is no way to escape the pivotal role of the women, either before or, even more magnificently, during the revolution – whether we look at the peasant seizure of the land where the women were the most active, or the industrial strikes in the cities where the women were the most militant, or the creativity of women workers in Lisbon who took over a laundry plant to make it a free service so that “working class women will be freed from housework,” or the direct establishment of a Women's Liberation Movement (MLM) that fought for specifically “feminist” issues such as the right to abortion.

The need for such an autonomous movement of women was underlined when a demonstration of the MLM was physically attacked at the beginning of 1975, not by the fascists who had been overthrown, but by the CP and other so-called Left men, who even attacked their children. Many women who fought for the revolution soon found they then had to fight their own male co-workers and their husbands. In one brewery where the women won equal pay with the men, the men demanded an increase to maintain their differential. As a MLM leaflet put it: “When it's not the bosses who are exploiting us, it's our own comrades who are demanding this exploitation.”

The SP-CP, from the underground, had organized the Democratic Women's Movement (MDM) in 1969. It, however, had limited itself strictly to economic issues like “Equal Pay for Equal Work,” kept away from man/woman relations, and been critical of the “middle class” MLM. But the MDM and MLM are no longer attacking each other, and, what is most important, the MDM has grown to 10,000, including many men, and is recognized as an important, ongoing, revolutionary force.

Under the whip of the counter-revolution, the working people, men and women, did feel that the crucial question was unified action. It wasn't a way to deny the need to combat male chauvinism within the movement. Rather it was a way to keep the counter-revolution at bay – and to assure the deepening of the ongoing revolutionary process. The counter-revolution has not yet been able to discipline the workers who made the revolution of 1974-75, and all questions are still open.

What is clear now is the imperative need for a unity of theory and practice and for an integrality between nationalism and internationalism. A first step was begun by Isabel do Carmo, of the PRP/BR when she raised both the question of the relationship of party to spontaneously developing new forms of organization and the relation of theory to practice. Here is how she defined her group: “It is also

the organization capable of making a synthesis between theory and revolutionary practice.”<sup>14</sup>

All these elemental outpourings, new developments in theory and practice, cannot do our tasks for us. Clearly, when it comes to any country, only those inhabiting it can reconstruct it. The American revolution is the task of American revolutionaries. The pivotal question, then, is: where do we go from here, in this country?

When we see, as fact, cleaning women in New York identify themselves as “we are women’s liberationists,” there can be no doubt that the fact is well-grounded, that Women’s Liberation is, indeed, not just an **idea** whose time has come, but the **fact of development** that has emerged out of it. Yet we cannot gloat over all these heretofore untold tales and reasoning and suffering and struggle when we see an outright revolution – such as began in Portugal in 1974 and flowered nearly full-blown to social revolution – now under the whip of counter-revolution on the most crucial of all questions, capital/labor.

It is for this reason that we have concentrated on women workers – what they are doing, what they are saying, what they are thinking. To the extent that we have brought in history, it wasn’t for purposes of “learning lessons,” but grasping the continuity with our struggles today, so that we can start working out so new a relationship of theory to practice, philosophy to revolution, that we will not have to face yet one more aborted revolution.

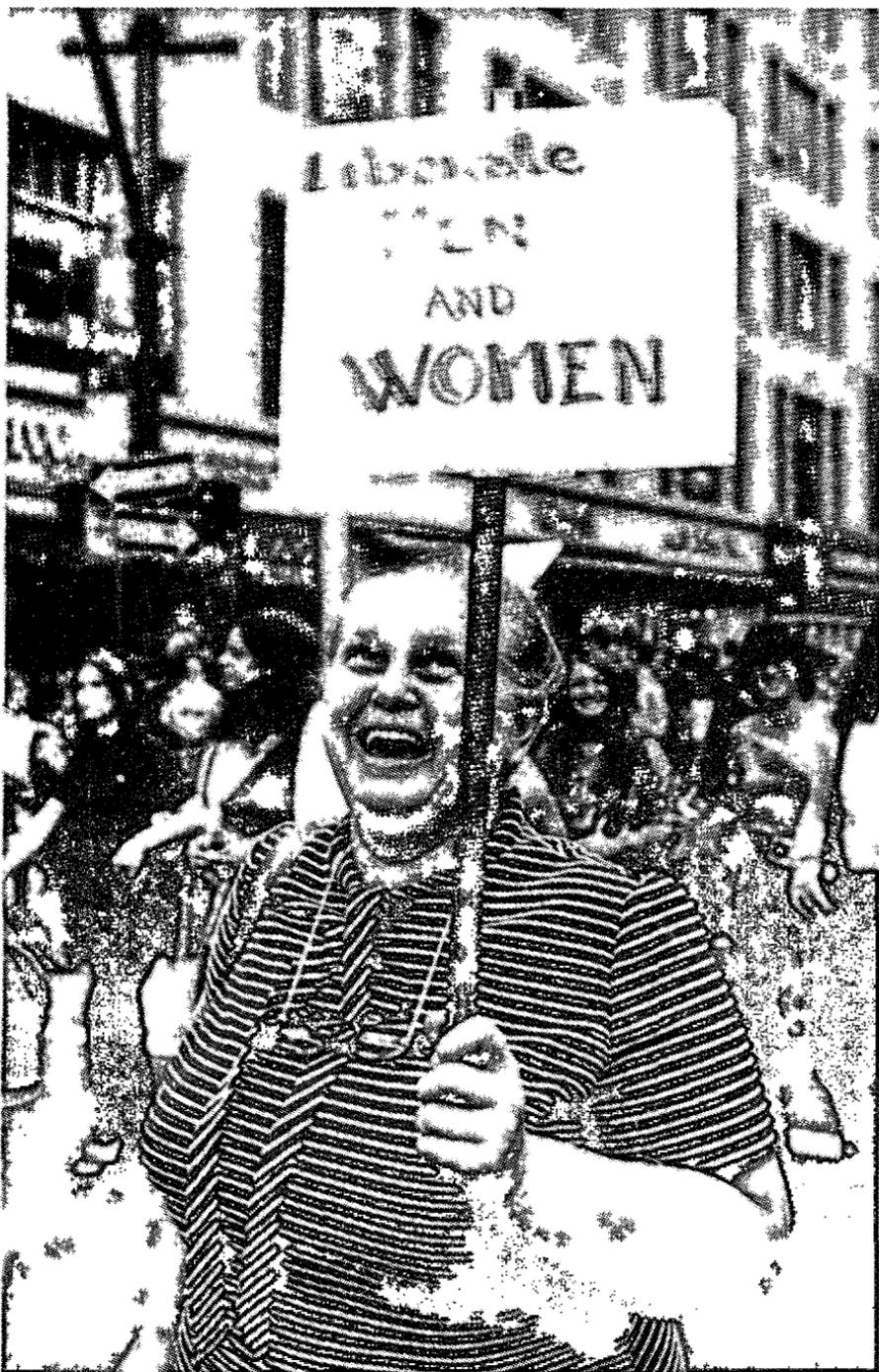
That is what has to be worked out by all of us as we participate in daily struggles, whether they are around organizing the unorganized or fighting elitism. Too many in the new Women’s Liberation movement are acting as if all they need is a party, party, party – a party to lead. They offer themselves as the new leaders and are ready to engage in anything except taking seriously the deeply philosophic questions raised from below, and dialectically working them out on the basis of the movement from practice that is itself a form of theory.

The times demand a total transformation of this rotten, decadent, racist, sexist, exploitative, alienating society to one where all human beings can live in dignity and can freely develop themselves and their ideas.

We ask you to help us work it out concretely in daily activity and daily thinking. Let us establish new relations in activity and in philosophy.

**Women’s Liberation, News and Letters Committees**

14. See **Portugal: Key Documents of the Revolutionary Process**, published by People’s Translation Service, 1735 Allston Way, Berkeley, Cal. 94703.





Poster above is silk-screened in black, brown, purple and white colors. Created by P. Tamura, it measures 22"x28" and is available for \$4.50, including postage, from News & Letters, 1900 E. Jefferson, Detroit, MI 48207.

# **WOMEN AS THINKERS AND AS REVOLUTIONARIES**

**by Raya Dunayevskaya**

*(The article below is excerpted from two lectures: "Today's Women Theorists," given in Detroit, at the WSU-U of M Cultural Center, Sept. 1975; and "Rosa Luxemburg," given at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, May 1976.)*

Good evening. Let's go adventuring, first in women's activities that have not been recognized as revolutions, such as the first Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Fall, N.Y., in 1848, and the Aba "riots" in Nigeria, 1929, and then take the plunge into three revolutions: Russia, February 1917; Germany, January 1919; and the ongoing revolution in Portugal now. In each case we will become a witness to women's creativity as a liberating force.

## **I. Mass Creativity and the Black Dimension**

Creativity is so very characteristic of masses in motion, that you tell a story of the past and have it sound like something just happening before your eyes. Or you can describe a happening of today, and have it sound as something that will first happen tomorrow. The temptation is also great to start the story of women's creativity neither at its beginning, nor at the end, that is, today, but somewhere in the middle. This is not due to any sort of Existentialist obsession with "extreme situations." Rather it is rooted in the truth that women's struggles have created totally new situations, hidden from history and still unrecognized as philosophic ground. What today we call Women's Liberation as an Idea whose time has come, are movements from practice, from below, that have been accumulating through the ages.

Take the so-called Aba "riots" in Eastern Nigeria in 1929, some 30 years before anyone thought seriously of Africa, much less African women, as a new development of world freedom. It was in that inauspicious year that the market women in Eastern Nigeria were suddenly taxed by the occupying British Empire. This was done with the consent of the African chiefs. The anger of the women, however, was unbounded and therefore, though the men, the educated ones, would not help the illiterate women resist the imposition of the tax, the women decided, themselves, to revolt.

The self-organization of the women established a totally new form of struggle which transcended all tribal divisions — Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa, as well as the smaller tribes. So united, powerful, and violent was the opposition of the women to the edicts, to their own chiefs, as well as to the British imperial rule, that it became impossible to contain the revolt. Shots were fired into the crowd, and only when 40 women lay dead and many more injured, was so-called "order" restored. Even then, however, it was achieved only after the tax was revoked, with British rulers claiming that they had been unaware of African "traditions" that the women not be taxed.

The attitude towards women's struggles seems always to play down women's actions as not meriting the description "revolutionary." For that matter, even up to our day, has any historian, or even revolutionary, seen that historic act as ground from which a great leap into freedom as well as leadership was achieved in the 1960s? Nor can the neglect be explained only by the fact that the event occurred in far-off Africa, back at the outbreak of the Great Depression.

Take the Women's Rights Convention in this country in 1848, at Seneca Falls, N.Y., a fact often enough recorded by women historians of today. All underestimate the Black dimension which inspired the white, middle-class, educated women to strike out on their own. Sojourner Truth and sometimes also Harriet Tubman are dutifully mentioned, condescendingly admitting their bravery — and of course their suffering as slaves — but never as Reason which drove the educated to face reality: that the Black women were the orators, generals, and, yes, thinkers, whereas they, the middle-class intellectuals, were but subordinates.

For that matter, have we asked ourselves, as we proudly repeat Women's Liberation is an Idea whose time has come, such simple questions, as: (1) How does it happen that our very names, "freed from patriarchy," do not measure up to Sojourner Truth's, whose whole philosophy of liberation is included in her name? (2) Have we even today, as we inveigh against "male domination," compared it to Sojourner Truth's separation from Frederick Douglass after the Civil War for being "short-minded" because he did not wish to burden the struggle for passage of the 14th Amendment by demanding also the right of women to vote? And (3) have today's women theorists built on that movement from below, not only as force, but as Reason? Nor have any analyzed it within the context of that year of revolutions, 1848.

Let's take a second look at that year, 1848. Was the first Women's Rights Convention really totally unrelated to the revolutions that covered the length and breadth of Europe? Isn't it a fact, though hardly recorded, that the women of the French Revolution of that year published a daily paper, **La Voix des Femmes** (which is something the women of today have yet to create)?

Other than Marx's genius, what **was** in the air that led to Marx's discovery of a whole new continent of thought? Can we today afford to let the ruling ideology keep us hemmed into American pragmatism? Shouldn't we, as women, at least be aware of the fact that the year Marx first broke with bourgeois society and worked out a philosophy of liberation which he called "a new Humanism" — 1843 — was also the year when a woman, Flora Tristan, proclaimed the need for an international of men and women that would put an end to the division of mental and manual labor?

Young Flora Tristan died that year in the London plague. In Germany, the young Marx continued to develop a whole body of works, a theory of proletarian revolution, a whole philosophy of human liberation, deeply rooted both in the class struggles **and** in that most fundamental relationship, Man/Woman. Marx helped organize women's movements, not only for better wages, but totally different conditions of labor; not only for the right to vote, but for full freedom. Eighty full pages on women and child labor went into **Capital**, Vol. I, not only as description and resistance, but, as Marx expressed it when he drew the whole work to a conclusion, "the new passions and new forces" that would produce the "negation of the negation," that is to say, become the "grave diggers" of capitalism, creating a whole new society where "the development of human power is its own end."

Some 100 years after Flora Tristan's declaration for an international organization of working men and women; after Marx's discovery of a whole new continent of thought; after the first Women's Rights Convention, in New York; and after the greatest revolution in Marx's lifetime – the Paris Commune – in which **The Women Incendiaries**<sup>1</sup> surely acted as both force and Reason, isn't it time to work out a philosophy so urgently needed by the Women's Liberation Movement which does not, **does not**, limit the question of women's liberation to an expose of "the Man" and thereby becomes practically no more than a bystander to Marx's philosophy of liberation on the excuse that it is "male defined,"<sup>2</sup> as Sheila Rowbotham puts it.

Marx practiced what he preached, again both in the class struggle, and on the question of women as Reason as well as force. Thus, in the Workingmen's International Association, Madame Law was a member of its leadership, the General Council. Thus, he encouraged Dmitrieva to go to Paris and there establish the women's section of the First International. Along with the French women like the great Louise Michel, Dmitrieva became central to the whole Committee for the Defense of Paris and Care of the Wounded in the Paris Commune. There was no break in Marx's philosophy of liberation from the time the young Marx called his philosophy a "new Humanism," and declared Man/Woman to be the most fundamental human relationship, to the Marx of the Paris Commune when he declared the greatest achievement to be "its own working existence."

Or course, Marx answered the questions of his day, not ours, but can we afford, as women's liberationists of today, to be without a total philosophy, because the greatest philosophy for uprooting the exploitative old and creating ground for the new was formulated by "a man"?

## II. Russia, February 1917; Germany, January 1919; and Rosa Luxemburg

Now let's turn to the 20th century and see, firstly, what we can learn from women **as masses in motion**, initiating nothing short of the overthrow of that reactionary Russian colossus, Tsarism – the dramatic, creative, empire-shaking five days in February, 1917; and, secondly, let's turn to the 1919 German Revolution, and its greatest theoretician, Rosa Luxemburg.

That first day, Feb. 23, in Russia, appeared simple enough as a celebration of International Women's Day by the textile workers in Petrograd. But was it that simple, when they insisted it become a strike, despite a raging world war in which their country was doing very badly? Was it that simple when all revolutionary parties – Bolsheviks, Left Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, Anarchists – were telling them that they were courting a massacre, and they shouldn't go out on strike? Was that first day of the revolution, when 50,000 women marched despite all advice against it, a "male-defined" revolution? Was the letter they addressed to the metal workers, which the metal workers honored by joining the strike – and 50,000 grew to 90,000: men and women, housewives as well as factory workers – a proof of the fact that they didn't really "know" what they were doing?

When the Bolsheviks did join the women textile workers and the strike turned

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1. See **The Women Incendiaries** by Edith Thomas. This work on the women in the Paris Commune is a must for all women's liberationists. It is the most detailed and creative analysis of the revolution of 1871.

2. Sheila Rowbotham, **Women, Resistance and Revolution**, p. 11.



**Rosa  
Luxemburg**

into political opposition to the imperialist war and the Cossacks did open fire, it was too late to save the Russian empire. By then the soldiers also joined the masses in revolt, and "spontaneously" the whole rotten empire toppled.

It is true that those five historic days that crumbled the might of Tsarism led, in turn, to the Revolution of Oct. 25, and that certainly was led by the Bolshevik Party. That, however, can no more detract from what the women workers initiated on Feb. 23, than the October one can be blamed for its transformation into oppositè under Stalin a decade later.

What had happened in action, what had happened in thought, what had happened in consciousness of the mass participants — all this is ground on which we build today. Or should be. But even if some still insist on playing down women **both** as masses in motion and as leadership, let them consider the German Revolution, January, 1919, led by Rosa Luxemburg. None questioned that she was the leader.



From 1899 when she fought the first appearance of reformism in the Marxist movement; through the 1905 Revolution in which she was both a participant and out of which she drew her famous theory of the Mass Strike; from 1910-13 when she broke with Karl Kautsky — four years in advance of Lenin's designation of Kautsky as not only opportunist but betrayer of the proletariat — and when she first developed her anti-imperialist struggles and writings, not only as political militant but carving out her greatest and most original theoretic work, **Accumulation of Capital**; to the 1919 Revolution, she made no division between her theory and her practice.

Take her **Reform or Revolution?** against Bernstein, who demanded that "the dialectical scaffolding" be removed from Marx's "materialism."

"When he," she is talking of Bernstein, "directs his keenest arrows against our dialectical system, he is really attacking the specific mode of thought employed by the conscious proletariat in its struggle for liberation . . . It is an attempt to

shatter the intellectual arm with the aid of which the proletariat, while materially under the yoke of the bourgeoisie, is yet enabled to triumph over the bourgeoisie. For it is our dialectical system that shows the working class the transitory character of its yoke, proving to the workers the inevitability of their victory, and has already realized the revolution in the domain of thought."

The next great historic event — the Russian Revolution of 1905 — again reveals her as theorist and activist participant who did not stop at oratory but, with gun in hand, made the proprietor-printer print a workers' leaflet. What she singled out, however, from the great experience; what she made ground for other revolutions; what she created as a theory also for the relationship of spontaneity to party, was **The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions:**

"The revolution is not an open-field maneuver of the proletariat, even if the proletariat with social democracy at its head plays the leading role, but it is a struggle in the middle of incessant movement, the creaking, crumbling and displacement of all social foundations. In short, the element of spontaneity plays such a supreme role in the mass strikes in Russia, not because the Russian proletariat is 'unschooled,' but because revolutions are not subject to schoolmastering."

It is this concept and this activity and this perspective that led, in 1907, to Luxemburg's joining with Lenin and Trotsky to amend the resolution at the Stuttgart meeting of the International that declared socialist opposition to war and the imperative need to transform it into revolution.

At the time when Luxemburg recognized the non-revolutionary character of Karl Kautsky, when all other Marxists, Lenin included, were still acknowledging him as the greatest theoretician of the Second International, she embarked on the most hectic point of activity outside of a revolution itself.

She felt very strongly that the German Social Democracy had been hardly more than a bystander instead of militant fighter against Germany's imperialist adventures. It was this, and not mere "organizational" questions, which made her return to her original analysis of mass strike which had always meant to her that "the masses will be the active chorus, and the leaders only 'speaking parts,' the interpreters of the will of the masses."

Luxemburg was not only involved in lecturing and developing an anti-imperialist struggle over the Morocco crisis which would, in turn, lead to her greatest theoretical work, **Accumulation of Capital**<sup>3</sup>, but she also turned to work on the woman question,<sup>4</sup> which heretofore she had left entirely to Clara Zetkin, who was editing the greatest German women's magazine, **Die Gleichheit**, from 1891 to 1917.

The magazine's circulation rose from 9,500 in 1903 to 112,000 in 1913. Indeed, by the outbreak of the war, the female membership in the German Social Democracy was no less than 170,000. It is clear that, as great a theoretician as Rosa Luxemburg was, and as great an organizer as Clara Zetkin was, they were not exceptions to the alleged apathy of German women. On the contrary, it would be more correct to say that there wouldn't have been as massive and important a revolution in Germany were

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3. I happen to disagree seriously with her theory in **Accumulation of Capital**, because I consider it a deviation from Marx. This cannot however detract from the important contribution it made in the struggle against imperialism in her day. See "State-Capitalism and Marx's Humanism or Philosophy and Revolution," (*News and Letters*, 1967.)

4. See Rosa Luxemburg's speech on "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle" at the Stuttgart Second Social Democratic Women's Rally, May 12, 1912. Included in **Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg** (Monthly Review, N.Y.).

there not that many women involved in the revolution. Naturally none could compare with Rosa Luxemburg as theoretician. That is certainly true of genius whether that be woman or man. As one of the very few persons who had written on the subject put it, were it not for proletarian women, "there might have been no revolution in Germany."<sup>5</sup>

Despite all the misrepresentation of her position on the Russian Revolution, she had hailed it as the greatest proletarian revolution ever, insisting that the Russian Bolsheviks alone had dared and dared again. It was exactly for such a daring act that she was preparing herself from her jail cell, from which she was not freed until Nov. 9, 1918, when the German masses in revolt had driven the Kaiser from the throne. Anyone who tried to use her criticism of the Russian Revolution as the German Revolution unfolded got from her the following: where did you learn the ABC's of revolution? Is it not from the Russians? Who taught you the slogan, "all power to the soldiers, workers, and peasants"? Isn't it the Russians? This is the dialectics of revolution: that is what Spartakus wants, this is the road we are taking now.

Rosa Luxemburg lived only two and a half months after being let out of jail. Two and a half months in which the upsurge of the masses led to the establishment first of the Spartakus League and then the independent Communist Party in Germany. Two and a half months in which to call for all power to the soldiers' and workers' councils. And then, the counter-revolution caught up with her, shot her, bashed in her head, and threw her body into the Landwehr Canal.

Does the beheading of the German Revolution — Liebknecht and Jogiches were murdered along with Luxemburg — mean that we're not to learn from a revolution because it was "unsuccessful"?

Has the Women's Liberation Movement nothing to learn from Rosa Luxemburg just because she hasn't written "directly" on the "Woman Question"? Outside the fact that the latter doesn't happen to be true, should not the corpus of her works become the real test of woman as revolutionary and as thinker and as someone who has a great deal to tell us as women's liberationists of today? Are we to throw all that into the dustbin of history because she had not written on the "Woman Question"?

### **III. An Ongoing Revolution and Today's Women Theorists**

The plunge into revolutions is being undertaken because they not only are exciting events of the early 20th century, but will also illuminate the problems of our day. We need to examine, if only briefly, today's ongoing Portuguese Revolution to see the historic continuity of working class women in motion as shapers of history. As far back as two decades ago, when the totally new movement from below began with the outbreak of the East European revolt against Russian totalitarianism, signaling a new world stage of struggle for freedom from under totalitarianism, and no one was paying attention to the fascist regime in Portugal, there were struggles of workers, of women, of peasants.

The first woman to die in Portugal, in the mid-1950s, in the fight for the eight-

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5. A good beginning on this subject has been made by William A. Peltz in his unpublished thesis, "The Role of Proletarian Women in the German Revolution, 1918-19," presented at the Conference on the History of Women, College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minn., Oct. 24-25, 1975.

hour day was Caterina Eufemia. It is she who was to become the symbol for the women's movement — MDM — that was organized in the underground. For that matter, she became also the symbol for the struggle for women's rights of the new MLM, which was organized by intellectuals and middle-class women, when the "Three Marias"<sup>6</sup> were freed from jail.

The undercurrents of revolt had actually been germinating long before 1974. When no others were paying attention to Portugal as the youth rebellion around the world reached a high point in 1968, there was, in fact, an outbreak of revolts in Portugal by students who were fighting not only for academic freedom, but against being drafted for the Portuguese imperialist wars in Africa. The two high points that were reached in all these undercurrents of revolt came from within the army in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Angola,<sup>7</sup> and from within Portugal itself.

Within the country itself there was a whole series of wildcats in 1973. Women became especially important in 1973 when a labor shortage sent them into textiles and electronics, and directly into the fight against multinationals. It is in textiles and electronics and shipyards where the grass roots workers' movement first erupted, and where none questioned the militancy of women workers. But they were asking not only for a fundamental change in labor conditions, but for different relations at home, as well as raising totally new questions of revolution and new human relations.

With the overthrow of the fascist Caetano regime in April 1974, there were outbreaks of all sorts of wildcats, freeing the revolution itself from the neo-fascist "leadership" of Spínola, and creating the foundation also of a new Women's Liberation Movement. Women's participation became critical as three movements — the rebellion within the army, and the wildcats of industrial workers covering the length and breadth of the country, as well as the peasant occupation of the land — coalesced. It was no accident that one of the revolutionary political movements that arose, PRP/BR, was headed by a woman, Isabel do Carmo.

As can be seen, the question of revolutionary creativity is not just that of an individual, not even when she's as great as Rosa Luxemburg, and certainly not that of artists or scientists. Now then, let us see whether the movement from practice was the stuff out of which the women theorists of today, whether they be in the U.S., England, or any other technologically advanced country, built their theories.

With the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement in the mid-1960s, when a whole new generation of revolutionaries was born out of the Black Revolution, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the world-wide national liberation struggles, we had the rise also of women theorists. The new in the struggles of the mid-1960s, when it came to the Women's Liberation Movement, was the women's refusal to wait for the day **after** "the Revolution" for **their** total freedom. They refused to narrow their struggles to fight for equal wages or, for that matter, any other economic demands. They raised all sorts of new questions, from sexuality to opposition both to patriarchy and the ingrained division between mental and manual labor. For what they aspired to was nothing short of the wholeness of the person.

6. The original title of the work for which Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta, and Maria Velho da Costa were imprisoned was **New Portuguese Letters**, published in 1972.

7. The leaflets of the FRELIMO in Mozambique, the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, and MPLA in Angola may not match the fraternization leaflets that the Bolsheviks wrote in 1917, but they certainly were an entirely new ground for fighting in Portugal, 1974. In urging the Portuguese soldiers to go home and make their own revolution, the national liberation forces were raising questions, including the role of women, that the "advanced" Portuguese had not even heard of. See **The Struggle for Mozambique** by Eduardo Mondlane and **Return to the Source** by Amílcar Cabral.

The women theorists have done considerable work in exposing male chauvinism in history, and in the Movement itself. It was certainly of the essence to make such relatively undiscussable subjects as sexuality discussable, not à la Freud, but against Freud. Works like Kate Millet's **Sexual Politics** exposed the male chauvinism of great writers of our day, from D. H. Lawrence to Norman Mailer. Others took issue with all forms of patriarchy. The weak point was that none of them were in any serious way related to working class women, their activities, their thoughts, their aspirations. The one exception was Sheila Rowbotham's **Women, Resistance and Revolution**.

In dealing with 300 years of women's struggles, in concentrating on labor struggles and revolutions, and openly espousing socialism, and in bringing in the question of male chauvinism not as something only capitalistic, but very much pervasive within the Movement itself, she focused on the validity of an independent women's movement. Unfortunately, so preoccupied was she with "the new" that she neither dug deeply into philosophic roots, nor so much as mentioned one of the greatest revolutionary theoreticians, Rosa Luxemburg. Whatever the reason — whether it was because Rosa didn't write voluminously on the "Woman Question," or Rosa Luxemburg's works and activities are not, to her mind, relevant to today's women's tasks, or whatever — she thereby actually degraded women's revolutionary role. Indeed, flying in the face of history, she writes as if all revolutions were "male-defined." This only leads her to a vanguardist conclusion that women, even when doing nothing short of initiating a great revolution that toppled Tsarism, lacked "consciousness." That is still one other form of considering women "backward." In a word, no matter how "consciously" one favors an independent women's movement, one doesn't really consider them capable of "getting there" — unless led by a "Vanguard Party." Vanguardism, elitism cannot but impede the Women's Liberation Movement of today from working out a new relationship of spontaneity to organization, theory to practice, philosophy to revolution. It is but one more form of separating thinking from doing, especially as it relates to women as thinkers and as revolutionaries.

Working class women have a very special reason for their passionate interest in revolutions, not simply because they're exciting events, but because they show working class women in motion as shapers of history. The dialectical relationship of spontaneity to organization is of the essence to all of us as we face today's crises. It is not only Portugal which is under the whip of counter-revolution that began Nov. 25, 1975. The global struggle for power between capitalist imperialism and state-capitalist societies calling themselves Communist, all nuclearly armed, has put a question mark over the very survival of humanity.

Creativity that can really tear things up at their roots and genuinely start something new, humanly new, can only come from mass creativity. It is only then when it is totally revolutionary, is not hemmed in by the concept and practice of the "Party to lead," and it is only then it can once and for all end aborted and unfinished revolutions.

Be it something as "simple" as the question of women's struggle for equality in the very midst of all the myriad crises, or the deep recession and racism in the U.S., what women are hungering for is working out the relationship of their creativity to a philosophy of liberation. We surely do not need yet one more form of elitism. What we do need is a **unity** of philosophy and revolution. Without it, we will not be able to get out from under the whip of the counter-revolution.

