

Working women and marxism

A debate on oppression

**Carmen Carrasco
Mercedes Petit**

Carmen Carrasco ~ Mercedes Petit

Working Women and Marxism

A debate on oppression

First Spanish edition: Editorial Lorca, San Pablo, 2009

Second Spanish edition: Ediciones CEHuS, Buenos Aires, March 2025

First English edition: Ediciones CEHuS, Buenos Aires, April 2026

Cover and interior design: Daniel Iglesias

www.nahuelmoreno.org

www.uit-ci.org

www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar

Copyright by CEHuS , Centro de Estudios Humanos y Sociales
Buenos Aires, 2026
cehus2014@gmail.com



Contents

About the Authors	1
Foreword.....	2
About Patriarchy	2
The Intersection of Class and Gender	3
The Role of Political Parties in Feminist Struggles	4
A Review of the Feminist Waves.....	4
Socialist Feminism for the Emancipation of Women and Gender Dissidents.....	5
Presentation by Mercedes Petit (2009)	7
Presentation by Carmen Carrasco (2009)	10
Introduction	13
CHAPTER I	
Capitalism, the Family, and the Oppression of Women... 15	
Capitalism and its “basic policies”	16
Two contradictory trends	17
The destruction of the family and the incorporation of women into production is a painful process.....	19
The Nature of Women’s Liberation Tasks	21
The Nature of Women’s Struggles	22
CHAPTER II	
Women’s Struggles: A History Marked by Political and Class Divisions	24
Reality belies Waters.....	25
In the “First Wave”, There Was no Multi-class Unity of Women	25
A New Phenomenon Emerged in the 1960s	28
Waters vs. Waters	28
Unitary and Autonomous Women’s Movements in Backward Countries?	32
Latin America: “Is It Only a Matter of Time”?	34
Waters Ignores the Largest Women’s Mobilisation in History.....	38
CHAPTER III	
Oppression and Exploitation	41

“A Decade with a Woman’s Name”	42
Women of the World, Unite?	42
All women are oppressed, but some exploit others	43
What is Oppression?.....	44
What is the relationship between exploitation and oppression?	45
Until the victory of socialism, exploitation will divide the oppressed	45
Proletarians of the world, unite!	47

CHAPTER IV

Method and Programme for Women’s Struggle 49

Strategy and tactics 50

The different tactics that, according to Waters, would lead to the autonomous movement....	50
What strategy do we adopt when working with women?.....	51
An incorrect relationship between mobilisation and organisation	52
What kind of “united front” does Waters propose?.....	53
“There are no exclusively women’s issues”	56
What program for the autonomous movement?.....	57
A maximum and ultra-leftist program for the family and women’s liberation	58
A “transitional program” for each “sector”?	58
Her program is not structured around the task of the workers’ government	59

CHAPTER V

The need for a revolutionary party 60

Autonomous movement and party 61

Waters puts an end to the struggle against reformist and reactionary parties.....	62
A liquidating conception	63
Waters capitulates to anti-party feminist currents.....	63

APPENDICES

I. The Tasks of Trotskyism Among Women 66

II. The rebellion against sexual violence 71

The pact of silence was broken.	71
Milestones in the fight against sexual violence	72
What is consent?	73
Debunking the myth of “false accusations”	73
An arm wrestling against patriarchal impunity.....	73

Faced with the reactionary advance, we need more feminist organisations..... 75

III. The Role of Women in the Struggle for Militant and Anti-Bureaucratic Unions..... 75

IV. We defend sex education and demand its implementation with a gender perspective..... 77

Against obscurantism, we demand secular, scientific, and gender-sensitive sex education..... 77

V. Debates about Prostitution 79

Biographical Appendix..... 81

Glossary 86

Revolutionists and Reformists 86

First World War 86

Triumph of the Socialist Revolution in Russia and the Third International..... 87

Isolation of the First Revolutionary Workers’ State and the Stalinist Bureaucratisation..... 88

The Fourth International and Trotskyism 88

Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States 88

Second World War 89

Workers’ States..... 89

Chinese Revolution..... 89

Yankee invasion of Vietnam..... 90

The French May and the Global Rise..... 90

Struggles for the Civil Rights of African Americans..... 90

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) 91

The Right to Abortion in the Second Wave..... 91

Right to Divorce 91

About the Authors



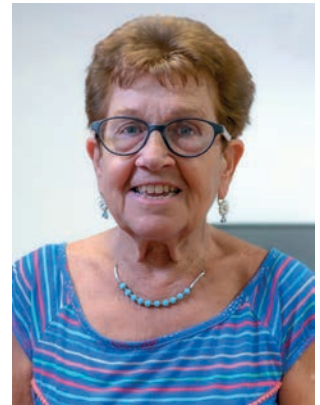
Carmen Carrasco.

She joined Trotskyism in 1975 in Colombia as part of the international current led by Nahuel Moreno. In 1985, she moved to Argentina to join the editorial staff of the magazine *Correo Internacional*. In the 1990s, she lived in Russia, from where she wrote for Latin

American and European media outlets. She is currently a freelance journalist.

Mercedes Petit.

Journalist and researcher. In the 1960s, she began her activism in Trotskyism, in the current led by Nahuel Moreno (www.nahuelmoreno.org), with whom she collaborated for years on theoretical and propaganda work. Following the genocidal coup of 1976, they both went into exile in Colombia and returned in 1982. In 1986, Petit published *Elementary Political Concepts* with Nahuel Moreno and *Notes for the History of Trotskyism*. She currently writes for the newspaper *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar) and for the magazine *International Correspondence* (www.uit-ci.org).



Foreword

Mercedes Trimarchi¹

At the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, the same number of female and male athletes competed for the first time: 5,250 each. A true achievement when we recall the first edition of the event in 1896 and the following years, in which no female athletes participated. This parity is a step forward in the fight against discrimination against women in sports, a fight that took 128 years to achieve. And now, a setback is evident in relation to gender identities, since the Olympic Games remain trans-exclusionary; the binary classification (woman/man) has not yet been overcome, leaving out people who do not identify as female or male.

The novel parity in Paris has an explanation. Currently, the demands of the fourth wave of feminist struggles continue to be voiced. This movement, which burst onto the scene in 2015, challenges the gender-based violence inherent in the patriarchal capitalist system and which, like any struggle process, is dynamic. Through mobilisation, conquests have been achieved, such as the recognition of diverse gender identities, marriage equality, sex education, and the right to abortion, all of which are now threatened by representatives of the far-right, such as Donald Trump in the United States and Javier Milei in Argentina, who are waging a “cultural battle” against these hard-won rights.

To further reflect on the contradictions inherent in these struggles, those who lead them, and their scope, we are reissuing this 1979 debate, which at the time expressed one of the topics under discussion within the Trotskyist movement, in the context of the mobilisations that took place in the United States and Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s — a process known as the second wave. Authors Mercedes Petit and Carmen Carrasco contributed to the debate from their feminist, socialist, and revolutionary perspectives. The text is almost half a century old, but the discussions around class and gender remain relevant. These are some of the issues currently being debated within the feminist movement, in a context of the deepening crisis of imperialist capitalism and its austerity programs, which exacerbate all social inequalities, including gender inequalities.

About Patriarchy

In 2023, the film *Barbie* was released, a fictional work starring the iconic doll who, since her creation in 1959, has embodied the prototypical traits of an adult, white, Western woman. It quickly became one of Hollywood’s highest-grossing films. Its director, Greta Gerwig, portrays in the film the inequalities experienced by women and men in patriarchal society. When Barbie and her boyfriend Ken visit the human world, the male character discovers, with astonishment, the preferential treatment he receives for being male. Upon returning to BarbieLand, Ken will attempt to replicate the privileges of a patriarchal society that he experienced during his brief time in the real world. That millions can see and enjoy such a successful film that challenges patriarchy is also an expression of feminist struggles.

1 **Mercedes Trimarchi** is a teacher and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Communication (University of Buenos Aires). She coordinates the women’s group Isadora and is a leader of Izquierda Socialista [Socialist Left]. She is a member of the Buenos Aires City Legislature for the Left Front-Unity coalition. She writes for the newspaper *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar) and contributes to the magazine *International Correspondence* (www.uit-ci.org).

But what is patriarchy? The word, derived from Latin (and before that, Greek), means rule by the father (the patriarch; *pater familias*). It can be simply explained as a hierarchical system that organises society based on male dominance. From a historical perspective, patriarchy was established approximately 7000 years ago, with the rise of exploitative societies, private property, and the consolidation of the patriarchal family model. In 1884, Friedrich Engels wrote *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a key book for analysing and understanding the links between capitalism and patriarchy. There he states:

“The overthrow of mothers’ right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house too; the woman was degraded, enthralled, became the slave of the man’s lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. This humiliated position of women, especially manifest among the Greeks of the Heroic and still more of the Classical Age, has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in part, clothed in a milder form, but by no means abolished.”²

Let’s reflect for a moment: what would happen if, instead of the mother cooking, the family ordered takeaway food every day of the week? It would cost that family significantly more money. Some studies indicate that if reproductive labour were assigned a value, it could reach between 10% and 39% of a country’s GDP. This is how capitalist economies save a substantial amount of money, by ensuring that domestic work continues to fall on women, without any kind of remuneration or recognition. In the work we are republishing, special emphasis is placed on the exploitation of all the advantages that patriarchy grants to the capitalist system to obtain greater profits.

The Intersection of Class and Gender

In Chapter 3 of this book, Petit and Carrasco revisit two fundamental concepts for the analysis of contemporary society: the categories of oppression and exploitation. They return to these concepts repeatedly to fully understand the root of the problems that women and gender non-conforming people suffer under patriarchal capitalism.

They define oppression as “the utilisation of inequalities to disadvantage and subjugate a social group based on racial, sexual, national, or other differences, producing a situation of unequal rights, social, cultural, and eventually economic discrimination.” And they characterise exploitation as “the appropriation of the labour of the dispossessed class by the class that owns the means of production, which has historically resulted in the struggle of different classes against each other.”

This distinction between the two categories clarifies that exploitation is an economic relationship in which the bourgeoisie profits from what it takes from the working class, and that oppression encompasses specific sectors, such as women, gender minorities, racialised, mixed-race, or indigenous people, regardless of their class affiliation. Oppression is multi-class because it includes people and sectors from all social classes. For example, all women are oppressed; patriarchy and sexism affect us all. However, those of us who belong to the working class and popular sectors (the vast majority) experience it in a completely different way than bourgeois women.

Under capitalism, working women, besides being oppressed, are also exploited. Therefore, oppression and exploitation are not dimensions that operate separately. Bosses use every tool at their disposal to increase their profits. Thus, female workers suffer super-exploitation in the workplace, and upon arriving home, we perform domestic chores, effectively doubling our workday.

Feminist struggles involve people from different social classes, converging in a heterogeneous and multi-class movement that organises itself primarily against patriarchal oppression, inequality, and for the conquest of democratic rights. Within this movement, consensus is built, and unified actions are taken in relation to various specific demands. For example, in Argentina, there is the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion; a space where more than 500 organisations with diverse political positions converge, but with a common motto: “Sex education to decide, contraception to prevent abortion, and legal abortion to prevent death.”³

2 *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 26, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2010, page 165.

3 The **Campaign** emerged from the National Women’s Meetings and was officially launched on 28 May 2005, the International Day of Action for Women’s Health. The Campaign adopted the green scarf as its symbol. With the growth of the mobilisations,

At the same time, and within the feminist movement, controversies carry significant weight. Beyond the tactical debates, which are important, a profound strategic difference exists among the various sectors that comprise it regarding whether it is possible to reform capitalism so that it ceases to be an oppressive system. A dispute that spanned the 20th century and continues today, between revolutionary and reformist changes. The necessary unity of action is combined with the existence of different class interests within the movement itself. From the socialist feminist perspective held by the authors, the struggle of women and gender dissidents against patriarchy takes place within the framework of the anti-capitalist struggle. Advancing along this path, to end capitalism and achieve a new, socialist system, will be crucial to eradicating all forms of oppression and exploitation.

The Role of Political Parties in Feminist Struggles

The struggle against patriarchal oppression and for the conquest of rights is a political battle involving different sectors. In this struggle, there will always be women and dissidents who do not fight against capitalism and who support the various pro-capitalist political parties, and it is here that the different paths within the movement diverge. To strengthen both the unified movement in each of its daily struggles and to propel forward this fundamental anti-capitalist fight, the great task arises of building a consistent political leadership, that is, the revolutionary and internationalist party. This is another of the key points that Carrasco and Petit develop extensively in Chapter 5. The authors argue that while participating in unified feminist struggles, it is essential to promote the construction of a revolutionary party whose objective is to end both patriarchy and capitalism, in order to advance towards socialism.

While the main themes of the work we are reissuing remain relevant, the fact that it was written in 1979 means it omits debates that arose during the third and fourth waves of feminism. In this sense, readers of the following pages will notice some absent topics and others that, while present, have been expanded and enriched by the evolution of feminist struggles. For example, the slogans concerning the working-class and peasant family in Chapter 1, formulated almost fifty years ago, have today been enriched by the advancement of divorce rights, the proliferation of different family types, and same-sex marriage. But beyond these updates, the arguments raised by Petit and Carrasco against the misguided positions of Mary Alice Waters of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States regarding the role of the family institution in the capitalist system and the degradation of living conditions for popular sectors remain valid.

A Review of the Feminist Waves

The fight against discrimination against women and for equal rights with men has a history spanning several centuries. In the 18th century, during the French Revolution, the writer Olympe de Gouges, paraphrasing the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789, wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, a foundational text for which she was guillotined. In England, the writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1772, in which she argued for equal political and social rights for women of the time.

In the mid-19th century in the United States, we find Sojourner Truth, a Black woman and formerly enslaved, who fought to regain custody of her son, becoming the first Black woman to win a lawsuit against a white man. Also in the United States, we find the abolitionists and suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, both fighters for the recognition of women's civil rights.

They foreshadowed what would become, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the first wave of women's struggles for their political and social rights. Not only did a great movement for universal suffrage emerge, but also for improved working conditions for women workers. Thus, women's organisations arose within the unions themselves, demanding the same representation rights as their male counterparts. As the authors argue, during this first wave, the class divide within the movement was much more pronounced than in subsequent waves.

Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, the second wave of women's rights took place, amidst a global rise in the workers' and student movements. Large-scale women's mobilisations, primarily in the

within the context of the fourth wave, the green headscarf became a symbol of struggle for all of Latin America.

United States and Europe, protested against the social mandates of patriarchal oppression, sexual discrimination, and prevailing stereotypes that sought to confine women to reproductive roles within the home and family. They demanded the right to divorce and abortion, which was achieved in some countries. The emergence of the contraceptive pill played a significant role in triggering the so-called sexual revolution, which coincided with other social movements such as those of the youth of May 1968 in France, against racism, against the Vietnam War, and for the decolonisation of Asia and Africa. From within academia, a third wave emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, structured around a critical perspective on more traditional feminism. Classical feminism's demands stemmed from a hegemonic model of the Western, white, heterosexual woman – the prototypical figure of liberal feminism in previous decades. This gave rise to the need to consider multiple types of women, shaped by diverse experiences based on social, ethnic, national, or religious identities. Elaborations and demands related to the category of gender, which challenged biological determinism, gained momentum. These contributions on gender were invaluable at the time and remain so today. Through them, the critique of the patriarchal system deepened, questioning heterosexuality and cisgender identity as a universal and obligatory norm.

These proposals provided a significant impetus to the movements for the recognition of the rights of lesbians, gays, and transgender people. For example, through mobilisation, victories were achieved, such as the removal of homosexuality from the World Health Organisation's list of psychiatric illnesses (1990) and the prohibition of so-called conversion therapies in Brazil (1999), Malta (2016), and Ecuador (2012). In Argentina, equal marriage laws were passed (2010), as well as the gender identity law (2012), and within the framework of the fourth wave, in 2021, the transvestite-trans employment quota was established, stipulating that 1% of the national government workforce must be comprised of transvestite, transsexual, and transgender people. All these legal advances are challenged by conservative and reactionary sectors, particularly the Catholic and Evangelical churches. These institutions speak of "gender ideology" as a nefarious approach that supposedly aims to corrupt children. A complete lie intended to discourage feminist struggles and the fight for the recognition of rights. Worldwide, 62 UN member states still criminalise consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults, according to data from the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), and in 12 countries, such acts are punishable by death.

Currently, we are still in the midst of the upheavals caused by the fourth wave against sexist violence. Its beginning is marked by the massive mobilisation that took place in Buenos Aires in June 2015 against femicides, under the slogan #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less), but which quickly expanded to denounce the multiple forms of patriarchal violence. Since then, reports of sexual abuse have increased globally, breaking years of complicit silence. Various institutions, such as sports clubs and unions, have drafted protocols for assisting victims, and some rapists have been convicted, despite the patriarchal justice system.

Socialist Feminism for the Emancipation of Women and Gender Dissidents

The text we are reissuing is essential reading for those seeking to explore the intersection of class and gender. While struggles have yielded significant gains for women and gender minorities, these advances, within the framework of the capitalist system, can be reversed. For example, during the first wave, women fought for freedoms and won the right to vote in several European countries, and this right was subsequently extended to many others. However, dictatorships have emerged that have crushed the most basic democratic freedoms, and entire regions exist where theocratic regimes – like Iran – stone women, force them to cover their bodies and heads, or prevent them from walking in the streets without a male escort. In other words, processes are not linear; rights are not forever, and as the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir argued decades ago, "Never forget that a political, economic, or religious crisis will be enough to bring women's rights back into question."

The authors emphasise that to achieve true emancipation for women and gender non-conforming people, the struggle against patriarchy must be united with the struggle against capitalism. In this way, it will be possible to end not only male privilege and domination over other genders but also the multiple forms of exploitation and oppression. To this end, it is essential to advance towards the conquest of governments by workers and the people. There is no possibility of defeating patriarchy while capitalism exists,

and therefore, the feminist struggle will always be intertwined with and inseparable from the struggle of the entire working class against capitalist domination and for the triumph of socialism worldwide.

In this second [Spanish] edition of *Working Women and Marxism*, we are incorporating a series of supplementary texts that reflect some of the main current debates within the feminist movement.⁴ One of the essays analyses the implications of the rebellion against sexual violence, another delves into the transformative role of women and gender non-conforming people within militant trade unionism, and a third addresses the struggle for the implementation of sex education within the context of the conservative and obscurantist onslaught of churches and far-right governments globally. Finally, we include a text that explores the debates surrounding the practice of prostitution within the context of the deepening capitalist economic crisis. We hope that reading this book will help deepen political engagement and problematize the complex relationship between feminisms and Marxism.

4 For more information, refer to the magazines of the Isadora women's group published at www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar and on Isadora's social media. [In Spanish.]

Presentation by Mercedes Petit (2009)

The book we present was written in 1979, 30 years ago.

Can we draw experiences and lessons from those debates? Surely yes. They were made in the heat of the powerful feminist movement that shook the United States and several European countries in the 1960s and early 1970s. Those mobilisations changed many aspects of the daily lives of American women, who won rights such as abortion, greater sexual freedom, and growing participation in different aspects of society's activities. Were women's liberation definitively established and fundamental solutions achieved? No, not at all. Periodically, the right again attacks the right to abortion, to suppress or limit it. Divorce is a conquest, but more and more women must face raising children and supporting the home alone. Around the world, there has been a great expansion of women's participation in the labour market, but the conditions of exploitation have worsened. As long as the capitalist system endures, it is impossible to achieve the liberation of all women. In the same way that it is impossible to feed the entire world population, give them a decent life, health, education, work and recreation. This is prevented by the multinationals and an economy based on making profits for a minority of owners. The perspective is raised that liberation will be achieved with the conquest of a new world system, socialism with workers' democracy.

In the debate that we are publishing, the current of Trotskyism headed by the Argentine leader Nahuel Moreno polemicised against conceptions that supported the idea that autonomous and unitary women's movements would have a permanence over time and a continuity that would allow them to be decisive protagonists of a triumphant struggle towards socialism. The mere fact that those movements had their rise and fall, and have not been repeated, could serve to settle a conclusion. But the most important debate at that time was different, and it became increasingly topical. Does the path to liberation go through multi-class movements of "all" women? We responded that no, that even if unity of action and united participation in those movements were important and necessary (even knowing that they would not be permanent), the class contradictions, the antagonistic interests that tear these processes apart, were not eliminated. And we emphasised that the trenches of the revolutionaries must be established from the defence of the interests of exploited women and their natural confluence with the workers, to strengthen their struggles and to advance in the construction of the revolutionary party.

We were vindicating a brief but very profound historical experience, in which the most important achievements to advance the liberation of women took place: the triumph of the first socialist revolution in 1917, in Russia. The new Soviet regime, headed by Lenin and Trotsky, immediately gave the same legal and political rights to women and men, and began to install an extensive system of child care centres, kindergartens, and laundries. The right to abortion was established, and divorce was a simple and free procedure. The first revolutionary workers' and peasants' government, even in very difficult circumstances such as the terrible years of the civil war, took immense steps to combat the situation of tremendous oppression of worker and peasant women under Tsarism. But the process of bureaucratisation led by Stalin cut it short, and women were one of the sectors hardest hit by the regression of the revolution. "How man enslaved woman, how the exploiter subjected them both, how the toilers have attempted at the price of blood to free themselves from slavery and have only exchanged one chain for another — history tells

us much about all this.”⁵ These are words of Leon Trotsky, spoken in 1936, when he was living in exile outside the USSR. He was commenting on the changes in Soviet legislation, which limited divorce and banned abortion, imposed by the dictatorship of Stalin (who proclaimed that “socialism” had already been achieved). There were great achievements in the first years of the USSR. And the so-called “failure of socialism” was not such but the result of the disaster caused by a repressive and restorationist bureaucracy, which betrayed the fight for socialism and was sinking all the achievements of that revolution, including the advanced steps to combat the “slavery of women”.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the restoration of capitalism in the former USSR, China and other countries where the bourgeoisie had been expropriated, the world has continued to be shaken without pause by all kinds of convulsions and revolutionary struggles. Nothing indicates that the wheel of history (or, rather, the class struggle) has stopped. Mass feminist movements have not been repeated, but anti-feminist taboos and prejudices have been falling. The reactionary discourse of the Churches (particularly the Catholic Church) loses its popularity. Important sectors of public opinion accept and demand the legalisation of abortion. Violence against women is becoming less silenced (although it does not necessarily occur less), and the various groups linked to the defence of sexual diversity are gaining space and legitimacy. New protagonists have been incorporated to accompany city workers and young students. The poor and landless peasants, the indigenous people, the unemployed youth of the big cities, and the super-exploited immigrants are mobilised. The debate on the role of the working class and its relationship with the other popular and oppressed sectors is reconsidered. The sectors of political reformism and the intellectuals who feed it from academic approaches deny once again the irreconcilable antagonism of the interests of the opposing social classes (the old and irreplaceable antinomy of the bourgeoisie–proletariat) and the inexorable need for revolution.

One of the current trends in Latin America, for example, is the “post-Marxists” such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and others. They invite the “deconstruction” of the Marxist concept of “class” on the idea that the working class almost no longer exists or is decreasing (an idea that has been empirically refuted ad nauseam), and they put old discussions back into the debate. Reducing Marxism to a workerism typical of the 19th century or at most the 20th century, they disqualify it as insufficient in the face of the proliferation of particular struggles erected by the “new social movements” – feminists, environmentalists, sexual diversity, ethnic minorities, immigrants – that would emerge as the new political subjects that would occupy the prominence that once (or never) corresponded to the working class.

In countries where the indigenous and peasant movement has acquired great prominence, such as in Bolivia or Peru (or years ago in Chiapas, in the south of Mexico, with Zapatismo), in the heat of very progressive struggles against semi-colonial capitalism and the debates to overcome it, utopian and multi-class solutions are proposed. They are current expressions of the traditional controversy between reformists and revolutionaries. In the face of imperialist capitalism, reality returns again and again to prove the revolutionaries right: capitalism has no fix, there is no “reform”, there is no other path than the clash of the conflicting classes. If we commit ourselves to the fundamental solution of the problems of the workers, the peasants, the women, or the indigenous people, there is no other path than, with the strength of the working class united and leading its allies, to defeat the enemy class, the bourgeoisie and imperialism, to put an end to the political and economic power of the bosses and the governments that protect them. That is, the triumph of the socialist revolution. The indigenous demands, for example, unrelated to an anti-capitalist and socialist solution, have points in common with the “socialism of the 21st century” proclaimed by President Hugo Chávez, who defends and practices a mixed capitalist economy with multinationals and sectors of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, and maintains the exploitation and increasing repression of the workers and popular sectors of Venezuela.

In this book, the debate revolves around the struggle for women’s liberation, with the multi-class conceptions of the time. The discussion continues, even with groups that identify as Marxist and Trotskyist. It may seem a minor debate, since it is not fuelled today by the significant women’s mobilisations of the 1960s and 1970s. But it is undoubtedly important, at the very least, because women’s liberation encompasses half of humanity, and women are present in all struggles. Some groups in the United States and other countries, or followers of the leader Ernest Mandel, attribute a decisive and leading role to the women’s

5 Trotsky, Leon, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and where is it going?*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1972, p. 159.

liberation movement in advancing towards socialism. They acknowledge certain facts, since women are the sector that is the victim of almost all forms of oppression. But they draw a mistaken conclusion. According to these groups, since working women suffer oppression because of their class, race, sexual orientation, nationality, and ethnicity, their movements would be their movements that would lead to the liberation of humanity. The discussion we raised three decades ago about the characteristics of capitalism, exploitation and oppression, about class antagonisms and the tasks to advance towards the triumph of the socialist revolution continues to be a contribution to these current debates.

Buenos Aires, 30 September 2009

Presentation by Carmen Carrasco (2009)

The second half of the 20th century witnessed a women's revolution in all areas. Their incorporation into production is growing steadily: in 2007, 1.2 billion women worked around the world, an increase of 18.4% in the last decade. From 1960 to today, women have gone from 34 to 46% of wage earners in the world. In the United States, six out of ten women were working in 2005, twice as many as in 1948, and in late 2009, after a year of recession, they are about to surpass men in the workforce for the first time in history. In Europe, women have gone from being 30% of the workforce in the 1960s to 43% today, an increase of almost 50%.

The same thing happens in backward countries: in East Asia, there are 83 women for every 100 men in the labour market, a higher percentage than in developed countries. In China, they are known as *dagongmei*, young people around 20 years old who emigrate from the countryside to work in factories, without legal residence in the cities, exhausting themselves in eternal workdays, crammed into small sheds with their children.

This "proletarianization" of women, or this "feminisation of wage earners", is the fundamental feature of female history in the second half of the 20th century, to such an extent that the English magazine, *The Economist*, considers that, in the last decade, "the increase in women's employment in developed countries has contributed more to growth than China."⁶

In plain English, the massive incorporation of women into production has been one of the main sources of the extraordinary capitalist profits of the last boom, before the outbreak of the crisis in 2008.

The group where female employment grew the most is that of women between 25 and 49 years old. News: women do not stop working to become mothers, or rather, it is young mothers who join the labour market *en masse*.

In a parallel phenomenon, women have taken the classrooms by storm: at the end of the Second World War, women were between 15% and 30% of students in developed countries.⁷ Today, in the United States, 140 women enter university for every 100 men, and in Sweden, 150 for every 100.⁸

This massive incorporation of women into production, and therefore into education, is a precondition for their liberation, but they must pay dearly: there are more salaried and educated women, more lawyers, doctors and journalists, but there are also more unemployed women, with casual jobs (in Europe they have 80% of the part-time jobs) and with lower salaries (on average they earn 27% less),⁹ while double exploitation is widespread due to their status as workers and mothers.

The conclusion is simple: women constitute 70% of the world's poor, yet they make up almost half of the workforce.

6 *The Economist*, "A guide to womenomics", 12 April 2006.

7 Hobsbawm, Eric, *History of the 20th Century*, Planeta, Buenos Aires, p. 313.

8 *The Economist*, "A guide to womenomics", 12 April 2006.

9 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures> (accessed on March 2026).

The most important social consequence of this massive introduction of women, especially young (and, in most cases, single) mothers, into the world of wage earners, has been the dissolution of the family for the majority of workers, becoming a luxury only permissible for the bourgeoisie and some segments of the middle class. In this way, capitalism has fulfilled a historical mission: burying the family.

One fact is enough: in 2007, in the United States, 60% of young women between the ages 20 and 24 were single mothers, three times more than in 1980, a true revolution in personal and family relationships, which is not limited to the United States but it extends to Europe where in many countries this figure is higher, and is reflected in Latin America. In Argentina, for example, a third of households are headed by women, a figure that has increased 50% in the last 15 years, but in the poorest households it reaches 40%.

The dissolution of the family, without any state alternative to replace it – canteen halls, child care centres, collective laundries – amid the crisis of education and public health, creates alarming social situations: children are left to their own devices; single mothers must be responsible for the education and support of their children; there is an increase in teenage pregnancies, who abort at the risk of their lives; children are left in the care of their grandparents – or grandmother – and, likely, the father is not known. The social collapse translates into an increase in drug consumption and domestic violence against women, while trafficking in women is the third most profitable activity in the world, after drugs and arms trafficking. Let us remember the 370 Mexican “maquila” workers in Ciudad Juárez, murdered in the last 10 years.

The mass entry of women into production and the cultural and political life brought with it great struggles of women for their rights, which reached their peak in Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. If in the first half of the last century a female president was unthinkable, in the second half, around 40 women held that position. In most Western countries, the right to divorce, shared parental authority, and the right to vote were won, and in 54 countries, the right to abortion was won, which already existed in the so-called socialist countries. This fight is still pending in Latin America, but progress has been made, such as in Mexico City, where it was legalised, and in Uruguay, where the decriminalisation of abortion was approved by Parliament, although the law was vetoed by the “left government” of the Frente Amplio [Broad Front] led by Tabaré Vázquez.¹⁰ But these achievements are very uneven and fundamentally cover the most developed countries, leaving out entire regions of the planet, such as Africa, with the brutal mutilations of its women; Muslim countries, with their stoning and deprivation of rights to the female half; the millions of Chinese peasant women, from South Asia, or the poor women of Latin America.

Where this revolutionary change is expressed the most is in the growing participation of women in the front row of workers’ and popular struggles. Neda Soltán, the young woman murdered during the demonstrations against electoral fraud in Iran in June 2009, personifies the great rebellion of Iranian women against the theocratic regime of the ayatollahs. Azucena Villaflor, the only person buried in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, personifies the fight against dictatorship and genocide, and represents the thousands of missing women in Argentina. Rachel Corrie, run over by a tank in Gaza, personifies international solidarity with the Palestinian people. Dionisia Díaz, wife of one of the workers of the great banana strike of 1954, has been called “the grandmother of the resistance” in Honduras. The Terrabusi women workers, who have carried out the heroic strike of more than a month against the multinational Kraft in Argentina, are an example of the millions of salaried women who fight for their rights.

The “feminisation” of the working class and the dissolution of the family, these two phenomena of the end of the 20th century, mark the agenda of those of us who seek to offer a revolutionary alternative to women.

Anti-Marxist feminism and many left-wing feminist currents maintain the agenda of the 1960s and consider their goal to abolish the family (in fact, abolished by capitalism), for which they call for building an “independent feminist movement”, and place the axis on “women’s issues” in general. The book we present today is a debate against these positions. Despite having been written in 1979, it reflects some of the hottest controversies in the feminist movement today.

Three decades later we can see that the “proletarianization” of women leads them to participate in an increasingly massive way in political and social life but following class political lines: raising their

¹⁰ **Tabaré Vázquez** (1940–2020) was a Uruguayan politician and oncologist who served as president of Uruguay in the periods 2005–2010 and 2015–2020.

own demands as workers (child care centres, maternity leave, equal pay) and as women (free abortion, equal rights, against trafficking, gender violence, for health and education), not in an “independent” way, but accompanying and/or being a vanguard of the general struggle of the workers and popular sectors against imperialist capitalism. For this reason, there have not been “autonomous feminist movements”, multi-class and permanent, around “women’s issues”.

Our fundamental task is to awaken to action the massive battalions of working women, young people, housewives, unemployed, to fight for their rights, and to convince them that full equality will only be achieved by uniting with the workers and building a revolutionary alternative to overthrow the capitalist system and build a new society.

This book was written under the guidance of Nahuel Moreno. Various political circumstances meant that it was not published at the time, but today we can pay off a debt of 30 years.

I dedicate the book to Amelia Beato and Rita Astasio, Argentine teacher leaders, who tragically died in a car accident while travelling to support a teachers’ strike in the province of San Juan. To Graciela Flores, a prominent leader of the *piquetero* movement, who died of a painful illness, and to Sonia Colman, a street vendor, murdered by “trigger-happy” bullets. All of them, dear comrades.

Buenos Aires, 30 September 2009

Introduction

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, important mobilisations of women for their rights developed, particularly in France, Italy and the United States. They were fuelled by the wave of workers' and students' struggles, whose peak was the French May of 1968, and the growing global repudiation of the intervention of Yankee imperialism in Vietnam.

The United States was one of the countries where the mobilisation took place most profoundly. The women's sector, led by the Democratic Party, was at the forefront. One of the central demands was the right to free abortion. A growing participation of women was being established in all areas of social, economic and political life.

This book was written in 1979 to present a Marxist approach to these struggles and the different responses they generated. Countless anti-Marxist feminist groups had emerged that preached the unity of all women above social classes and political divisions, and that, taken to the extreme, even denied the participation of left-wing political parties as such. This objective pressure crept into the ranks of the Trotskyist movement, organised in the Fourth International. Both the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States and the current led by Ernest Mandel, majority in the Unified Secretariat (USec) of the Fourth International, were adopting positions focused on "the unity of all women" of all classes, to form "unitary and autonomous movements", forgetting the inexorable contradictions caused by the conflicting social classes.

In her paper *Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation*,¹¹ Mary Alice Waters, a leader of the American SWP, presented this new conception and policy.

The current of Trotskyism headed by the Argentine leader Nahuel Moreno debated with this multi-class feminism, and thus came about this book that is now published. The debate about how to respond to women's oppression and their struggles was part of a broader discussion about the role of different groups of oppressed people, such as women or Black people, in the fight for the socialist revolution, and their relationship with the working class and the revolutionary party. Also, about the *Theory of Permanent Revolution*, a pillar of Leon Trotsky's conceptions, which Nahuel Moreno developed with the leadership of the SWP. In 1979, in his work *The Transitional Program Today*, he pointed out:

"The new theory of permanent revolution of the current leadership of the SWP is the theory of the unitary progressive movements of the oppressed, and not of the proletariat and Trotskyism. Any movement of the oppressed – if it is unitary and covers the whole of them, even of different classes – is itself increasingly permanent and leads unavoidably, without class or political differentiations, to the national and international socialist revolution. This view has been expressed particularly in relation to the Black and women's movements. All women are oppressed, as all blacks are; if a movement of all these oppressed sections is achieved, this mobilisation will not stop, and it will lead them through different stages to make a socialist revolution.

11 "Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation", SWP's *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Volume 15 Number 4, May 1978.

“To the SWP, the socialist revolution is a combination of distinct, multitudinous movements — without class differences — of similar importance: the black, women, workers, youth, and elderly movements that almost peacefully reach at the triumph of socialism. If all women march together, they represent 50% of the country; if the same happens with the youth (70% in some Latin American countries), plus the workers, the Black and the peasants, the combination of those movements will cause the bourgeoisie to be cornered in a small hotel, since it will be the adult, male, white bourgeois that will be opposed against the permanent revolution. It is the theory of Bernstein combined with the permanent revolution: the movement is everything, and the class and the parties are nothing. This theory breaks down rapidly into anti-classist humanism, claiming the praxis to be the fundamental category as opposed to the class struggle as the motor of history.

“[...] We keep staunchly defending the essence of both the theory as well as the written theses of the permanent revolution: only the proletariat headed by a Trotskyist party can lead consequently to the end of the international socialist revolution and therefore the permanent revolution.”¹²

In this book, the reader will be able to perceive the relevance of these debates, related to the need for a revolutionary alternative for working women, in controversy with the positions of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois feminism, and with the discussions about the different social subjects and politicians that are at stake in the mobilisations against imperialist capitalism.

12 Nahuel Moreno, *The Transitional Program Today*, Thesis XXXIX, Currency of the theory of the permanent revolution and the law of uneven and combined development. Available to download at www.nahuelmoreno.org.

Chapter I

Capitalism, the Family, and the Oppression of Women

This first chapter addresses the discussion of two approaches that, during the second wave, were held by sectors of feminism and also by the Trotskyist movement, then organised in the Fourth International (United Secretariat). In her paper, Mary Alice Waters (MAW) argued: First, the “basic core” of the capitalist system and the oppression of women is the traditional family as an “indispensable” institution for sustaining the system. Second, the tasks linked to the struggle against women’s oppression would inherently possess “an objectively anti-capitalist character,” meaning they would have their own automatic dynamic for advancing the transition towards the triumph of the socialist revolution.

The authors argue the opposite and debate by drawing on some of the contradictory tendencies of capitalism in this area. First, they assert that the “basic policy” of capitalism is to maintain private ownership of the means of production to guarantee the exploitation of workers. This framework organises the various forms of oppression, such as patriarchy, and the role of different institutions, including the family. The authors demonstrate with statistics how the policies of the bourgeoisie and their governments towards working-class and peasant families, contrary to what MAW claims, are highly contradictory, and what prevails is their deterioration, in a scenario far removed from treating them as “indispensable” to the system.

Second, they define women’s demands as democratic because they affect women of all classes. The capitalist system could continue to maintain its exploitative dominance even if it fully incorporated women into the workforce, or if rights such as abortion, divorce, or education were generalised. Given that the struggle of women for their liberation is essential, historically progressive, and anti-capitalist, it is crucial to address it in all its complexity and define the nature of these tasks. They will do so in the following chapter.

Capitalism and its “basic policies”

Waters’ document, approved by the USec, is based on a totally erroneous definition of the objectives of capitalism and its tendencies regarding the family and the oppression of women. There, it is stated that “the social and economic needs of capitalism” impose on it, as a “basic mechanism”, the maintenance of the family system, which is its “basic social nucleus”, and that the oppression of women is “indispensable to its maintenance”¹³. This approach is decisive for MAW’s entire conception of women’s problems.

For us, the opposite happens. The “basic mechanism” of capitalist society, “dictated by its economic needs”, is to extract as much profit as possible, exploiting and super-exploiting workers, be they men, women or children, and even entire peoples. This desire absolutely subordinates all its activities and institutions, and, to achieve these profits, it revolutionises all the social relations it encounters in its path.

In its early days, capitalist production swept through, demolishing archaic production systems, dismantling the old social order, establishing republics instead of kings and monarchies, destroying feudal domains, and confronting the Catholic Church to break its power. At the same time, it was forming and consolidating some institutions which were essential to impose and maintain capitalist rule, such as the national state and its apparatus, and the army. Through a colossal development of the productive forces, it inaugurated the era of mass industrial production, destroyed the regime of guilds and independent producers, and replaced them with centralisation, the development of science and technology and production for the world market. At the same time, the capitalist regime – being based on the broadest social production and individual appropriation of the means of production – set in motion the growing anarchy of production and exchange, laying the foundations for periodic crises, and reinforced some of the old production systems.

The capitalist regime has been, since its birth, deeply contradictory. Revolutionary, to the extent that it destroys the old production systems and opens the doors for the emancipation of all humanity with mass industrial production; reactionary, to the extent that it places these colossal advances at the service of an exploitative minority and against the vast majority of workers, to the point of going against the development of the productive forces that it imposed. Its contradictions are what prevent it from taking its progressive, revolutionary tendencies to the ultimate consequences. This is particularly true in the economic arena. For example, it can’t advance one hundred per cent its tendency towards the centralisation of production or the control and ordering of the market, since to do so it would have to suppress all individual entrepreneurs. Hence, at the same time that it destroys the old social and production relations, it coexists with some of them and even strengthens them, always trying to extract the maximum possible profit. For example, it maintains private ownership of land when the most useful thing would be to nationalise it and thus save the income that parasitic and unproductive landowners extract. However, the bourgeoisie can’t take this measure because, on the one hand, it is bound by a thousand ties with these landowners and, on the other hand, someone destroying land ownership could encourage workers to do the same with the ownership of factories. A nascent bourgeois sector used slavery to lay the foundations of capitalism in the southern United States. There are also great contradictions in the field of superstructures, such as the maintenance of monarchies or the survival of the Catholic Church, and others.

From the point of view of its economic production, then, the capitalist system does not make it a question of principle the destruction of old systems, relations, customs, or in their reinforcement and use when, for some reason, it is forced to maintain them, or it is convenient for it to do so. These contradictions give rise to differences and even clashes between the different bourgeois sectors and serve, at times, as a release valve for the survival of the entire system.

Let’s see how this characteristic of capitalism is reflected in the issues of the family and the oppression of women. Neither one nor the other was born with capitalism, but rather capitalism inherited them from previous regimes.

13 Waters. Mary Alice, “Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women’s Liberation”, SWP’s *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Volume 15 Number 4, May 1978. Also in www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1963-1985/usfi/11thWC/women.htm. All quotes made about this document are taken from this publication.

The emergence of capitalism meant, by definition, the death knell of the family system of medieval artisans and peasants and the incorporation of women into production. These are undeniable historical and economic facts, even when capitalism itself contradictorily combines them with their opposites: somehow maintaining the family system and removing women from production. And they are undeniable, even when they become much more complex, if we analyse the legal norms and the customs and ideologies that accompany them. But we want to refer fundamentally to the objective process of production, which is ultimately the determining factor. In this area, facts are categorical: capitalism, by imposing mass industrial production, destroys the old family system and incorporates women into production, thus laying the foundations for their economic independence and, therefore, for the elimination of their oppression.

As Lenin said, “At the factory, the woman is the equal of the man; this is the equality of the proletariat.”¹⁴

Two contradictory trends

The oppression of women and the existence of the family are historical facts that have been transforming over time; they have fulfilled different functions, and their characteristics have varied among the different social classes. The full development of the family in its patriarchal form and as a productive unit, whose traces we know today, took place during feudalism. Peasant production was based on the work of the plot by all members of the family. In the city, artisans and merchants also had solid and organised families. Something similar occurred among feudal lords, but incorporating the recognised hypocrisy of wives and mistresses.

To prosper, the new capitalist economic system that was taking shape within the old society had to have men free from individual ties to production. To impose the 18 and 20-hour days of nascent capitalism, in the worst conditions and for starvation wages, these men needed to have no other way of subsisting.

The peasant had to be removed from his land, the servitude ties that united him to the feudal lord and prevented him from disposing of his person had to be destroyed, the artisan had to be removed from the corporation, freed from the codes and norms of his guild. This implied the destruction of the family unit, by taking away its forms of subsistence, and the incorporation of men, women and children into production. Big industry “enters, destroying all family ties for the proletariat.”¹⁵

Theoretically, from the point of view of its economy, there is no obstacle for capitalism to incorporate all women into production and socialise all domestic work. Let’s look at a hypothetical example. If in a given factory a boss exploited 50 workers and extracted us\$1,000 as monthly surplus value, it would be in his best interest to hire 50 more female workers and, assuming that he paid them the same as the men and that everything remained the same, he would extract another 1,000 dollars from them, more per month. He would no longer have us\$1,000 but us\$2,000 of surplus value. With this surplus, he could easily create nurseries, canteens, and collective laundries so that all the women could work. And, if it produces massively, it could be more economical than the cost they would have at home, and he could even find a new branch of profit by also exploiting the workers who worked in the new service industry.

Suppose that of those us\$2000, he spent 500 for the services. He would have \$1,500 left that he did not have before, and it is possible that with the exploitation of the new workers, he would add \$200 more, thus obtaining \$1,700. To all this, we must add that women are paid a lower salary than men, which also adds to the profit.

That this does not happen in a generalised way, that capitalism does not take to its ultimate consequences its tendency to incorporate women into production, filling the world with canteens and collective nurseries, is also due to economic reasons: because capitalism needs to maintain an industrial reserve army, of which women are an important part; by the limitations that its contradictions impose on the

14 Lenin, VI: “The development of Capitalism in Russia”, Chapter VII, The Development of Large-Scale Machine Industry, *Collected Works*, Vol 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, footnote on page 547.

15 “The employment of the wife dissolves the family utterly and of necessity, and this dissolution, in our present society, which is based upon the family, brings the most demoralising consequences for parents as well as children.” (Engels, Frederick, “Conditions of the working class in England”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 437, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2010.)

development of productive forces; because the technological development that capitalism imposes reduces the human power necessary to produce what it wants; and because it would mean a very strong pressure to raise wages. There are periods of unemployment, and during them the capitalists take the opportunity to fire the women first; to conceal the problem, they resort to sending them back to their homes, and even, by taking advantage of them in domestic tasks, they can cut social expenses.

At first, in the early and mid-19th century, the work of women and children was particularly intense, as capitalists took advantage of the fact that they could pay them lower wages. Frederick Engels describes: “Of 419,590 factory operatives of the British Empire in 1839, 192,887, or nearly half, were under eighteen years of age, and 242,296 of the female sex, of whom 112,192 were less than eighteen years old. There remain, therefore, 80,695 male operatives under eighteen years, and 96,599 adult male operatives, or not one full quarter of the whole number.”¹⁶ Women were an especially high percentage in the textile industry.

We see, then, that capitalism “not only allows women’s work on a vast scale, but even demands it”.¹⁷ Perhaps, if it had exploited only adult men, it would not have achieved in such a short time the tremendous accumulation produced in that period. The first era of capitalism was so catastrophic for the family that Trotsky, referring to the destruction of families that the First World War produced, said that “war shattered all that had stood only by the inertia of historic tradition.”¹⁸

Capitalism, then, opens the doors of factory production to women, as it does with everything capable of delivering surplus value. At the same time, it takes advantage of their oppression to give them lower wages than men, to use them in the worst positions, to fire them more easily than men, and to “put the burden” of domestic work on them.

It destroys the family for the majority, but sometimes it has to strengthen it; it introduces women to the production, but sometimes it has to remove them. It also allows the relative subsistence of a minority family and maintains its ideological defence. For example, during its first period, it reinforced the family for the bourgeoisie, as it offered certain advantages, the first of which was guaranteeing the transmission of property. Protestantism, a typically bourgeois religion, imposed severe moral norms to protect the family and called on it to save and make a fortune. Although it was a different and progressive morality compared to that of the Middle Ages, since it enshrined “free will” or the freedom to marry, it kept that freedom within the limits of economic convenience, and, of course, it was based on a series of oppressive prejudices against women. As part of this same reality, there were prostitution, polygamy for men, and adultery, hidden and brutally punished for women.

The families of the middle class (of merchants, independent employees who progressed in the cities, the middle and rich peasants, the usurer, the professional), having a certain economic stability, were not forced to disintegrate; all their members didn’t need to work in a factory. Therefore, family ties were maintained and even strengthened to the extent that these social sectors progressed economically.

As capitalist production was rationalised in the advanced countries and, as a consequence of heroic struggles, the proletariat won the reduction of the working day, the regulation of the work of women and children, and social laws. The process of “regularisation” took place, of normalisation of the family life of sectors of workers. With the emergence of imperialism, the exploitation of the colonial peoples allowed the bourgeoisie of the advanced countries to form a more or less stable and privileged petty-bourgeoisie and a layer of privileged workers who, as they raised their standard of living, stabilised their families.

16 Ibid, p.436.

17 “In contrast with the manufacturing period, the division of labour is thenceforth based, wherever possible, on the employment of women, of children of all ages, and of unskilled labourers, in one word, on cheap labour, as it is characteristically called in England.” (Marx, Karl: “Capital, Volume I”, Chapter XIII, “Machinery and Modern Industry”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Vol. 35*, p. 464, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2010.)

18 “The deeply destructive influence of the war on the family is well known. To begin with, war dissolves the family automatically, separating people for a long time or bringing people together by chance. This influence of the war was continued and strengthened by the revolution. The years of the war shattered all that had stood only by the inertia of historic tradition. They shattered the power of czarism, class privileges, the old traditional family. The revolution began by building up the new state and has achieved thereby its simplest and most urgent aim.” (Trotsky, Leon: “From the Old Family to the New”, *Pravda*, 13 July, 1923, https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/women/life/23_07_13.htm.)

But this came at the cost of brutal exploitation in backward countries. Capitalism entered by breaking the old production systems and replacing them with a timid capitalist exploitation that did not allow the employment and well-being of all those who were displaced from the backward traditional production systems. Therefore, it produced painful misery, chronic and structural unemployment, overexploitation, illiteracy, and alarming levels of prostitution. This process continues today to a greater or lesser extent, and results in the violent destruction of the peasant and working-class family in backward countries.

In advanced countries, the First World War inflicted incredible suffering on workers and dealt a new blow to their families. Then came the triumph of the Russian Revolution, the defeat of the German revolution and, practically until the end of the Second World War, the societies of the advanced countries experienced a prolonged period of crisis and war confrontations, which left its mark on the increasing destruction of families and the position of women in society. Once the Second World War ended, during which women massively joined production while men went to the front to fight, the men returned to their primitive positions in industries and displaced the women.

The beginning of the prolonged post-war economic boom provided increasing income stability, an increase in the standard of living of important sectors of workers and the middle class, which was accompanied by a relative stabilisation of family life. Nonetheless, the needs of production also meant that at this stage, millions of women were reintroduced into factory work, although with the recession of the 1970s, the bourgeoisie once again tended to cut female employment. In any case, throughout the period, women have held the lowest ranking and specialised positions.

So, in the imperialist capitalist system, we see that the family and the position of women in production are shaken to the beat of the needs and possibilities of the capitalists, always taking advantage of the fact that they are oppressed. This process is always accompanied, in a complex way, with an entire legal superstructure that enshrines the couple, the inequality of women, and the illegitimacy of children outside of marriage, although with profound differences from country to country. We all know the campaigns that are launched through radio, television, the press, and tv soaps that propagate the ideal of a family formed by the happy couple of spouses who never deceive each other – or who, if they ever do, they return repentant – who work hard to support and educate their children, who always progress until they become kind-hearted grandparents surrounded by grandchildren. We have also seen, depending on the different economic situations, calls for women to join production or to return home.

It is evident that in this area of the family and the location of women, there are profound differences of opinion between the different sectors of the bourgeoisie, which are nothing more than a reflection of the contradictions they have among themselves. Bourgeois sectors are clinging to the conception that a woman's role is in the home, others who tend to defend their independent work, and still others who voice the positions of the Church. Inevitably all this propaganda, this legislation and the different bourgeois policies combine in a complex way with the economic situation and production, but the result is that only a privileged few can maintain, if they want, a stable family life, at the expense of most brutal exploitation and the destruction of the family of the people of backward countries and of the millions of workers who are exploited throughout the world.

The destruction of the family and the incorporation of women into production is a painful process

We assert, categorically, that with the emergence of capitalism a process begins, caused by the new relations of production, of crisis and irreversible destruction of the family, that this process is exacerbated by with the emergence of imperialism and that, at present, this destruction of the family is a tragic fact since it has not been replaced by anything superior or even equal. Its destruction is, therefore, a source of suffering for all humanity, particularly for workers. The large numbers of lonely men and women, of divorces, the subsistence of prostitution, and most of the terrible individual problems of the “modern world”, are closely related to this situation.

Waters argues the opposite: for her, there is a linear and systematic campaign in favour of the family and the subjection of women, and the family not only subsists but is the source of innumerable misfortunes. From this utter blindness follow all sorts of errors in characterisation and policy.

However, this crisis of the family is so evident throughout the world that its description seeps into Waters' work, although no conclusion is drawn from it. She herself says that "this state of affairs is frequently referred to as 'the crisis of the family', which is reflected in the soaring divorce rates, increased numbers of runaway children and rising domestic violence." She even points out the economic aspect: "The basic economic bond that previously held together the family (...) begins to dissolve." "The functions of the family unit in advanced capitalist society have continually contracted."

In a single paragraph, she manages to summarise very well all the tragic contradictions faced by the family spoils that remain: "In a class society, the family is the only place most people can turn to satisfy some basic human needs, such as love and companionship. However poorly the family may meet these needs for many, there is no real alternative as long as private property exists. The disintegration of the family under capitalism brings with it much misery and suffering precisely because no superior framework for human relations can yet emerge."

This paragraph is not only totally true, but it also gives rise to an entire policy, an entire attitude, which cannot be other than defending the worker and peasant family, fighting to provide them with better living conditions in the face of the destruction imposed on them by capitalism and imperialism, without giving them anything in return. But to Waters, it's just a passing mention, and she moves ahead with her blindness.

Immediately afterwards, she defines the family system by dissolving this complex and contradictory reality into a series of rules that may be, for the most part, correct in a general sense, but that have nothing to do with everyday life. The "family system" is defined because it "transmits" the possession of goods from one generation to another, because it is "the basic social mechanism for (...) reproducing human labour", because it involves "the domestic subjugation and economic dependence of women", "reproduces within itself the hierarchical, authoritarian relationships", "distorts all human relationships by imposing on them the framework of economic compulsion, personal dependence, and sexual repression." This unrealistic schema can be applied to all families or none. For example, the worker, the wage earners, who are the vast majority of humanity, do not have assets to transmit, even if they have a family; the bourgeois transmit property to their children even if they destroy their family life.

Waters's generalities about the family, which are already preposterous when confronted with the crisis of the family in advanced countries, reach the point of absurdity with respect to the situation in backward countries. Waters makes a fantasy description of the emigration of peasant women to the cities, where, with open doors, factories and schools would wait for them, which has nothing to do with the terrifying problems brought about in backward countries by the crisis in the countryside and the abrupt and uncontrolled growth of urban centres.

Women who go from the countryside to the city do not do so to liberate themselves, to consciously break with their economic dependence by joining production, nor to escape the oppression of their families or their husbands, but rather to escape from appalling misery. Once in the city, many of them must work as maids, or become street vendors or prostitutes. Those who arrive alone have a worse time, without the minimum support of a husband or partner (even if he is sexist) or from some members of their family. We are sure that no peasant woman emigrated to the city who thinks, as Waters says, that this breaks her "their time-honoured subordination" or that she thus escapes the "mental prison" of the rural family. We know very well that many women who are working in the cities do not see them as a lifeline against their oppression, but rather as a greater source of suffering, and they yearn — although Waters does not even imagine it — for the peasant family community, despite its misery.

Regarding the incorporation of women in production, she also makes a partial and useless schema, contrasting work outside the home versus family, and making the former an absolute of goodness and the latter an absolute of evil. We all know countless women who go out to work outside the home thinking that it is a disaster to have to do so since in addition to working eight hours in a factory or office, or in a family home, they must return to their home and do all the domestic work, without having any way to take

care of the children during the day. We know that there are many women who will rejoice the day when their husbands have a higher salary, and they do not have to go to work, at least under those conditions. This is not our invention. Lenin pointed out that: “the drawing of women and juveniles into production is, at bottom, progressive”, but “it is indisputable that the capitalist factory places these categories of the working population in particularly hard conditions.”¹⁹

The Nature of Women's Liberation Tasks

To make a serious political document about work among women, it is essential to define the nature of the tasks of women's liberation. Comrade Waters' document contains the strange surprise of not clearly defining anywhere what type of tasks are involved. But, from what she says and what she does not say, Waters considers the fundamentals of women's tasks for their liberation as transitional, that is, as anti-capitalist socialist. We have already seen how she considers oppression as an “essential feature”, “indispensable” for capitalism. She also says that women's demands “strike at the pillars of class society”. If a demand alone does that, then it is transitional to socialism.

We argue something completely different: the tasks of women's liberation as such are bourgeois democratic, historically posed with the beginning of capitalism and belong to women of all classes.

This was how Lenin placed this problem: referring to religion, the oppression of nationalities and “the denial of rights to women”, he said that: “these are all problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution”.²⁰

Capitalism arises massively, introducing women into production, but taking advantage of their inherited oppression, which causes a contradictory situation since, on the one hand, women are exploited equally or even more than men, but, on the other hand, they do not have the same rights. This rupture of the traditional role of women that occurred from below – in the economic structure – clashed with the old laws and customs that enshrined this inequality. But laws and customs do not adapt on their own or automatically to economic and social changes, and they take even longer when the changes involve issues as conflictive and complex as the family and the situation of women.

With its ups and downs, the process of adjustment between the new reality of production and what is consecrated by the norms took place both through reforms directly imposed by the ruling class and through the demands of great women's struggles. This is how, throughout the 20th century, increasing respect for women's democratic rights made its way. Waters lists a few of these conquered rights: higher education, working in business and the liberal professions, receiving and disposing of wages, property, the right to divorce, to participate in political organisations, and, later, to vote.

Women's struggles in the 1970s have continuity with previous ones in terms of the kind of problems they face. Let's see what Waters has to say: against reactionary laws, for abortion and contraceptives; against oppressive marriage legislations, for sufficient childcare facilities; against the legal bases of discrimination; against sexism in all its spheres. And she insists: the right to participate with complete equality in all forms of social, economic and cultural activity; equal education; equal access to jobs; equal salary for equal work; that society take charge of domestic tasks, caring for children, the elderly, and the sick.

19 “Large-scale machine industry, which concentrates masses of workers who often come from various parts of the country, absolutely refuses to tolerate survivals of patriarchalism and personal dependence, and is marked by a truly ‘contemptuous attitude to the past’. It is this break with obsolete tradition that is one of the substantial conditions which have created the possibility and evoked the necessity of regulating production and of public control over it. In particular, speaking of the transformation brought about by the factory in the conditions of life of the population, it must be stated that the drawing of women and juveniles into production is, at bottom, progressive. It is indisputable that the capitalist factory places these categories of the working population in particularly hard conditions.” (Lenin, VI: “The development of Capitalism in Russia”, Chapter VII, The Development of Large-Scale Machine Industry, *Collected Works*, Vol 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 546-547.)

20 “Take religion, or the denial of rights to women, or the oppression and inequality of the non-Russian nationalities. These are all problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The vulgar petty-bourgeois democrats talked about them for eight months. In not a single one of the most advanced countries in the world have these questions been completely settled on bourgeois-democratic lines. In our country they have been settled completely by the legislation of the October Revolution.” (Lenin, VI: “Fourth anniversary of the October Revolution”, *Pravda*, October 18, 1921, *Collected Works*, Vol 33, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 53.)

The entire enumeration of demands that Waters makes regarding advanced countries, about women's past and present struggles, is of an individual democratic nature. Regarding backward countries, she is no less categorical in her description of the problems: the women of those countries will fight for "elementary democratic rights".

From a theoretical point of view, there is no reason for capitalism to impede the granting of full legal equality to women, to install collective child care for all working women or those who wish to do so, and to accept the right to abortion and divorce. Many of these demands, as Waters herself acknowledges, have been achieved in whole or in part without capitalism having died.

Making an analogy, by the type of problems, we could see that the socialisation of medicine, providing it free and generalised by the State, did not mean the death of the British Empire, but quite the opposite. In Sweden, equality between the sexes and the broadest sexual freedom have been practically achieved—as far as nature allows—and this has not weakened Swedish imperialism.

The fact that we specify this essentially democratic nature of women's demands does not mean at all that we despise their struggles. The process of women's liberation is deeply revolutionary since it affects all customs and daily life, and perhaps it will be even more revolutionary after the triumph of the socialist revolution, in the transition to socialism. Waters cannot put the right name to the problems she so carefully enumerates because it would collapse her entire document. We could simply say that women's problems fit what Marxism and Trotskyism generally think about democratic problems of this type.

The Nature of Women's Struggles

Although Waters does not give in her document a clear definition of the character of the tasks of women's liberation, her conception is clearly evident when she repeatedly states that all women's struggles have an "objectively anti-capitalist character". This is profoundly incorrect.

As we have already seen, capitalist production is what set in motion the process of women's liberation, by incorporating them by the millions into industry, making them equal to men "at the factory", and thus laying the foundations for their economic independence. This is the basis of support for all the struggles carried out by women for their rights throughout the 20th century and is a progressive and revolutionary phenomenon, since it goes against the millennial oppression suffered as sex by half of humanity.

But capitalism is incapable of carrying its revolutionary trends to the end; it is incapable of incorporating all women into production, so the definitive solution to the women's problem will only come with the triumph of the socialist revolution. Apparently, on this point, we would have great agreement with Waters' document. However, this is not the case. We concur with Waters' words when she states that women's struggles are "an integral part of the socialist revolution", that they are a "form of struggle against capitalism", and that they are "objectively anti-capitalist" in the sense that the definitive and generalised solution to their demands can only come from the destruction of capitalism and the triumph of socialism. But behind these generalities, there are two opposing conceptions: for us, it is like this because capitalism lays the objective foundations for the independence of women, but cannot carry it to the end, and, therefore, that independence turns against it. For Waters, on the contrary, women's struggle goes against capitalism because the oppression of women is an essential, basic, and indispensable feature of capitalism.

From this mistake of general definition arises another, which is also very serious, regarding each specific struggle that women carry out. According to Waters, all feminine struggles, concrete, current, conjunctural, have an "objective revolutionary dynamic", that is, they would have an internal and automatic mechanism that leads them against capitalism and towards socialism.

This is wrong. Just as we define the general historical process of women's liberation as anti-capitalist, we categorically deny that this definition extends naturally to any feminist struggle that takes place. One thing is the profoundly revolutionary, transitional, anti-capitalist character of a centuries-long process, such as the struggle of a class, a nation, a sex, a race, and quite another thing is the political and organisational expressions, the struggles and antagonisms that occur every day in this historical process.

It is a crime to dissolve the anti-capitalist revolutionary character of these struggles on a historical scale in each concrete mobilisation because, as such, they are much more complex, the product of the

combination of many factors, of many conflicting classes, of many parties, and at each moment they appear in each country with certain characteristics.

For us, no democratic struggle, and this includes those of women, goes objectively against capitalism (except those of national liberation and agrarian reform), against its essence, which is the exploitation of wage labour through private property. In theory, we insist, the bourgeoisie can provide daycare centres and canteens for all women, or abortion and divorce, without eliminating itself. But, in the current historical epoch, imperialism cannot solve any problem definitively and, therefore, democratic struggles such as those of women can, at a certain moment and under certain conditions, acquire an anti-capitalist dynamic. However, this will not be “objective”, inherent to each feminist struggle, as Waters claims, but will depend on its context, its program, and, especially, its leadership.

Let’s bring down to earth what Waters says: according to her, all women who fight, by that fact alone, become consistent anti-capitalist fighters.

We believe we cannot make such an irresponsible statement, even about the working class, which we very well know is led by reformists and social democrats, counter-revolutionaries willing to take every struggle, not towards a consistent anti-capitalism but towards a dead end. If anyone has doubts about women, let’s look at one example among thousands of the reality of the feminist struggle. In the United States, NOW (National Organisation of Women) is the largest feminist group in the country and is led by the Democratic Party. During the electoral campaign that would bring Jimmy Carter to the presidency in 1976, NOW agreed with him, according to which NOW would suspend the agitation in favour of abortion while Carter would promote the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), an amendment to the Constitution to establish equality in the application of the laws for both sexes. Carter won the presidency, supported by many women, and, of course, he didn’t even remember the ERA. Let Waters explain where the “objective revolutionary dynamic” of the ERA struggles is.

Chapter II

Women's Struggles: A History Marked by Political and Class Divisions

In the second chapter, the debate centres on the characteristics of the two waves: the first, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the second, from 1968 to the mid-1970s. Mary Alice Waters (MAW) develops three points. First, she establishes a forced “continuity” between the two, ignoring or distorting the main distinctive features of each. Second, she asserts that there is a unified and autonomous “movement” spanning the entire planet (imperialist, colonial or semi-colonial countries, and bureaucratic workers’ states) that was in constant growth and expansion during the second wave. Third, in colonial or semi-colonial countries, women’s struggles would eventually become the most important component of revolutionary struggles.

The authors recall that in the first wave, which took place primarily in developed countries, bourgeois women fought on their own behalf, demanding, for example, the vote for women property owners, while working-class women fought for theirs, demanding universal suffrage and better working conditions. In the second wave, something new and different happened. According to the SWP itself, it was mainly comprised of housewives, students, and middle-class workers, with virtually no participation from African Americans, Latinas, or working-class women. Furthermore, it was led by the Democratic Party, meaning it was not “autonomous”, and it shows that the wave that began in 1968 began to decline in the early 1970s.

Regarding the third point, there is no evidence to suggest that what MAW claims has ever happened or will happen. They also point out that MAW contradicts herself in her paper, since the struggles of women against their oppression in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam and Palestine were closely linked to anti-imperialist struggles.

Reality belies Waters

The existence of women's oppression has provoked numerous reactions and expressions of rebellion in all areas. In the Western world, the feminist struggle has two fundamental chapters: the struggles of the late 19th century and early 20th century, and those of 1968 and the early 1970s. In these two great waves, bourgeois, petty-bourgeois and working-class women have participated, accompanying the struggles of their classes and their parties.

Waters refers to these two great chapters of the feminist struggle of the historical or immediate past, but not in a way that befits the Marxist duty, which requires a rigorous analysis of reality and a class definition of the processes. So careful is Marxism about this that it has earned the respect of many non-Marxist scientists for it. Regarding history, Waters makes a totally superficial mention, from which a false continuity between both "waves" emerges. As for the immediate past (the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s), the sin is more serious: it directly distorts and hides the reality of what has happened, to seek greater support for its position.

The abandonment of the Marxist method allows Waters to conceal or distort the categorical differences that exist between the first feminist struggles and those of the 1960s and 1970s. In the first wave, there was a constant class delimitation, even in specific struggles. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were important mobilisations of women, which gave rise to the formation of unitary movements, such as NOW in the United States.

According to Waters, there exists today a "movement" that is an "international phenomenon" encompassing advanced countries, backward countries, and workers' states, which is in a constant process of growth and extension.²¹ This "movement" was built based on the struggles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and there would be substantial continuity between the two, since Waters says that there was a "first wave" that sought to achieve complete equality with men, and within which different political currents would have existed, among them socialism. The picture that emerges from those few lines is that this "first wave" is quite similar to the "second", in which there would have been struggles that achieved important victories, and in which, among the women who carried them out, there were different opinions and currents.

The historical and current reality is the opposite of what Waters paints in her document.

In the "First Wave", There Was no Multi-class Unity of Women

Between the important women's struggles in the advanced countries of the early 20th century and those that took place in recent years, there are profound differences in terms of slogans, social composition, political orientation of the mobilisations and organisations that led them. These differences are explained if we place them as part of the profound differences that exist between one period and another.

In all the countries of the world and particularly in the advanced ones, political and social life, from the last century until the triumph of the Russian Revolution, was marked first by the development of capitalism and, later, with its global expansion, by the development and consolidation of imperialism, on the one hand, and on the other, for the development of the proletariat. The proletariat was fighting great battles, organising and strengthening itself in the political and union arena, and gave rise to the formation of the First International and large trade unions and, later, of the Second International and the mass revolutionary workers' parties, whose maximum expression was German Social Democracy until the First World War.

Any struggle of that time to which we refer took place within this framework: with the working class and its mass revolutionary workers' parties as central protagonists of the class struggle, and within

²¹ According to Waters, the women's liberation movement, which first emerged "in the advanced capitalist countries", then spread to "broader sectors", and the "continuing spread of women's liberation struggles". "This rapid growth of the feminist movement... confirms that the struggle for women's liberation must be considered a fundamental component of the new rise of the world revolution," as "a more important component of the coming revolutionary struggles in the colonial and semicolonial countries", and as "a significant component of the process of challenging and overturning the privileged bureaucratic regimes and establishing socialist democracy."

a workers' rise that began at the end of the 19th century and which had its climax towards the end of the First World War and with the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The women's struggles of that time had a general characteristic: on the one hand, bourgeois women fought demanding, for example, the vote for women with property, and on the other hand, following their workers' parties and their unions, accompanying or as a direct part of the workers' struggle, working women, demanding better working conditions or universal suffrage. Women always participated in the class struggle on one side or the other, more or less actively, in a more or less differentiated way.

During the French Revolution (1789), women actively participated in the struggle against feudal power, monarchical absolutism and for the republic; they also raised their demands as gender. Numerous women's clubs emerged, societies were organised, and feminist demands were presented. In 1792, the Society of Friends of Liberty and Equality put itself at the head of a movement caused by the terrible famines that were ravaging the country, and the city of Lyon was temporarily in its hands when it established the distribution of food and the regulation of prices.

With the rapid capitalist development of the 19th century, thousands upon thousands of women and children entered the industries, to the point that in 1835, as we already noted, the number of women and children working in them was greater than that of men. As a reflection of this situation, in the first half of the 19th century, women's groups began to emerge that advocated equal rights with men. Europe was coming from a profound bourgeois-democratic revolution, and the emergence of the modern proletariat, which had not yet fought major battles, was beginning. For this reason, most of the groups that emerged, both in England and France, demanded some rights for women, but fundamentally from a narrow bourgeois point of view.

Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first English feminists, raised demands so that bourgeois women could participate in all political and social rights in the management of property, denying this possibility to proletarian women.

In France, around the days of 1830, when the monarchy of Charles X was defeated, and Louis Philippe came to power, different currents developed. On the one hand, Christian women, who opposed any kind of political and social liberation of women and simply demanded a reform in the education of the female sex, with a view to providing women, as wives and mothers, with a better position within their family.

On the other hand, a group of feminists, who gathered around Madame de Mauchamps and demanded that Louis Philippe, king of the French, also declare himself "king of the French women", begged him to grant women the economic resources and the political privileges enjoyed by the big landowners.

But as the working class develops and begins to participate in the class struggle, waters begin to divide between the two classes that daily appear with greater clarity and forcefulness as irreconcilable enemies. One of the first symptoms was the revolution of 1848 in France, where for the first time the working class acted as a distinct social and political force. Consequently, the struggle of working women, differentiated from those of the bourgeoisie, also begins to emerge.

Says Sheila Rowbotham: "In 1848, at the Lyonnais Club, a 'simple working woman from a poor family, wife of a republican', stepped forward to the podium and demanded that women not be slaves to men. She wanted them to be admitted to the meetings, to discuss their own rights and run their own affairs. They were to be paid decent wages in exchange for their work, so that they did not have to depend on men. Young girls who had been seduced and then abandoned were to be allowed to care for their children without dishonour and shame was to fall on the men."²²

In France, in 1840, Flora Tristan (writer, feminist, socialist, granddaughter of the painter Paul Gauguin) was one of the first to raise the struggle of women united with the struggle of the working class. From this period onwards, women's circles emerged, working women organised themselves in the "Union of Workers", in the "Laundresses' Circle", etc., and important demands were achieved for the women workers. The washerwomen were given a 12-hour day instead of 14; women workers were allowed the right to present their own interests within public authorities. Feminist demands were linked to the workers'

²² Rowbotham, Sheila: *Women, Resistance & Revolution: A History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World*, Random House, 1973.

struggle. Women demanded cooperatives that would sell their products by eliminating intermediaries, the construction of public laundries and tailor shops, schools in companies, cheap public restaurants, meeting and recreation rooms, etc.²³

The development of the working class, its trade union organisations, and socialist parties brings with it the organisation of working women from the unions themselves, as a means of defending themselves from the terrible exploitation to which they were subjected. In 1865, the Third Congress of the League of German Workers' Societies, held in Stuttgart, raised the fight for the equality of men and women and approved the struggle for certain demands, such as the creation of higher institutes for women workers, the founding of women workers' associations and the right to vote for women.

The International Workers' Association, founded in 1864 and led by Marx and Engels, plays a decisive role in promoting the demands of working women, which is reflected in the affiliation of important groups of women workers to it, such as the League of Pantmakers of England. Since the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, the objective of full equality for women under socialism has been raised, indicating a clear path for the Marxist movement in the fight against female oppression. Socialism consistently continues this struggle and its most prominent leaders, such as Marx, Engels and, later, August Bebel, dedicate part of their pages and their activities to the question of women.

In 1907, the Second International, taking up the tradition of the First International, approved for all its parties the campaign for universal suffrage without distinction of sex, thus rejecting any concession to the opportunism of the liberal parties that feared the vote for women, or the feminist movements that were content with the vote "for the ladies."

England is a typical example of the division of the women's movement. As the rise grew stronger and the world war forced decisive decisions to be made, the movement appeared more divided. On the one hand, middle-class women demanded improvements in education, legal changes, and fights for birth control. The liberal feminist movement was divided into a strong conservative tendency that supported the ruling class and the empire, and another that attempted to link the female struggle with that of the working class.

The Fabian Society, which was a pressure group within the Labour Party, called for restricted voting, only for women from the propertied classes. In contrast, the East London Federation of Suffragettes, led by Sylvia Pankhurst, supported the Russian Revolution, campaigned for equal pay, organising demonstrations and street rallies. On the other hand, the WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union), organised by her mother, Emmeline Pankhurst, had parliament and the purchase of votes through money as her method.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the definitive event that sealed the division of waters between those who supported it and those who stood against it. It couldn't be any other way among women. In this great revolution, there was no autonomous and unitary movement of all women of all classes. On the contrary, female mobilisation took place through the general mobilisation of workers and peasants for power, led by the Bolshevik Party, against the pro-tsarist women and against the women who in October supported Kerensky and his government.

The First World War and the Russian Revolution shocked Europe and "forced feminists to define themselves at a time when, by granting women the right to vote, the only common cause that united them disappeared. After 1917, no political movement can ever be the same, neither those formed by women nor groups of any other type."²⁴ A new and decisive chapter in the history of humanity had begun, that of proletarian revolutions.

The Third Communist International was formed after the revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky, and at its Third Congress it approved the "Theses on Ways and Means of Work Among the Women of the Communist Party", calling, not to build a unitary movement of women of all classes but to the active support of all working women for the workers' revolution and the Third International, preventing them from any collaboration with the bourgeois parties or the Second International. The Women's Secretariat

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

of the International is formed and four international conferences of communist women are held, whose orientation is “to develop the communist women’s movement... to cause and guide under the leadership and with the energetic support of the communists national and international actions aimed at intensifying and expanding, through the work of women, the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.”

A New Phenomenon Emerged in the 1960s

The feminist mobilisations that took place in some advanced countries after 1968 were mainly attended by housewives, students, and petty-bourgeois working women. It is particularly palpable in the United States, where the SWP itself acknowledges that it gained almost no adherents among Black, Chicano, and working-class women, and where practically the bulk of the struggle was led by NOW, and this by the Democratic Party. On the other hand, a strong current emerged known as radical feminists, who considered the oppression of women as the basis of class society, and “self-awareness” groups, coming mainly from the student movement.

In Europe, although the essential base was also petty bourgeois, as there was a greater working class rise than in the United States, especially in Spain, Italy and France, there was a greater radicalisation of the petty bourgeoisie and, in turn, a greater development of left and ultra-left positions within feminist groups.

The essentially petty-bourgeois base of these movements and the lack of a powerful wave of struggles of the workers’ movement and a strong mass revolutionary party made it possible to create the petty-bourgeois fiction of independence, of autonomy above the class struggle. Waters is a victim of this fiction, and her entire strategy of building an autonomous and unitary women’s movement is nothing more than her capitulation to the petty bourgeois pressures of the radical feminists of the United States and the very powerful reformist or directly imperialist leaderships.

To analyse what characteristics these struggles had, we have to begin by finding the enormous differences that exist between the situation that opened in May 1968 and that of the late 19th or early 20th centuries. The fundamental characteristic of the time was the existence of a strong workers’ upsurge and large mass revolutionary workers’ parties. The situation following the Second World War had opposite characteristics: the working class of the advanced countries experienced a prolonged process of stability, of passivity in their struggles, which only maintained or consolidated the control over the workers by the great reformist workers’ parties, Stalinism and social democracy. The revolutionary upsurges were experienced in the semi-colonial world, and the revolutions that triumphed were led not by revolutionary workers’ parties but by petty-bourgeois or Stalinist workers’ parties, and based essentially on peasant or popular struggles.

The global rise that began in 1968 has, as its characteristic, for the moment and although it covers the entire world, the nonexistence of strong mass revolutionary workers’ parties and the fact that the industrial working class has not been the main and sustained protagonist of the continuity of the rise. In this context, in the advanced countries of Europe and the United States, there were great mobilisations of youth, Blacks, and oppressed nationalities, and what Waters calls the “second wave” of feminist struggles. Until 1975, when the Vietcong triumphed, mobilisation against the war was very important.

Waters vs. Waters

In April 1978, the decline in women’s mobilisations in Europe and the United States, which had been on a downward curve for approximately two years, was already undeniable. Precisely in that month, the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International, headed by Ernest Mandel, approved the document we are criticising, “Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women’s Liberation.”

In the first five pages of the document, there are at least eight sentences – and that is because we have not counted them all – where it asserts, in one way or another, the existence at a global level of a deep, growing and unprecedented “movement” of women. It begins with an exaggeration: “Throughout the world, millions of women (...)” begin to fight. Then she qualifies it and limits it only to “throughout the

advanced capitalist countries". She immediately exaggerates again by saying that this "movement" is part of the rise of "all exploited and oppressed sectors of the world population" and that this "swift growth" of the "movement" must be considered a "fundamental component" of the new rise and that this fight "is unprecedented" in "the implications" it has "against imperialism."²⁵

At the very least, our readers will agree that there is an exaggeration of objective reality on the part of Waters and all of Mandelism. But so far, it could be seen as an exaggeration resulting from enthusiasm. However, as we delve deeper into the reading, we find that these phrases are repeated throughout the material, leading us to the conclusion that it is a deep conviction of Waters.²⁶

For her, "the fading of the postwar boom and the deepening economic, social, and political problems of imperialism on a world scale, highlighted by the 1974-75 international recession, led to an intensification of the attacks on women's rights on all levels. This did not lead to a decline in women's struggles or relegate them to the sidelines as more powerful social forces came to the fore. Far from diminishing as the struggles of the organised working class sharpened in recent years, feminist consciousness and struggles by women continue to spread and to become more deeply intertwined with the developing social consciousness and political combativity of working-class women and men. (...) Their struggles have been a powerful motor force of social protest and political radicalisation."²⁷

We want to ask Waters a series of questions. In the United States, after the mobilisation of August 1970, and especially from 1975 onwards, have there been many more extensive mobilisations of women?

During the last three or four years (1976-1980), have "struggles by women continue to spread" to all the states of the United States? In all of these states, have some demonstrations surpassed those of 1970? If this is so, are the "new struggles" raising "more far-reaching demands" than abortion or recognition of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment)? Is the front-page news of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and other American newspapers the women's "movement"? Do women play the "crucial role" of the class struggle in the United States?

In Italy, after the great mobilisations for divorce in 1974 and abortion in 1977, were there demonstrations that doubled or tripled the number of those already mentioned? Italian women, after winning the right to divorce and abortion, have they moved on to "more far-reaching" measures? Are the streets of Paris more crowded today than in May 1968 and with subsequent mobilisations of women demanding "more far-reaching" demands? And if not in these countries, in which ones are there currently growing and unprecedented mobilisations of hundreds of thousands of women? In Africa or Latin America, perhaps?

In the United States, from the mobilisation against the Vietnam War and influenced by Black mobilisations, NOW (National Organisation of Women), the largest feminist organisation in the country, led by Betty Friedan, emerged in 1966, and small self-awareness groups began to emerge, mainly based

25 The second sentence of the document says: "Throughout the world, millions of women, especially young women- students, working women, housewives - are beginning to challenge some of the most fundamental features of their centuries-old oppression." In the third paragraph she adds: "... as the emergence of the women's liberation movement throughout the advanced capitalist countries soon demonstrated."

The fourth paragraph says: "The new women's liberation movement came on the historical scene as part of a more general upsurge of the working class and all exploited and oppressed sectors of the world population." Turning the page, she concludes: "The swift growth of the women's liberation movement, and the role it has played in the deepening class struggle, both internationally and in specific countries, confirm that the fight for women's liberation must be regarded as a fundamental component of the new rise of the world revolution. On the next page, point two begins like this: "This radicalization of women is unprecedented in the depth of the economic, social, and political ferment it expresses and in its implications for the struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation." "In country after country, growing numbers of women are taking part in large-scale campaigns (...). The development of the struggle by women against their oppression has already begun to deprive the ruling class of one of the principal weapons it has long used to divide and weaken the exploited and oppressed", and "The development of the women's liberation movement today advances the class struggle, strengthens its forces, and enhances the prospects for socialism."

26 Speaking of the roots of the new radicalization of women, Waters says: "Greater democratic rights and broader social opportunities have not 'satisfied' women, or inclined them to a passive acceptance of their inferior social status and economic dependence. On the contrary, they have stimulated new struggles and more far-reaching demands."

27 In the final chapter, when she refers to the tasks of the Fourth International, her first point says: "(...) speed with which revolutionary ideas and lessons of struggle are transmitted from one country to another, and from one sector of the world revolution to another, ensures the continuing spread of women's liberation struggles."

on female students. On 26 August 1970, on the 50th anniversary of the conquest of the female vote, the largest mobilisations of women took place, which were not repeated on such a large scale. The New York demonstration, for example, was attended by around 30,000 women. Its first achievement was the legalisation of abortion in the state of New York that year, and two years later, the decision of the Supreme Court of Justice was achieved, legalising abortion throughout the country. This slogan has been accompanied by the campaign for the ratification of the ERA, a constitutional amendment to achieve equal rights for women. But neither the fight for abortion, after the great mobilisation of 1970, nor that of ERA has again produced demonstrations of the size of the first; on the contrary, the mobilisation was in constant decline until its almost total disappearance shortly after.

The fact that there is no rise in workers' struggles allowed the strengthening of liberal currents such as NOW, which was the majority, and radical feminist currents (who consider the oppression of women as the root of class society and who oppose left-wing parties), culturalist currents and self-awareness groups. In the United States, the "movement", according to the analyses of the SWP, was fundamentally student and middle class, and never managed to attract significant sectors of workers, Blacks and Chicanas, the most overexploited sectors of the American population.

Regarding the United States, we want to quote Waters herself, who, years before her document was voted on in 1978, was already raising the situation of crisis of women's mobilisations. "In the three years following the mobilisations of August 26, 1970, there have been no demonstrations or mobilisations of a magnitude or impact similar to those of August 26. Most of the groups of the women's liberation movement that emerged after the first impulse of the movement continue in the process of disintegration. Of those that still exist, many focus on problems such as rape, prostitution, and 'self-help' clinics, which are not central political problems for the masses of women and do not lend themselves to effective struggle against the institutions that perpetuate women's oppression."²⁸

This is reflected in the fact that "the feminist movement, after its first emergence in 1969-1970, immediately suffered a crisis of perspective. The counter-culturist, workerist, far-leftist, sectarian, and reformist tendencies developed (...)."²⁹

Referring to the campaign for the legalisation of abortion, she takes stock of the activities of the WONAAC (Women's National Coalition for Abortion Action), an organisation created by the SWP and other forces to start this campaign in 1971, and says: "When taking stock of the campaign, we must look at the achievements of WONAAC and also discuss why there were no mass mobilisations over the issue of abortion."³⁰

"The week of mobilisation for abortion that WONAAC carried out in May 1972 and the local courts of 1972 were the only opposition to the 'right to be born' campaign and the anti-abortion statements of Nixon and McGovern.

"WONAAC's direct accomplishments are impressive. It carried out the mobilisation of 20 November 1971 in Washington, the first national mobilisation for abortion. It carried out multiple activities in different areas in May 1972. The demonstration carried out by WONAAC in New York as part of the Abortion Mobilisation Week was the only mobilisation carried out by the pro-abortion movement to counter the almost successful attempt by the anti-abortion forces for repealing the legalisation of abortion in the State of New York.

"WONAAC was never able to attract significant numbers of women to its activities, apart from activists of the women's liberation movement. It did not become a mass movement before the Supreme Court made a favourable decision. WONAAC's actions were smaller than we had anticipated. This is because we underestimated the combined impact of various obstacles to the development of WONAAC. Among these obstacles are:

28 Waters, Mary Alice, "La Liberación de la Mujer y su papel en la Revolución Socialista", *Marxismo y Feminismo*, Editorial Fontamara, Barcelona, 1974, p. 106. [Note: The translator was unable to get the original English version of this work and had to retranslate from the Spanish.]

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

“1. The intense opposition to the national campaign for abortion in sectors of the women’s liberation movement, expressed, among other things, in the intense campaign of anti-communist provocations against WONAAC. The initial strength of the far leftists and liberals was greater than we had anticipated. We had thought, for example, that a national campaign for abortion would have dragged down NOW, but NOW, as a national organisation, refused to provide effective support to the fight for abortion (...).”³¹ And it concludes by saying: “In retrospect, we now see that the women’s liberation movement was born at the height of the rise and radicalisation of the past decade. In its struggles, it swam against the tide from the beginning.”³²

But it could be that between 1973 and 1978, a new flourishing of women’s struggles had taken place. However, the report on the women’s movement, approved by the SWP National Committee in January 1977, says: “Today’s feminist sentiment – although it is stronger and deeper than ever, especially in Black communities and in the working class – is poorly organised. There are numerous feminist groups in the universities, but they are relatively small, atomised, and lack direction. The abortion rights movement is weak and barely visible. In some areas, we have begun to form *ad hoc* groups, but none constitute a true coalition. Some Black and Chicano feminist organisations have formed but they are small and relatively isolated.”³³ And: “in the absence of a class-based leadership with any weight in the workers movement or in the Black, Chicano or Puerto Rican mass organisations, the scant response that there has been to the attacks has been carried out by the confusionist reformist leaders of the feminist movement oriented by the Democratic Party, particularly NOW, which makes up the largest and most influential group.”³⁴

This is just a sample of the multitude of documentation that the SWP could provide to show, based on official or Waters’s documents, that the description of the situation presented in the document on feminist struggles in the United States is false.

In France, at the end of the 1960s, MLF (Women’s Liberation Movement) groups emerged and, starting in May 1968, large mobilisations developed, fundamentally based on the struggle for the legalisation of abortion, which spread during the early 1970s. The composition of the mobilisations and groups was fundamentally student, but, unlike in the United States, they developed amid a stronger upsurge of the working class, which turned the petty bourgeoisie further to the left. However, “the explosion of May 1968 ended too quickly to allow the nascent women’s movement to convince important layers of the workers’ movement about the importance of the fight against the specific oppression of women. For this reason, this movement has tended to develop sectarian positions, even among groups that claim a class point of view, and that declare they want to defend the interests of the most exploited and oppressed women.”³⁵

The fight for abortion concluded with a victory when it was legalised by the French government in 1975, but precisely because of it, “the impact of the MLAC (Movement for the Legalisation of Abortion) in France and its swift decline after the law was approved.”³⁶ Other indicators of the movement’s decline are the poor celebration of 8 March 1979 and the poor results of the global campaign for abortion. Some female comrades from the French LCR (Revolutionary Workers League), the Mandelist organisation, said in May 1979: “The women’s movement is in difficulties (subtitle). Neither organisation nor permanent and coordinated movement, the women’s movement today is a particularly mobile reality. Women’s groups come and go, and their initiative capacities fluctuate enormously. Some are rooted in a local practice of struggle, or about their company, but the others? And, for over a year, in the Paris region, there has been

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 “Women’s Liberation Report”, presented to the SWP National Committee, January 1977, *Internal Information Bulletin No. 1*, 1977, New York, February 1977, p. 4041. [Note: The translator was unable to get the original English version of this work and had to retranslate from the Spanish.]

34 Ibid.

35 “On the intervention of the Sections of the Fourth International in the women’s movement”, *International Discussion Internal Bulletin*, vol. xiv, May 1977, p. 11. [Note: The translator was unable to get the original English version of this work and had to retranslate from the Spanish.]

36 *Cahiers du Feminisme N° 9*, “Il fallait être au Milieu des Torches y des Flambeaux”, Editions la Brèche, Paris, Avril Mai, 1979.

no more real coordination or exchange of experiences and development of common initiatives that allow the women's movement to become a social and political force."³⁷

"The women's movement is politically dismembered in the Paris region, and the only places of 'centralisation' that still exist are the general assemblies, where the most motivated feminist activists are often found. If there are no more representative central coordinations of the movement in Paris, it is not because the militants of the groups are disheartened by the verbal terrorism of the general assemblies or by their undemocratic nature, but mainly because the need for coordination, for central and unitary initiatives, has largely regressed, and this for multiple reasons (political situation, crisis of the far left, youth of the feminist movement, etc.). The localist retreat is a reality today, and if it is not fought politically, it will lead to the suffocation of an entire generation of feminist activists. Heartbreak wins now!"³⁸

The situation is more or less similar in the other countries where there were important mobilisations. Let's summarise so as not to bore you. In Italy, during 1974, large mobilisations developed around the plebiscite for divorce and continued in 1975 with the struggle for abortion. But we are not aware of any massive mobilisations or subsequent campaigns. In Spain, in 1974 and 1975, the struggle against Francoism unleashed mobilisations of women deeply linked to the democratic struggle and the workers' struggles for the dismantling of the dictatorship. In Catalonia, the Catalan Dona Days were held in June 1976, with the attendance of over 4,000 women and groups were organised throughout the country and mobilisations in the provinces. But in the last two years, this wave of mobilisations has not continued either. In Sweden, the government has granted broad concessions to women, which is why mobilisation has been slowed.

This is the reality that we see. What the American and French comrades say coincides with the fact that there is a decline, a fall in feminist mobilisations, in most cases linked to the victories they obtained. Again, then, we ask Waters: Where on earth is this "movement", whose clear struggles "continue to spread," and which is becoming more and more radical?

Unitary and Autonomous Women's Movements in Backward Countries?

The emergence of imperialism meant a brutal exploitation of backward countries, which, without leaving their age-old situation of misery, saw their old production systems attacked or destroyed to satisfy the capitalist's profit, saw the violent and devastating introduction of capitalist production for the world market.

The conditions of hunger and misery that existed throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world led to a situation of instability and intense class struggle throughout the entire 20th century. In some cases, these conditions became so terrible, so hopeless, that even without a Marxist revolutionary party and without a strong working class, the revolution triumphed in China, Cuba, Vietnam and other countries.

In these revolutions, the working class did not play a vanguard role but rather an indirect one, expressed in support for workers' states through the existence of workers' parties linked to the Soviet Union or China, and in the support of the world working class. This indirect, mediated role of the working class and the nonexistence of revolutionary workers' parties in these triumphant revolutions was what gave them their "abnormal" character, *sui generis* (opposed to the "classical" experience of the Russian Revolution).

Except in the case of the Chinese Revolution, in the entire process of struggles in colonial and semi-colonial countries and their triumphant revolutions, we have not seen powerful feminist mobilisations. And in the case of China, women had a very prominent, vanguard, unique role, but one that has nothing to do with Waters's proposal, of the formation of a unitary or independent movement.

We believe that this situation, different in this aspect from that of advanced countries, is due to the political and economic instability that these countries are going through, the social differences that give rise to very small ultra-privileged and very rich minorities, in contrast to multitudes of people immersed in super exploitation and misery, that, except in a few countries, the urban middle class is quite weak. All these make class contradictions much more explosive, and society quickly polarises between its extremes.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

The women of the ruling class see their fate directly compromised by that of their class. The petty bourgeoisie is much less independent and radicalises towards the working class more easily when there are struggles. The student movement is also relatively weak and has much more affinity with the workers. And the working class and peasant women, the poorest, live subject to the problems of misery and hunger that afflict all workers, which makes the problems of their specific oppression as women go into the background. These specific conditions are what explain why, both in the past and in the current rise that began in 1968, even when there were important struggles and even triumphant revolutions, there was no phenomenon even similar to that of the feminist mobilisations of the advanced countries. Moreover, the cases of struggles led by women that took place in Chile and Iran were not only very sporadic but were directly linked to the political problems in conflict.

In Chile, in 1973, there were mobilisations of women against the increase in the cost of living, but with a purely political character, in direct support for the counterrevolution underway, against the Popular Unity government.

In the recent process of the Iranian revolution (1979), for a brief period, there were specific mobilisations of women, as a consequence of Khomeini's order to banish Western clothing and customs that the Shah had encouraged, and return to the use of the traditional chador and compliance with the letter of Islamic laws. In this case, apart from the very fleeting nature of the mobilisation, it is necessary to specify carefully to what extent, even though the slogans of freedom in clothing or customs were progressive, this movement was not directly or indirectly linked to counterrevolutionary sectors. In passing and at the end of her document, without drawing any conclusion, Waters says the same thing as us regarding the participation of women in the struggles of colonial or semi-colonial countries: "Since the rise of the colonial revolution at the beginning of this century, women have participated in anti-imperialist upsurges, but there has not been a tradition of women organising as women, around their specific demands, as a distinct component of these struggles."

Nevertheless, making this correct acknowledgment does not lead Waters to abandon her project of building the independent feminist movement, but quite the opposite. What has not yet happened must happen. "However, the development of the world capitalist system since World War II has sharpened the economic, social, and political contradictions in the colonial and semicolonial countries, which will more and more propel women into struggle around their own demands."

To make her argument less far-fetched, Waters tries to rely on supposed previous historical examples of feminist struggles, although she herself has already acknowledged that they did not happen: "In Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, Palestine, South Africa, the Sahara, and elsewhere, struggles by women to end the most brutal forms of the oppression they suffer have been closely intertwined with unfolding anti-imperialist struggles."

What women's struggles is she talking about? In all these revolutionary processes, women participated intensely as part of the struggle of all the people against the imperialist aggressor. But the worst thing about the example is not that: how come Waters does not list, neither there nor anywhere else in her document, the grand mobilisation of Chinese women? How can it be that a document about women's struggles ignores the largest, the only great mobilisation of women that occurred in history? We can think of only one explanation: Waters does not mention it because it goes precisely against her "strategy" of "building an independent movement" of all women.

Waters encompasses all backward countries in a totally false generality: "In most semicolonial countries, the majority of the population still lives on the land and is engaged in subsistence farming, utilising extremely backward methods." This is a phrase worthy of a World Almanac from the 1930s, which has nothing to do with the complex reality of backward countries, among which there are very large differences regarding industrial development, but in most of which there is, for many years, a trend towards industrialisation, to become increasingly urban. There are countries where oil has distorted all economic and social relations, even though many areas still retain their peasant character.

Waters's assertion that women's struggles "will become a more important component of the coming revolutionary struggles" in backward countries and imposing on them the "strategy" of "building an independent movement" is going against history, against the current reality and against the future of

those countries. We categorically assert that the struggle for national liberation and for land is decisive in them, that these are two decisive components of the struggles of backward countries. And that in some of them there is a more or less strong and experienced working class, which places them at the forefront of the struggle of the semi-colonial countries, and that the existence of this working class makes it possible to combine intimately the democratic tasks of the land and for national liberation with workers' slogans, which only further distances the possibility of the emergence of "independent movements" of all women in the manner of Waters.

Given that Trotskyism has an important weight and tradition in Latin America, and that, apart from Waters's proposals, there is a specific document of the majority of the leadership of the Fourth International about that continent, which proposes the same "strategy" of "building an independent movement", we need to dwell especially on this problem.

Latin America: "Is It Only a Matter of Time"?

The Latin American document of Mandelism and the SWP takes Waters' policy for women literally:

"Objective changes (...) are laying the basis for the development of a women's movement. (...) The deep-rooted prejudices against the participation of women in political life have inhibited the early development of a women's liberation movement comparable to that which has appeared in the advanced capitalist countries. It is only a matter of time, however, for such a movement to develop. The severity of the oppression of women and the great social weight that this oppressed sector has created the possibility for the development of a massive women's movement, with great political potential.

"Initial signs of the development of a women's movement in Latin America can already be noted:

"a). The appearance, in many countries, of women's groups that explicitly consider themselves feminist organisations. Though they are still small and mostly student or petty bourgeois in composition and audience up to now, feminist organisations will certainly grow among women from the exploited classes.

"b). The growing participation of women in political life. In this process, some specifically women's groups have appeared, such as the housewives' committees in the Bolivian mining areas and the women's committees of the Democratic Tendency of Electrical Workers in Mexico."³⁹

If the generalities of Waters' document on backward countries and women are bad, what the specific document on Latin America says about it is worse. Latin America is a continent with a well-known history of intense class struggle, in which mass anti-imperialist movements have occurred under the leadership of the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie; there have been great workers' struggles, great defeats, and even a triumphant workers' revolution that was later lost, the Bolivian one. In Latin America, there is Cuba, the first workers' state on the continent.

Within this rich history, women have had a constant participation, but aligned with their parties and their respective classes. As the Latin American document is forced to look for "feminist struggles", it attributes the fact that they have not occurred in a similar way to the "second wave" to "deep-rooted political prejudices". We say the opposite: women have participated in political, union, and anti-imperialist struggles in all Latin American countries, but they did not do so according to the new canons that Waters intends to impose: forming autonomous and independent movements of all women. And we assert that both the experience of this entire 20th century and that of the current rise indicate that, within the framework of the important socioeconomic changes experienced and being experienced on the continent (greater industrial development, crisis in the countryside, growth of the urban population, relative increase in education), women will struggle more and more every day, but not only around one or another partial slogan, specific to women, something that can happen temporarily, but following the different parties and political and union organisations and class struggles, and being the poorest and most oppressed they are an important component of the struggle for the workers' revolution and socialism. They will fight more and more among themselves, in opposing political and social camps, counterrevolutionaries against revolutionaries, opportunists against Trotskyists, bourgeois and petty bourgeois against proletarians.

39 "Resolution on Latin America" of the United Secretariat, SWP's *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, Vol xv, No 6, December 1978, p. 14.

Let's look a little at the experience of the past. One of the few countries that has some tradition of feminist struggle and one of the oldest traditions of workers' organisation and struggle on the continent is Argentina, where, since the end of the 19th century and following the pattern of the time given by European countries, there was feminist activity by bourgeois women, on the one hand, and by socialists, on the other.

In 1900, the Socialist Feminist Centre was founded in Buenos Aires, directed by Alicia Moreau de Justo, one of the founders and top leaders of the Argentine Socialist Party, who worked primarily for legislation to protect women workers, who at that time constituted a significant percentage of the workforce and were brutally exploited. Then another socialist, Cecilia de Grierson, founded the National Council of Women, which later fell outside of socialist influence.

The relative importance of feminist activity in the country led to an International Feminist Congress being held in 1910, in which women from all over the world participated. Between 1924 and 1926, important achievements were made for women's work.

However, in most of the countries of the continent, there were no experiences of this type. The history of Latin American women's struggles is a faithful reflection of the political history of their countries. In all of them, their participation in political life has to do with the overall situation of the country. Women have massively supported bourgeois nationalist parties such as APRA in Peru or Peronism in Argentina; they have supported conservative or liberal parties, and women workers have also had a prominent participation in the workers' struggles, as has been the case in the entire history of Bolivia or as it happens now in Brazil.

A good example of all this variety of situations is given by what happened with the conquest of women's suffrage. In Latin America (where in several countries there is still a qualified suffrage, which excludes the illiterate or those who do not have property), women's suffrage was granted by the majority of governments without any struggles by all women and long after it had been achieved in Europe and the United States (approximately, between 1935 and 1958), and was directly linked to attempts to manipulate the vast flow of female votes in favour or against one or another bourgeois candidate. In Peru, for example, in 1955, the vote was granted to women who could read, but it was directly linked to the political manoeuvre of gaining an advantage for the conservative candidate Manuel Odría, which is what happened. Right there, APRA, a bourgeois nationalist party, "progressive" in relation to Odrism, opposed the vote for women. In Mexico, it was not until 1953 that the vote for women was accepted, since among women, there was significant resistance to the measures of secularisation of the state advanced by the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party, in government since the revolution). In Colombia, women's suffrage was imposed in 1957 by a military government, without any mobilisation of women. In Chile, there was an attempt to organise a feminist movement linked to this problem. Amanda Labarca Hubertson organised a Chilean Federation of Women's Institutions (FECHIF) to fight for the vote, but as soon as it was achieved, in 1949, it was dissolved. In 1946, María de la Cruz, a follower of Juan Domingo Perón and his wife, Eva, organised a Chilean Women's Party to support the bourgeois populist candidate, Carlos Ibáñez del Campo. He won in 1952, and that party, which had been decisive in his election, entered into crisis and broke up. In Argentina, the banner of women's struggle was fundamental for Juan Domingo Perón. At the beginning of his first presidency, in 1947, he granted women the vote. When Congress approved the bill, thousands of women took to the streets in Buenos Aires, led by Eva Perón, to express their support for the government. In 1949, under the leadership of Evita, the Peronist Women's Party was founded, whose organisation started from the women's committees of the neighbourhoods and reached all sectors of the population. It then became the women's branch of the single party.⁴⁰ In 1951, in the first election in which they participated, 93.87% of the women of Buenos Aires voted, against 91.45% of the men. At the national level, the percentage of female votes in favour of Perón varied between 83% and 53%, which led to seven female senators and 24 female deputies being elected, a number that is exceptionally high not just for Latin America.

The active counterrevolutionary action of a significant number of women in the last period of Salvador Allende's government in Chile is another confirmation of what we say. During 1972-1973, the

40 Hellander, Nancy: "La Mujer, mitad olvidada de la sociedad argentina", *Hembra y Macho en Latinoamérica* ["Woman, forgotten half of Argentine society", *Female and Male in Latin America*], Editorial Diana, Mexico, 1977, p. 131-132.

conciliatory policy of the Popular Unity government and the increasingly aggressive policy of the bourgeoisie, directly supported by Yankee imperialism, turned increasingly to the right the middle class and even important sectors of the working class that followed the Christian Democracy, while at the same time wearing down and demoralising the most combative sectors of the proletariat. This explains how a large sector of women, along with the majority of the petty bourgeoisie and some working-class sectors, supported the counterrevolutionary policy of the bourgeoisie, which finally allowed Pinochet to triumph.

If there had existed in Chile a revolutionary party of weight, a party with a correct policy and in a position to guide the masses, it would have been capable of mobilising the working class by demanding clear measures from the government against imperialism and the bourgeoisie, it would have won the trust and leadership of the workers, both men and women, and behind them it would have also won, or neutralised, important sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, opening the possibility of crushing the coup and deepening the revolutionary path.

In either case, there was no room to “build an independent movement” of all women, as Waters poses. And, of course, she understands Chile’s experience backwards because she places herself in the corner of “all women”: “Chile once again tragically showed that if the workers movement fails to put forward and fight for a program and revolutionary perspective answering the needs of the masses of women, many petty-bourgeois and even working-class women will either be mobilised on the side of reaction, or neutralised as potential supporters of the proletariat.”⁴¹ It would seem that what was missing in Chile to prevent Pinochet’s triumph was not a revolutionary party that led the masses but a specific program for women and, just to make a change, an autonomous movement...

Bolivia is the most advanced in Latin America in terms of the workers’ revolution. In 1952, it had a workers’ revolution that was lost. In this country, the experience of women’s struggles has nothing to do with what Waters proposes. The case of the Housewives Committees of Bolivia, quoted in the “Resolution on Latin America” that we have been criticising, as an example of the independent struggle of women for their demands in general, could not be more different. In practice, it was the organisation of women to support the workers’ struggle. Domitila Chungara, the most recognised female leader of the Bolivian mines, explains to us what that committee was like:

“(…) We, the women, were raised from the cradle with the idea that women were made only to cook and to take care of the kids, that we are incapable of assuming important tasks, and that we shouldn’t be allowed to get involved in politics. But necessity made us change our lives. Fifteen years ago, in a period of tremendous problems for the working class, a group of 70 women organised to win freedom for their *compañeros*, who were leaders and who had been imprisoned for demanding higher wages. The women got everything they asked for after a ten-day hunger strike. And from then on, they decided to organise themselves in a group which they called the Housewives’ Committee of Siglo XX (one of the largest tin mines in Bolivia).

“Since then, this Committee has always been in step with the unions and other working-class organisations, struggling for the same causes. That’s why they’ve also attacked us, women. Several of us have been imprisoned, interrogated, jailed, and we’ve even lost our children because of being in the struggle with our *compañeros*. But the Committee hasn’t died. And in recent years, at a call from its leaders, four or five thousand women have come out to demonstrate.

“The Housewives’ Committee is organised like a union, and it functions almost the same way. We also participate in the Federation of Mining Workers, and we have our place in the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB). We always make our voices heard, and we are attentive to carrying out the tasks that the working class proposes.”⁴²

This Bolivian women’s movement was well divided: bourgeois and reformist women on the one hand, and working-class women on the side of the workers’ struggle. There was no unitary women’s movement in Bolivia. Dominica says:

41 Chaney, M: “La Mujer en la Política Latinoamericana, el caso de Perú y Chile”, *Hembra y Macho en Latinoamérica* [“Women in Latin American Politics, the case of Peru and Chile”, *Female and Male in Latin America*], op. cit.

42 *Let me speak! Testimony of Domitila, a Woman of the Bolivian mines*, by Domitila Barrios de Chungara with Moema Viezzer, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1978, p. 40–41.

“This Committee was formed in 1961. At that time, we were living through a pretty rough economic situation: the company owed our husbands three months, there was no food to eat, there were no medicines and no medical attention. So, the miners organised a march which consisted of everyone, miners, women and children going on foot to the city of La Paz. This was a very long march, because La Paz is really far away. But the government men found out about our plans and stopped us. They arrested the leaders and took them to jail in La Paz.”⁴³

The women decided to go to La Paz to demand for their husbands before a meeting of ministers that was going to receive a representative of the workers, and they did so, but they were attacked by the ‘barzolas’,⁴⁴ who responded to the MNR (National Revolutionary Movement, of Paz Estensoro). The housewives threatened the government with setting themselves with dynamite, and the government had to accept their requests and release their husbands.

In Bolivia, then, the mining women confronted the women of the MNR. They could not organise themselves into a unitary women’s movement because their fundamental interests were at odds. And so, in Bolivia, where there is one of the most powerful working classes in Latin America, working women organised to support their *compañeros* in their struggles. Later on, these committees began to raise demands of working women as women, but always linked to the general struggle of their people against oppression.

Let us keep in mind that these women were oppressed by their husbands, that the men at first booed them, did not allow them to speak, and did not let them go out to meetings. But they organised themselves, they fought for men to recognise them, and today they are a fundamental part of the Bolivian workers’ movement.

To conclude, let’s look at the characteristics of the current Latin American rise. No one doubts that Latin America is once again experiencing an important rise, whose epicentre is Central America. We hold that the entire current rise indicates that the participation of working women, the poorest, together with the workers and the people in the political and union struggles for these wages will be again repeated, without there being greater conditions for the appearance of Waters-style “movements” or for us to set out to build them.

In the heroic fight that the Sandinista combatants waged against Somoza’s National Guard, women did not have any differentiated participation as such or any type of independent autonomous organisation, but rather they fought alongside the men in the guerrilla. A similar thing happens in the struggle that is taking place in El Salvador.

Peru, starting in 1976, experienced a very important rise, which was expressed in the carrying out of two successful general strikes and countless struggles. Women participated in all of them, but within their unions and parties.

In Bolivia, the rise that caused the fall of Hugo Banzer, the calling and holding of elections, the current situation of instability, began in January 1978 when four women, four wives of activists and labour leaders who had been imprisoned for some time, entered the Archbishopric of La Paz accompanied by fourteen children, and began a hunger strike for the freedom of their husbands, which later spread like wildfire throughout the country. Not only was there no autonomous feminist organisation, but Bolivian women resumed, and with all honour, the vanguard role that they have always played in the struggle of the proletariat.

43 Ibid., p. 71.

44 Moema Viezzer says: “The ‘barzolas’ are part of a tragic chapter in the history of women in Bolivia. They were women that the MNR people organised and who took the name of María Barzola, but they didn’t play the role that she had played when she asked for fair treatment for the workers. Because, according to what I’ve been told, María Barzola was a woman from the village of Llallagua. In 1942 there was a big demonstration demanding a wage increase from the old mine owners, and she led the march with a flag. When they were near Catavi [a tin mine in Bolivia], where the main office was, the army arrived and massacred a whole bunch of people. And in that massacre, she died. That place is now called the ‘Plain of María Barzola’. But the MNR’s ‘barzolas’ began to serve the interests of their party, which was part of government and, in fact, they helped repress the people. They served as an instrument of repression. Because of that, there is a bad feeling against the ‘barzolas’ in Bolivia. For example, in La Paz, when a sector of the working class demanded something, the ‘barzolas’ went out to confront them with knives and whips; they attacked the demonstrators who were protesting against government policies.” Ibid., p. 72–73.

In Brazil, where massive workers' strikes have been taking place for over a year, more and more women workers are participating. In the São Paulo metalworkers' strike, which took place at the beginning of 1979 and mobilised some 250,000 workers, the participation of women's committees in support of the strike was remarkable. And it was not only the wives of the striking metalworkers, but the support also included women of various professions and social status, and a Housewives Association and the Women's Movement for Amnesty emerged. And for the metalworkers' union, one of the results of the strike was the permanent formation of the Women's Committees.⁴⁵

In Argentina, one of the most heroic chapters of the resistance to the cruel Videla dictatorship belongs to women. Hundreds of them have wandered in recent years through ministries, public offices, barracks, and police stations, in search of their missing children and husbands. Without stopping a single day, for more than three years, a multitude of mothers and wives have demanded the appearance of the thousands of those kidnapped by the military dictatorship. Others have supported their prisoners and demanded their release, in addition to the thousands of women who have disappeared, been tortured or imprisoned for their participation in the struggles of the 1970s. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo managed to make themselves known in Buenos Aires and abroad for their constant presence on Thursdays in the centre of Buenos Aires, in front of the Casa Rosada and the Ministry of the Interior, crying out for the disappeared. In October 1977, when Mother's Day was celebrated, more than a thousand women paraded through downtown streets. In the ongoing union reorganisation process, which is taking place everywhere, women play an important role.

Waters Ignores the Largest Women's Mobilisation in History

We have purposely left for last the greatest example of women's revolutionary participation in the struggle for their rights: the Chinese Revolution, which Waters does not mention in her entire document.

Jack Belden, in his book *China Shakes the World*, relates some aspects of the situation of women and the very powerful social revolution carried out by Chinese women, who played a fundamental role in this revolution.

About the living conditions of Chinese women, and about the fact that the women's revolution has been an essential part of the overthrow of the feudal regime and the defeat of Japanese imperialism, Belden says:

"Though vastly more complicated, the patriarchal Chinese society has also rested on the position of the Elders and their possession of women as material sources of wealth. Historically, control of women has been concentrated in the hands of the rural possessing classes. It was the gentry, and not the common peasant, who always had the largest families. The poor peasant seldom had more than one wife, but clan leaders and landlords had numerous wives, concubines and slave girls who not only produced wealth for the landlord by their own labour but also produced numerous sons, which gave the gentry local political power. In Honan Province, the writer came across a landlord who had a family of sixty-nine members. Through this family, he controlled seven hundred tenant farmers, thirty slave girls, two hundred squatters and seven wet nurses, who breast-fed his numerous brood. He was able to buy and sell women because of his wealth, and he was also powerful because he possessed women.

"Not only Chinese society in general, but even the structure of the state, from the village at the bottom to the throne at the top, was definitely influenced by the status of women as slaves, private property, labour powers and producers of sons for the ruling classes. The family was a training ground for loyalty to state authority. The father was the supreme autocrat in the family. Submission of female to male and of son to father found its natural reflection in submission of peasant to gentry, tenant to landlord and landlord to state ruler. From the forgoing it should be obvious that any all-out attempt to free women could only result in the upheaval of the whole social pyramid and a tremendous change in the correlation of forces struggling for power. That is why the Communists fought so hard for equality of women and why the more feudal-minded moralists of the Kuomintang never lost an opportunity to inveigh against

45 "Our sisters, the Brazilian workers", *Opción*, Year 2, No. 13, June 1979, p. 39 (clandestine monthly publication of the Argentine PST).

the Communist ‘destruction’ of the Chinese family. In the first case, the freeing of women was a means of breaking the old power; in the second case, the shackling of women was a means of preserving the power.”⁴⁶

Let us mention in passing the binding of women’s feet to deform them, prevent them from fleeing and leave them almost crippled; marriage from the cradle; the complete subjection of the woman to her husband’s family, of which she became a part; the last position in the family, subject to the domination of men; the prohibition to work; the privileges so that men could have as many women as they wanted, to realise the powerful oppression that existed on Chinese women, even in 1949.

But if such was their oppression, as great their struggle was under the leadership of the Communist Party and as an integral part of the peasants’ struggle against feudalism, the struggle against the Japanese army and against the tyranny of Chiang Kai-shek. In the villages, as the Red Army passed by, women’s associations were organised that were responsible for publicly punishing husbands and/or fathers-in-law who treated their wives and/or daughters-in-law badly, who organised themselves and called women to leave their homes to work in the fields to thus support the Red Army, or who, for example, carried out “strikes”, so to speak, against husbands who refused to let them work, or who refused to enlist in the Red Army.

Thus, women were imposing rights such as the right to choose their husband and the right to divorce him if he treated her very badly, the right to work, to have equality before the law, to eat the same as her husband and her father-in-law, and to participate in town elections. This women’s revolution was one of the greatest supports that the Red Army could have had in the rearguard. As women won their rights, they became aware that, to maintain them, they had to prevent the return of the old regime at all costs, and more than ever, they were the vanguard in the construction of the new Chinese society. But let a peasant woman from northern China, quoted by Belden in his book, speak to us directly:

“In the year 1947, Chiang Kai-shek’s offensive pressed hard on North China, and Gold Flower was afraid that the 8th Route Army might be defeated and her new freedoms wiped out with the stroke of a sword. The exhortations of the Communist Party to increase farm production fell on her ears like a clarion call. She went about urging women to work in the fields. ‘We have turned over now and have equality,’ she would argue. ‘That means that women do work and don’t have to depend on men.’ Not all the women in the village were convinced. ‘If we work in the fields,’ they said, ‘what shall happen to our work at home? Does turning over mean we shall be worked to death?’ ‘That’s wrong,’ answered Gold Flower. ‘If we do not work, the fields will produce little; there will be no grain for soldiers at the front. Then we shall be threatened with death by Chiang Kai-shek’s army and lose all we have gained. And again, we will have to depend on our husbands. The women could not stand up against her arguments.

“But there were other considerations. Husbands did not want their women to go into the fields. Gold Flower called on the belle of the village, a girl named White Purity, who agreed to come out and work. ‘You are too beautiful to work in the fields,’ her husband said. ‘What can you do when someone drags you away through the corn?’ White Purity laughed. ‘Yes, I am beautiful,’ she said. ‘But does that mean I must stay indoors all my life like a bird in a cage? This is a new society; it is not like the old days. If anyone dares to attack me in the fields, I will call our Women’s Association to beat him to death.’ Reluctantly, her husband consented, but when he found his income increased by the labour of his wife, he was very pleased. One night, he remarked to his wife: ‘If I ever have to leave home, you can support my whole family.’ White Purity had been waiting for such a remark. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I can support our family now, so you can go off and join the 8th Route Army. You are young and you ought to be ashamed not to be fighting the reactionaries.’ Perceiving that he had fallen into a trap, the husband refused to go. White Purity would not sleep with him. He threatened to beat her; she threatened him with the Women’s Association. Then she said she would kill herself unless he joined the army. Outmanoeuvred, the husband at last mounted a donkey and went off to fight Chiang Kai-shek.”⁴⁷

This powerful revolution is not mentioned at all in Waters’ paper, and it is the only one where the mobilisation of women has been a fundamental component of the revolutionary struggle. We can discuss whether or not the Chinese Communist Party promoted this mobilisation, whether it wanted to stop it or not, but the fact is that, because of the very violent conditions of oppression of women, which were at the

46 Belden, Jack, *China shakes the world*, Monthly Review Press, second edition, 1970, pp. 310-311.

47 Ibid., p. 294-295.

base of the Chinese feudal structure, their liberation was definitive for the triumph of the struggle against imperialism and the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek. This very powerful movement was not independent or autonomous at all. On the contrary, it was led by the Chinese Communist Party, and it involved not the feudal or bourgeois ladies who supported the Kuomintang but the Chinese peasant women fighting against the dictatorship and imperialism.

Chapter III

Oppression and Exploitation

The text of this chapter was published, with an introduction, in the magazine *Correspondencia Internacional* in January 1980. The introduction is omitted here.

The third chapter discusses two aspects raised by Mary Alice Waters. According to her, first, the “party strategy” would be the construction of autonomous, unitary movements independent of all parties, uniting all women in all countries. Second, oppression and exploitation would be synonymous or equivalent categories, and exploitation would be an “effect”, an “exacerbation” of oppression. Regarding the first point, the authors insist on the democratic and multi-class nature of women’s demands. They call for the united struggle of all women around their progressive slogans. But they place these demands in the context of different class interests, which makes the “strategy” of a permanent and united movement of all women unviable and misguided. They point out that MAW, using Marxist language, converges with flawed positions of feminism that argue that the main enemy is men, reject links with political parties, and deny the relationship between women’s issues and class struggle. Regarding MAW’s second argument, the authors distinguish economic exploitation from cultural and social oppression, and, depending on the case, economic oppression based on differences in gender, nationality, etc. They enumerate various forms of discrimination suffered by women under capitalism, which takes advantage of patriarchy. And as long as exploitation exists, it will determine the living conditions of the exploiting and exploited sectors. Thus, MAW does not distinguish the tasks of the current era, in which class conflicts predominate. It must respond both to the tactics of unity of action against oppression in its various forms and to its link with the central task of the working class: to end the domination of imperialist capitalism in every country, until the triumph of socialism. For this reason, they highlight the struggle for political independence from the various forms of pro-capitalist and class-conciliation parties.

“A Decade with a Woman’s Name”

Making the obligatory references to the characteristics of the 1970s, a Colombian journalist published an article with this title. He pointed out that every day more and more women participate in economic activity, politics, unions or artistic activities, and this is often from management positions.

The names of six women known to all stood out: the Israeli Golda Meir, the Indian Indira Gandhi, the Argentine Isabel Martínez de Perón, the Bolivian Lidia Gueiler, the English Margaret Thatcher, and the Portuguese Lourdes Pintasilgo. He also recalled in passing the massive women’s movements that had taken place in some countries in the first half of the 1970s. We could have added, to corroborate the same fact, Domitila Chungara and the Bolivian miners who with their hunger strike began the struggle that culminated in the overthrow of the Banzer dictatorship; the Chilean women who mobilised against President Salvador Allende, the Salvadoran bourgeois women who took to the streets to demonstrate against “communism”, the Iranian women who opposed the imposition of wearing the chador.

It is an indisputable fact that women are participating and will increasingly participate in all aspects of modern life, especially in politics, and the 1970s have good examples in the mass mobilisations of women that took place in some capitalist countries in Europe and in the United States, even when they did not reach the colonial and semi-colonial countries or the workers’ states. Women won the right to divorce in Italy, and the right to abortion in France, Italy, England and the United States.

As a result of these movements, feminist currents developed with consciously or unconsciously anti-Marxist positions that, to a greater or lesser extent, hold that the fight against the oppression of women is not determined by the struggle of the classes into which society is divided. For them, the enemy is man, and they oppose any attempt to link feminist struggles with the class struggle. They are against participation in parties since they consider them agents of politics, which is sexist and seeks to divide and dominate women. Therefore, they call for the unity of all women of all classes and reject any attempt to differentiate themselves according to different parties or social classes. The well-known motto “Sisterhood is powerful”, coined by feminists in the United States, is a good summary of their positions.

Faced with them, we Trotskyists have to state the opposite. We believe that women will increasingly participate in politics and all other aspects of social life. They will do so not only by fighting for specifically feminine demands, as has occasionally happened in recent years, but by participating daily in antagonistic political and social camps, following the different parties and political and union organisations and the struggles of their classes, as we have seen throughout the last decade. That is to say, they will participate more and more, but not more and more united, but rather fighting and confronting each other, revolutionaries against reactionaries, opportunists against Trotskyists, bourgeois and petty bourgeois against working-class. And this is, and will inevitably be the case, because women’s activity is also governed by the class struggle.

Comrade Waters embraces as a policy the sisterhood of women above political and class struggles, following the non-Marxist feminists closely.

Women of the World, Unite?

Comrade Waters believes, as we do, that the oppression of women will be eliminated only when exploitation and class division are eliminated; that for this to happen, we must carry out a socialist revolution led by a party of men and women. But she fully agrees with anti-Marxist feminists in the concrete politics she proposes for women’s struggles. She knows very well that no Trotskyist militant can accept the general positions of these women, and so she introduces a similar political proposal, sheltering it in supposed Marxist foundations.

According to Mary Alice Waters, as we said in the previous chapter, women of all classes will fight more united every day against capitalism, which is the common enemy, in a dynamic that will not stop until it is defeated. This is the quintessence of her policy, which has as its axis the need to build an autonomous multi-class and independent movement of all women, which “is part of the strategy of the revolutionary working-class party” and without which the destruction of the bourgeois state cannot be

carried out. She, like other feminists, holds that the unity of all women is possible simply because they are oppressed and that it must be achieved.

This is not a new or exclusive position of the comrade. Already in 1971, the SWP of the United States, her party, adopted as its official position a paper with the same conception: “There is an objective basis for a unified struggle of women of different nationalities and classes because all women are oppressed as women by capitalism. Sisterhood is powerful because of this universal female oppression, and this is the basis for the existence of an independent, nonexclusive, mass feminist movement, with an anti-capitalist logic (...) the real meaning of sisterhood – that is, the concept that women can unite together as sisters based on common *struggle*.”⁴⁸

This peculiar conception has its own name: feminine popular frontism (the agreement between parties and organisations of the working class with the parties of the bourgeoisie). It is a call to working-class and revolutionary women to reconcile, in the long term and in a common organisation, with reformist and reactionary bourgeois women.

For us, without a doubt and as history has shown, women are social beings who belong to a certain class and who follow a certain policy. For this reason, between now and the triumph of the proletariat worldwide, they will increasingly participate in politics but always confronting each other according to their class interests and the directives of their party.

All women are oppressed, but some exploit others

The theoretical basis behind this erroneous policy of the “strategy” of the autonomous and unitary movement of all women starts from the incorrect relationship that Comrade Waters establishes between the struggles of the oppressed and the struggles of the exploited, equalising them and giving them similar importance in the struggle for the socialist revolution.

In several parts of her document, she mentions the class differences that exist between women, but she places oppression as the fundamental category, above class divisions: “While the subjugation of women has always had different consequences for women of distinct classes, all women, regardless of class, were and are oppressed as part of the female sex.” As a Marxist definition of a social problem, this statement is backwards. To refer to the same fact, a Marxist says the opposite: “While all women, regardless of class, have been and are oppressed, they are divided by classes and by political parties, which reflect classes and class sectors.”

As a consequence of this erroneous starting point, Waters refers to “oppressed and exploited” as equivalent, in an inadmissible general unity, as if they were the same, and exploitation appears as a measure, an “effect” or a “intensification” of oppression.⁴⁹

The relationships of the oppressed among themselves are much more complex, more contradictory than Waters paints them, since although the fact of being discriminated against may unite them, this does not erase the existence of oppressed-exploited and oppressed-exploiters. Any possible unitary struggle of the oppressed as such is irremediably crossed and subordinated to the division imposed by economic exploitation.

Exploitation is the greatest inequality that exists among men, and it is the stark appropriation of the product of the work of the working masses by the possessing class. This inequality means a total and irreconcilable antagonism between the exploiters and the exploited, between classes and between their parties and organisations. Since it emerged, exploitation has been the determining factor of all subsequent human history. This is not an unjust subjugation for cultural, racial, or sexual reasons but rather a fundamental economic fact, which is at the basis of the production of the entire class society.

48 Waters, Mary Alice: “Towards a Mass Feminist Movement” (Resolution adopted at the 24th National Convention of the SWP in August 1971), *Feminism and Socialism*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1976, pp. 145-146 and 148 (highlighted in the original).

49 Let’s look at some examples of MAW’s document *Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women’s Liberation*: on pp. 13-14, 17, 42, she refers to “oppressed and exploited”: “While all women are oppressed, the effects of that oppression are different for women of different classes. Those who suffer the greatest economic exploitation are generally those who also suffer the most from their oppression as women” (p. 95). “Class inequality that sharpens the oppression of the most exploited.” (p. 110)

For Marxism, the relations of production and property – who and how they benefit from the labour of the exploited – are those that define the different economic systems and the historical stages that have existed.

Since the emergence of exploitation, we went from the Asian regime to slavery and feudalism, until we reached capitalism. Ultimately, the struggle between the exploiters and the exploited is the driving force of history. Instead, all forms of sexual, racial, national or other types of oppression, which have been combined with different forms of exploitation throughout historical stages, have always been subordinated to them.

What is Oppression?

For as long as the animal and plant worlds have existed, there have been differences and inequalities between species, which give rise to disadvantages and privileges. The history of life is the history of the struggle between different species and groups to see who survives, making use of their advantages and using the disadvantages of others. The strongest animals live at the expense of those with fewer defences, and their life is sustained by using their relative biological advantages in relation to the environment, “oppressing”, if that term may be used, other species or groups or individuals of the same species to impose their dominance. In different species, but mainly among the higher animals, an incipient natural division of labour begins to develop based on the biological differences between the sexes. In many species, the female, who is biologically responsible for reproduction, is naturally dedicated to tasks related to it, such as feeding and caring for the young, while the male is in charge of obtaining food or defending his group.

With the transition from animal to human society, these divisions of labour developed even further, which, if at first they were based on a natural division, gradually embraced different aspects of social life and established differences between its members, no longer only between men and women but between young people and adults, between some tribes and others, between different races.

We can define oppression, then, as the use of inequalities to disadvantage and subject a social group, based on racial, sexual, national or other differences, which produces a situation of unequal rights, social, cultural and eventually economic discrimination. For example, Blacks, because of their colour, cannot go to white schools in the United States, or are brutally segregated in South Africa. Homosexuals are marginalised to a greater or lesser extent in all countries of the world.

For centuries – we leave out the discussion of how and when this process began – women have been oppressed by males, that is, patriarchy. Today, the laws of most capitalist countries enshrine their discrimination in different ways: the civil incapacity of women, the prohibition of managing their property, the prohibition of divorce or its very restricted nature, the illegitimacy of children born outside of marriage, the crime of abortion, differences in the punishment for adultery, and discriminatory labour legislation. These are a few examples, which are reinforced by customs, that aggravate the oppression of women beyond what the laws establish. For example, discrimination regarding participation in public life, in positions of responsibility in politics, the administration of the State or companies, as well as their submission and use in the sexual arena. The responsibility of domestic work and raising children also falls on women, even when they have to work outside the home. We could make an almost infinite list.

We can already see that the category of oppression covers very diverse types of problems, huge groups – half of humanity in the case of women – or very small ones, and it does not coincide with class divisions, since, as such, the oppressed do not have a common placement in production but rather appear scattered throughout the social pyramid. The relationship between oppressor and oppressed –whites and Blacks, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals– is totally different from the relationship between exploiter and exploited – which determines classes – since it is not economic but cultural, social. Lenin, for example, in all his works on women, referred to their situation as “inequality”, “weaker position”, without ever assimilating their oppressed situation to economic exploitation.⁵⁰

50 Lenin, VI: “The Tasks of the Working Women’s Movement in the Soviet Republic” (Speech delivered at the Fourth Moscow Conference of Non-Party Working Women, September 23, 1919), *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 40–46.

We can say now, very briefly, that exploitation and oppression are different categories. The first is economic and gives rise to the existence of classes. The second is cultural and social; it gives rise to a situation of discrimination, covers individuals from different social classes and can have economic effects of greater or lesser importance.

What is the relationship between exploitation and oppression?

When economic exploitation begins to emerge, it has the opportunity to combine with different pre-existing situations of disadvantage and oppression, and will also begin to open the way for new ones. From the beginning, a contradictory and mediated relationship between exploitation and oppression is established, different at each moment in the different stages of human history and of the class struggle. At no time do one or the other develop as totally independent processes, but exploitation is the determining, decisive historical fact to which the destiny of the different oppressed as such is subordinated.

Throughout their history, exploiters have used the inequalities they found in their path and imposed new ones, thus increasing their profits and privileges. This greed is the engine that fosters the existence and maintenance of different forms of oppression, since they allow the overexploitation of the oppressed. For example, today, in the United States, Chicanos and Latinos, along with blacks and single women, are the most exploited in the country.

This taking advantage of inequalities to increase profits reaches its maximum expression in the epoch of capitalism's agony, with imperialism, which is based on the exploitation of entire countries, the backward ones, and which, moreover, takes advantage of all existing racial, sexual and national differences, creates new ones, divides the working class between a privileged layer and a more exploited majority, intending to increase the profits of the imperialist capitalists to the limit. Imperialism has imposed the domination of capital on a world scale, with which it not only maintains the exploitation of the workers of the industrialised countries but also expands it with the exploitation of entire countries, taking advantage of the great differences that exist in the development of the productive forces between the great imperialist countries and the colonial and semi-colonial countries. This oppression-exploitation of backward countries is a basic pillar of imperialism, one of its fundamental distinctive features. Economic exploitation becomes the essential content of national oppression under imperialism, even when cultural and national oppression are maintained.

In backward countries, the existence of imperialism establishes a substantial difference between imperialist oppression and other types of oppression (of women, blacks, homosexuals, etc.). The latter have to do with essentially ideological and cultural issues that make up the superstructure, although they have an economic manifestation, overexploitation. Whereas imperialist oppression in backward countries has become economic exploitation and is part of the structure, the very essence of imperialism.

Until the victory of socialism, exploitation will divide the oppressed

If we want to correctly define revolutionary politics for women, it is essential to make a precise location of the historical stage in which we find ourselves. And, then, we have to begin by pointing out that in the struggle for socialism and communism two great stages have been established:⁵¹ The first, which began in 1917 and will extend until the global defeat of imperialism and the counterrevolution, is that of the struggle for the triumph of the world proletarian revolution, through the seizure of power in the different countries, which will eliminate private property of the means of production, the exploitation of wage labour and will also eliminate the national borders of the backward countries. The second stage will be from there to communism.

The seizure of power by the working class in a country is the first step of the socialist revolution. But neither exploitation nor the different forms of oppression can be eliminated in a single country nor

51 This problem has already been the subject of discussion within Trotskyism. Nahuel Moreno, under the pseudonym Darioush Karim, specifies this in his document *The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (available on www.nahuelmoreno.org), arguing with the text of Ernest Mandel, approved by the majority of the USec: *Socialist democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat*, 1977.

overnight; on the contrary, society will resolve these contradictions through permanent clashes and over a prolonged period, during which the central task will be the elimination of imperialism and counterrevolution from the face of the earth. Once this is achieved, the historical epoch of world socialist construction, the transition from socialism to communism will begin.

Undoubtedly, we live in the first stage, and our characterisations and politics cannot ignore it. Inequality problems indeed concern all women of all classes, because they are all oppressed as women. But as long as we are in this first stage, that is, as long as imperialist and capitalist economic exploitation exists, the majority of them will have to face every day the problems common to all the exploited in the world, regardless of their sex, race or colour and, beyond the commonalities that arise from oppression, the majority of them will be separated as if by a chasm from the minority of exploiting women.

These common problems, which unite the exploited of the world with iron bonds, are hunger, misery, unemployment, and the need to fight together against the bosses who exploit them mercilessly, until the struggle for political power of the workers is considered as the only way to solve their problems once and for all. This means that the majority of working women have the same central concern as working men: how to feed themselves and their children, how to have a roof over their heads and clothing, how to get a job or a better wage. It is for these objectives that they carry out their daily struggles, participate in unions or follow the large workers' parties. For us, it is an undeniable fact that the situation in which the exploited masses live or suffer daily is what leads them to downplay or ignore many of the problems that affect important groups of people, even half of humanity, as it happens in the case of women.

Throughout this first stage, the struggles against the oppression of women and against all other forms of oppression – even the only one decisive for imperialism, that of the backward countries – are crossed and torn apart by the struggle of the workers against their exploitation and for the socialist revolution. In all cases of oppression, there are, to a greater or lesser extent, exploiters and exploited, and this means that, above the community of interests they have as oppressed, there is an inevitable division regarding their fundamental interests; some benefit from the exploitation and will be in favour of maintaining it; others suffer from it and will seek to abolish it. The overwhelming weight of their daily misery will mark the struggle and dynamics of the latter, over and above their character as the oppressed.

The only point of unity that a bourgeois woman has with a working-class woman, a reactionary or reformist with a revolutionist, is her oppression as a woman. Hence, there is the possibility of a common struggle of all of them for some of those common democratic demands, for their equality and their rights. But their unity as women will be born with that activity and will die with it. Women of different classes cannot unite, for example, in the fight for a list of demands (a bargaining agreement or a labour contract) favourable to working women.

The bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women who, like those of many backward countries, are accustomed to still having one or more maids, will never support a struggle for the payment of the urban minimum wage for domestic service. Nor is it possible to imagine upper-middle-class or bourgeois women opening the doors of their homes, in implementation of an urban reform, so that the women of the “shantytowns” and their young children occupy the sumptuous rooms, or putting them at the disposal of housewives' and working women's committees to distribute them. And so, we could go on and on until we reach the case of a general workers' strike or the socialist revolution.

The unified mobilisation of women can only take place in specific situations and in an episodic way, as a unit of action around some particular demands. The struggle will be organised around one or two slogans and will culminate when this fight is won or lost. The multi-class and democratic character of women's struggles assigns them their temporary, fleeting destiny.

This situation will not change until imperialism is definitively defeated on a global scale. Meanwhile, the workers of the countries where the workers' revolution has triumphed, and the exploited masses of the rest of the world, will have as a priority task the anti-imperialist struggle and the extension of the socialist revolution to the entire world. The tasks inherent to internal socialist construction will also be subordinated to this central objective.

When the definitive and global defeat of imperialism and all its allies in the counterrevolution is achieved, humanity will enter a second stage, which will be the transition from socialism to communism.

In the new society that will be built, priorities will shift from the political-military field to social activities to raise the standard of living and, therefore, the annihilation of all inequalities and privileges.

In these future times, the struggle of women for the definitive liquidation of their oppression may take on greater dimensions because, once the central problem of exploitation is solved, society will be able to give increasing importance to this problem.

The patriarchal oppression of women by men is one of the most aberrant issues in our society and one that brings the most misery and misfortunes, since it is neither more nor less than the degradation of one-half of humanity by the other. This problem is mixed with the most intimate aspects of human life and, for the same reason, clashes with the most deeply rooted prejudices and the worst customs. That's why it's so hard to solve.

Due to the severity and depth of the problem, women's struggle against their oppression threatens society from top to bottom. Like nowhere else, it is in the family and in personal relationships where the great changes in humanity are reflected the slowest. Women will surely play the vanguard role in the construction of these new human relations, banishing machismo, property relations over the family, children and women, ending the hypocrisy of bourgeois society, fully developing their physical, intellectual, artistic, and sexual potential, perhaps becoming the driving force of general progress. It is very likely, then, that the struggle of women will play a transitional role towards the new communist society, in which the establishment of full human relationships will finally be achieved, where, on the one hand, the maximum expression of individuality is reached and, on the other, the highest development in social relationships.

Proletarians of the world, unite!

In her political proposal for women's struggles, Comrade Waters does not make any distinction between these two great stages. For her, there is only one path: the growing organisation of women united for their rights, which goes through the socialist revolution and will continue until communism.

For this very extensive stage, she proposes only one policy: the sisterhood of women, the construction of autonomous and unitary movements of all women and in all countries.

The reality of the class struggle is that of El Salvador. There, bourgeois women have been mobilising *en masse* against "communism", and they take refuge in the bourgeois neighbourhoods, together with vigilante gangs, to fight against the working and revolutionary men and women who are against the dictatorship. It is the reality of Nicaragua, where women actively participated in the Sandinista guerrilla, weapons in hand against the Somozists and their women.

This is the harsh reality. We are in an epoch in which violent confrontation between enemy classes is increasingly inevitable, in which the entire society is in permanent clash and in which all the parties of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat confront each other, now politically, tomorrow physically, in civil war.

In this political and armed struggle against the bourgeoisie, the main enemy existing within the ranks of the workers is class conciliation, popular frontism. Because when the most irreconcilable struggle is posed, they call on the workers to collaborate with the bourgeoisie, thus causing the condition of all the defeats that the working class has suffered, as in Spain in 1936 or in Chile in 1973. Trotskyism calls all workers to trust only in themselves, to become politically independent from the bourgeoisie, to break with the reformist leaders who lead them to conciliation, and to take power under the leadership of the revolutionary party. Our politics always seeks to divide the waters sharply from the bourgeoisie. The politics of the reformists is to mix and unite the poles in dispute.

Comrade Waters bows to them and proposes a women's popular front as the strategic policy of Trotskyism. There is no problem in considering a call for unified women's struggles, which may be right at a certain moment. The crime is to impose the construction of a unitary and permanent movement, which will necessarily subject working women to conciliation with women who respond politically to the bourgeoisie.

For all this, we defend a policy completely opposite to that of Waters. We reject the “strategy” of the permanent and universal autonomous movement of all women, and systematically we seek the independence of workers — both men and women — from the bourgeoisie and from the front populist conciliators. We continue along the path of the Third International, which clearly called on the communists to dissuade “the women workers against entering into any form of alliance and cooperation with the bourgeois feminists”. And we repeat, today, their words: “Communism will be achieved not by ‘united efforts of all women of different classes’, but by the united struggle of all the exploited.”⁵²

52 “Thesis on methods of work among the women of the Communist Party”, adopted at the 20th Session, July 8th, 1921, *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International*, published by the Contemporary Publishing Association, New York City, 1921, p. 160.

Chapter IV

Method and Program for Women's Struggle

In the fourth chapter, Mary Alice Waters (MAW) proposes various "tactics" to advance her organisational strategy: the autonomous and independent movement of all women. At the same time, she also points out that it should be fundamentally working-class in its composition and leadership. She adds the impetus for a "united front" that would respond to the Third International's orientations towards women, taking the phrase "there are no exclusively women's problems" as a call to the working class to address the problems of oppression faced by all women.

The authors highlight the relative nature of any definition, noting that both tactic and strategy are situated within a specific context. Currently, in relation to the imperialist era we have been experiencing since the First World War, the revolutionary party has two permanent "strategies": to promote the mobilisation of the masses and to build the party that will channel that mobilisation towards seizing power. Specific tactics will be considered in relation to this objective. They point out the contradictions of MAW in simultaneously proposing an autonomous, multi-class movement alongside working-class slogans. They also note that the phrase "there are no exclusively female problems" was intended as a warning to working-class and poor women against bourgeois liberal feminism.

Finally, regarding the proposed slogans and program, the authors criticise MAW for raising several valid slogans while ignoring that, for Trotskyism, the core of the revolutionary program must be the struggle for a workers' and people's government, and that tactics are organised around this objective to connect with all the struggles of the exploited and oppressed sectors.

Strategy and tactics

For Waters, “Thus our support for building an independent women’s liberation movement is part of the strategy of the revolutionary working-class party.” This strategy goes from now until socialism: “Thus even after the revolution the independent women’s liberation movement will play an indispensable role in assuring the ability of the working class as a whole, male and female, to carry this process through to a successful conclusion.”

Waters confuses strategy and tactics. Strategy is a long-term and tactics are the means to reach that goal. Therefore, tactics are determined by strategy. We may say that our strategy for the French trade union movement is the construction of a single central organisation, and all the steps that lead us to it are tactical. At the same time, the merger of regional federations, which is an objective step towards the single, tactical central, can be strategic for us at a certain moment, by which we mean that it is our great objective at that moment, and we orient all our work to achieve it. That is, what is tactical can become strategic and vice versa: what is strategic, at a time, can be only a tactical step to achieve our final strategy.

For us, the Fourth International only has one long-term strategy or, rather, two closely related strategic objectives: the permanent mobilisation of the working class and its allies to seize power and the building of strong mass Trotskyist parties that win the leadership of that mobilisation. In relation to these objectives, everything we do is tactical; they are the different steps that will lead us to them. We use all the means, all the slogans, all the forms of struggle and organisation that favour this mobilisation and the building of the party, and we discard everything that goes against it. For example, we work in the trade union movement to the extent that it strengthens the independent organisation of the workers, allows them to improve their living conditions and thus trust in their own strength, but we do not set the party’s final and historical objective for all times and places to make unions.

This same thing happens, and even more so, in the work among women: we try to mobilise and group them, to achieve demands, but we do not make it a party strategy to build an autonomous feminist movement in all countries, and from there to communism. Regarding our final strategy, the way of working with women is absolutely tactical.

According to Waters’ document, there would be at least one other strategic goal as important as those we propose: building the independent women’s movement.

We warn about the danger involved in accepting Waters’ formulation, which means imposing on our organisations, regardless of the differences between countries, continents, the situation of the class struggle and/or our relative strength, a schema of organisational behaviour, a permanent strategy from here to socialism: “building the autonomous movement.”

The different tactics that, according to Waters, would lead to the autonomous movement

Further proof of Waters’s lack of comprehension of the problems of strategy and tactics is given by her examples of “tactics”. “Women’s liberation groups”, “work through existing organisations”, groups with a “socialist program”, “coalitions”, or trade union work are all tactics that can lead, according to our “strength”, that of the women’s liberation forces and the other forces, to their strategy: the autonomous and independent women’s movement.⁵³

But most of these tactics go against her strategy. For example, if you build groups on a “broad socialist program”, you “subordinate” them to a “political tendency”, when you have previously told us that you

53 “The forms through which we work can vary greatly depending on the concrete circumstances in which our organisations find themselves. (...) Factors that must be taken into account include the strength of our own forces; the size, character, and political level of the women’s liberation forces; the strength of the liberal, Social Democratic, Stalinist, and centrist forces against whom we must contend; and the general political context in which we are working. It’s a tactical question whether we should organise women’s liberation groups on a broad socialist program, work through existing organisations of the women’s liberation movement, build broad action coalitions around specific issues, work through trade-union commissions or caucuses in other mass organisations, combine several of these activities, or work through some altogether different forms.”

should not “subordinate to the decisions or policy needs of any political tendency”. Therefore, her tactics may lead her to jettison her strategy.

What strategy do we adopt when working with women?

In relative terms, it is permissible to speak of the party’s strategy for work among women, and we can specify what objective the party has in working among women. By answering this question, we are not innovating practically anything, but we are only picking up the tradition of Marx, Lenin and the Third International, and the *Transitional Program*. The party works among women, and especially among working women, to mobilise them towards the seizure of power and draw thousands of them into the ranks of the party. This is and must be the strategy of the Fourth International. And we say this because women are fundamental for the socialist revolution and for the building of a socialist society, and because the full liberation of women will only be possible with socialism.

Our party is and will be the champion in promoting the struggle for the concrete demands of women, especially the exploited and oppressed, so that in this mobilisation for their demands, we win over working women and, if we can, one or another of the bourgeoisie, for the struggle for power and for the revolutionary party.

The *Transitional Program* says: “The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class; consequently, among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness and readiness to sacrifice. (...) Turn to the woman worker! These slogans are emblazoned on the banner of the Fourth International.

And the Third International: “Hence, the direct task of the Communist Parties: to spread the influence of the Communist Party to the widest circles of the women population of their countries, (...) to free them from the influence of the bourgeoisie and the compromising parties, and educating them to be real fighters for Communism, and therefore for the complete enfranchisement of the women.”⁵⁴

“As the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is the vital question before the proletariat of all the capitalist countries, and the construction of Communism is the important task of those countries where the dictatorship is already in the hands of the workers, the Third Congress of the Communist International maintains that the conquest of power by the proletariat, as well as the achievement of Communism in those countries where the capitalist state has already been overthrown, can be realised only with the active participation of the wide masses of the proletarian and semi-proletarian women.”⁵⁵

This concern of the Third International regarding a specific sector of women (the most exploited, the workers) does not mean that it forgot the existence of the rest of the women, those who did not follow the banner of the International. But its reference to the rest of these women was in the opposite sense to that advocated by Waters: “Wherever the question of the conquest of power arises, the Communist Parties must consider the great danger to the revolution represented by the inert, uninformed masses of women workers, housewives, employees, peasant women, not liberated from the influence of the bourgeois church and bourgeois superstitions, and not connected in some way or other with the great liberating movement of Communism. Unless the masses of women of the East and West are drawn into this movement, they inevitably become the stronghold of the bourgeoisie and the object of counter-revolutionary propaganda.”⁵⁶

For Waters, the party’s strategy among women is towards all of them and for the building of an autonomous and independent movement that organises them all. It is within this strategic multi-class movement, with women of all classes, which, for Waters, has to be “basically working-class in composition, orientation, and leadership”, that “we try to build the strongest possible wing (...) of those who share our class-struggle perspectives. (...) We strive to recruit the most conscious and combative to the revolutionary party.”

54 “Thesis on methods of work among the women of the Communist Party”, adopted at the 20th Session, July 8th, 1921, *Theses and Resolutions adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit., p. 158.

55 Ibid., p. 156.

56 Ibid., p. 157.

Let no one say that this is the same as what the Third International said! It is the opposite: Lenin and Trotsky started from the division of society into classes, from the need to independently group working women to go against the bourgeois women. Waters starts from the women's unity, and within this, she calls for the workers to group together. They are two antagonistic strategic orientations.

We agree with Waters that we must promote, if independent feminist movements arise, the “strongest possible wing (...) of those who share our class-struggle perspectives”, where will fight for it to be “basically working-class in composition, orientation, and leadership”, that we will educate women in the understanding of the class struggle, that we want to win as many women as we can for our party. But we are perfectly aware that this will lead, sooner or later, to the end of the independent feminist movement as such. Waters is locked in an insoluble contradiction: on the one hand, her fundamental strategic objective is to build the autonomous movement; on the other hand, she wants to form within it the strongest possible wing among those who share the perspective of class struggle, making it increasingly working-class. These are two antagonistic objectives. If the decisive thing is the autonomous movement, the building of the class wing must be subordinated to it. If the decisive factor is the class wing, the better it does, the faster the autonomous movement will split or disintegrate.

An incorrect relationship between mobilisation and organisation

One of the most serious consequences of enshrining the building of the autonomous movement as an absolute, long-term strategy is to put the permanent mobilisation of women in a straitjacket, placing a limit beyond which it cannot go. Waters says that her fundamental method of struggle is mobilisation, but she proposes an organisational strategy, the construction of a movement, and she subordinates mobilisation to it.

For us, mobilisation is above organisation and subordinates it. If we could give any rule that governs our behaviour, it is precisely that of promoting the permanent mobilisation of working and poor men and women for the seizure of power, and after this, to deepen and extend the socialist revolution. In this sense, the different organisational forms that take place in the process of struggle for the seizure of power – the unions, the committees, the soviets – and even after it, become a tactical, secondary aspect, which adapts to the needs of the mobilisation, which are useful if they promote it and are useless if they hold it back.

Therefore, we do not glorify any organisation as absolute, because the mobilisation and the class struggle will show us along the way which ones must be developed and maintained, and which ones have been left behind, since no organisation on Earth has guaranteed a progressive and revolutionary character for life. If for us every organisation presupposes some degree of mobilisation and arises or is destroyed as a product of it, for Waters, on the contrary, there is a categorical organisational imperative, called “independent women's movement”, that must be expressed in mobilisation.

In some parts of her document, she refers to the “struggles” and “mobilisations” of women, but she promptly replaces these terms that refer to concrete facts, to concrete struggles, with the abstraction of the “movement”. So, she talks about “building an independent women's liberation movement”, “the mass women's liberation movement we strive to build”, “we orient the women's liberation movement towards ...”.

Waters defines the term: “By the women's movement we mean all the women who organise themselves at one level or another to struggle against the oppression imposed on them by this society: women's liberation groups, consciousness-raising groups, neighbourhood groups, student groups, groups organised at workplaces, trade-union commissions, organisations of women of oppressed nationalities, lesbian-feminist groups, action coalitions around specific demands.” She clearly says that a movement is all women who organise. Therefore, she places before mobilisation and concrete struggles and organisation, an antediluvian “movement”. For this reason, she says, immediately afterwards, that “the women's movement is characterised by its heterogeneity” as if they were different positions within the same unit.

For her, “the movement” mobilises: “We try to lead the movement to address itself first and foremost to mobilising women of the working class ...”. “Lead the movement” so that it “address[es] itself...”, is putting things backwards! The movement does not pre-exist the mobilisations; it is the mobilisations that,

in their development, will or will not form what could be called a movement. Waters starts from organisational results and places them as a principle.

We can point out the repeated insoluble contradictions: her method of struggle is mobilisation, and especially that of “the women of the working class and oppressed nationalities.” If her method becomes generalised and gains strength, if working, black, exploited and poor women of all kinds mobilise *en masse*, they will surely blow up her strategy of the autonomous unitary movement. Nor does the method of struggle that she promotes lead to her strategy.

What kind of “united front” does Waters propose?

Regarding methods of struggle, Waters proposes that the best way “to mobilise masses of women in action” is often “through united-front-type action campaigns”, because “through such united-front-type actions we can bring the greatest power to bear against the capitalist government and educate women and the working class concerning their own strength”, and she says that “such united-front-type action campaigns are of particular importance in deepening the interaction between the independent women’s movement and the labour movement”.

These are not their only virtues; they also open up incalculable opportunities for propaganda: “Insofar as the liberal ‘friends’ of women, the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and trade-union bureaucrats refuse to support such united campaigns for women’s needs, they will isolate and expose themselves by their own inaction, opposition, or willingness to subordinate women’s needs to their search for an alliance with the supposedly ‘progressive’ sectors of the ruling class.” It is also very useful if those leaderships accept and things really get moving: “And if mass pressure obliges them to support such actions, this can only broaden the mass appeal of the campaigns and increase the contradictions within the reformist and liberal forces.” As if all this were not enough, it also fits our size: the usefulness of united front type campaigns “is all the more true (sic), given the relative weakness of the sections of the Fourth International and the relative strength of the liberals and our reformist, class-collaborationist opponents.”

Once again, it is necessary to specify what Comrade Waters is proposing, and, from there, see whether it is correct or not. We hold that Waters is proposing that her women’s movements be a permanent multi-class united front, of all women, that she intends to put an equal sign to this proposal with the proposal of the workers’ united front that the Third International promoted, that this is totally incorrect, and that towards women it is a matter of advancing a unity of action around specific demands.

Let us first distinguish what unity of action is and what a united front is. The first, as its name indicates, means doing a common action, just that. There it is born, and there it ends. A typical example of unity of action is the unity around the abortion campaign in Italy, France or the United States. It is also the unity that was achieved with different parties, personalities, unions and institutions for human rights, to carry out some activity for the freedom of the Trotskyists in Iran. In both cases, the most diverse social groups participate – and it is very good that this happens – from the Fourth International to personalities and parties or other bourgeois institutions, passing through the entire intermediate range of social democrats, Stalinists, union bureaucrats, etc.

On the contrary, the united front implies a certain organisational continuity, a unity with some permanence around some specific slogans or even an entire program, which brings together individuals, unions, or political organisations.

Let’s see what the “tactic of the united proletarian front” was that the Third International promoted. This tactic received its baptism in 1921, at the Third Congress of the Third International, when the famous “Theses on the united proletarian front” were voted on. The Third International advanced it as a decisive tactic in the following situation: imperialist capitalism was entering a stage of recovery of relative equilibrium and managed to survive the acute crisis in which the Russian Revolution triumphed. This stabilisation of imperialism meant an offensive against the standard of living of the workers. The working class of the different countries was fundamentally grouped into two large workers’ organisations: the Second International— which in turn was divided into the Second and the Second and a Half – and the

Third International. This situation demanded a unified response from the workers to defend their standard of living, and hence the need for the united front tactic.

In short, it was a front of the working class, its workers' organisations, to ensure that all workers strike together against imperialist capitalism, despite the division of their leaderships, and to follow their union organisations and have different policies. What was sought was a unity of class, and to achieve this, this tactic of carrying out common struggles around certain slogans was considered. Between April and May 1922, in numerous European countries, there were large demonstrations in response to the joint call of the three Internationals.

As content, this tactic did not imply anything new. The unit of the working class manifested itself in their struggles from the beginning. Unions and Soviets are typical examples of a workers' united front. Riazanov defined the First International as a workers' front, and Trotsky did the same with the Paris Commune. All these are organisms of different types and with different objectives, but all have in common to advance the unified struggle of the working class for some demands, above the divisions of their leaderships.

Of course, another class other than the working class can have its own united fronts, and there may also be fronts of different classes or different class sectors, whether or not they advance it as an explicit tactic. Examples of bourgeois united front are parliaments or the European Common Market. In Colombia, for 16 years, there was a peculiar agreement between the two traditional parties to govern the country, which was rightly called the National Front. The Peruvian APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) or Peronism in Argentina were, at certain times, in fact, multi-class fronts even though they expressed themselves in a political party, to the extent that they gave political direction and organised massively important bourgeois sectors together with the majority of the people and the workers.

In 1935, the Stalinist Third International baptised another conception of the front, but no longer workers' but multi-class: the Popular Front that promoted the seventh congress that same year. This was nothing more nor less than the unity between the workers' social democratic and communist parties with sectors of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Here, too, there was nothing new in what this name meant; As Trotsky said, it was "nothing more than the old class conciliation but with another name". In numerous countries, this multi-class front existed both as a government front and as a minority interparty agreement, for example, in Spain, France, Chile, etc.

Not only since the third international, but since the origins of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, the front sponsored by the revolutionists is the workers' front. Just as we are for making circumstantial agreements, units of action, even with "the Devil's grandmother", we are only for making a united front within the working class, between their class organisations and their parties. Moreover, regardless of the tactical expression that it acquires at a certain moment and place, we consider that the workers' front, as a synonym for unity in the struggle of the working class, is one of the fundamental principles of the revolutionary struggle.

Since its birth, it has been a basic policy of Trotskyism to fight to the death against all multi-class or class conciliation fronts, even if they are "with the shadow of the bourgeoisie" or without any of it, since these inevitably lead to the political subjection of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. Trotsky constantly insisted that for a Trotskyist party, it is inadmissible to make fronts, that is, more or less permanent political agreements with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties, just as he denounced the treacherous policy of conciliation of communists and socialists towards them.

An example: just as the policy of the 1936 Popular Front in France is condemnable, the Unity of the Left that was made in 1974 is positive because despite the equally treacherous character of the leaderships of both fronts, the first one was leading the working class to the capitulation to the bourgeoisie, and the second was a unity within the class, which could strengthen the struggle. At the same time, Trotsky spoke in support of measures or struggles that were against imperialism, even when the bourgeoisie promoted them, but calling for the proletariat to maintain the most absolute political and organisational independence from it.

Referring to the struggle for national liberation, he said:

“The Bolshevik Party defended the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, *with methods of proletarian class struggle* (emphasis in original), entirely rejecting the charlatan ‘anti-imperialist’ blocs with the numerous petty-bourgeois ‘national’ parties of czarist Russia”.⁵⁷

Referring to the agrarian issue in Mexico, he said:

“In every case where it is a direct fight against the foreign imperialists or their reactionary fascist agents, we give revolutionary support, preserving the full political independence of our organisation, of our program, of our party, and the full freedom of our criticism.”⁵⁸

Trotskyism does not promote multi-class fronts and, moreover, it denounces them because it considers them either a suicide or at least a brake on the struggle of the proletariat. When in reality there is a multi-class front that tries to advance positive measures in the fight against imperialism, as may have been the case of some governments or large mass parties in Latin America, it is possible to support some of its measures, as long as they give “a frontal struggle against foreign imperialism or its reactionary fascist agents”, and we support these measures “with methods of proletarian class struggle”, rejecting “blocs” with them and “preserving the total political independence of our organisation, our program, our party and total freedom of criticism”, and our final objective is to split from the bourgeoisie the proletariat and its allies, to gain their leadership ourselves.

So far, anyone could ask us why we make such a fuss. Let’s just simply say that Waters has gotten a little confused, that where she says united front, she should say unity of action, and that’s it.

But besides completely confusing unity of action with a united front, Waters gets us into a much more serious problem, because what she wants is not unity of action — regardless of what she calls it — but a multi-class united front of women, and there is no valid confusion that can hide this position. The successful culmination of this orientation is nothing more and nothing less than achieving the building of the “autonomous movement”, which we define as a shameful call for a multi-class united front.

Our policy for women is consistent with the entire policy of Trotskyism towards problems or tasks that affect various classes. The broadest unity of action for all possible activities in pursuit of common demands and the most zealous defence of the political and organisational independence of working women in general, of the poorest and most exploited.

We could work in unity of action with all groups of women, even bourgeois, around a specific and determined slogan, for example, the struggle for abortion, for equal rights or for divorce. Tactically, we can have relations of all kinds with women’s organisations led by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties, but our motto remains the same as it was almost 50 years ago: “We will only reach communism by uniting in the struggle of all the exploited and not for the unity of the female forces of the two opposing classes.” We form a “united front” within the working class. For this reason, we reject Waters’ strategy of “united front campaigns” with women of all classes, which culminate in the construction of the famous “autonomous movement.”

Waters finishes sinking when she says that we are much smaller in size than the rest of the forces. Where it does not exist, she wants to form a multi-class front (which is always disastrous), and she already anticipates that we will be a small force within it. Since when is it a Trotskyist policy to create a multi-class front to put ourselves inside and be a small force there? What policy will this “united front” have?

In case there is any doubt as to what Waters’s position is concerning the “united front” of women in the style of “proletarian front unity”, she says it verbatim in a writing from 1972.

“Bebel points out: ‘Despite everything, the enemy sisters have, to a greater extent than the male population —divided as the latter is in the class struggle— many points of contact on which they can, even if they march separately, strike ‘together’.’” Waters makes this comment on Bebel’s words: “Bebel’s formula, march separately, strike together, classic definition of the united front tactic, was proposed more than 40 years before it became the slogan of the Third International, under Lenin and Trotsky.”

57 Trotsky, Leon: “The Agrarian and National Questions, Remarks on the Draft Theses of The Workers Party of South Africa”, 20 April 1935, *Fourth International*, Vol. 6 No. 11, November 1945, pp. 345–347. (MIA, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1935/04/wpsa.htm, consulted on 16 March 2026.)

58 “A Discussion with Trotsky on Latin American Questions”, *Intercontinental Press*, Vol 13, No 19, May 19, 1975, p. 668.

Unfortunately for Waters, the aforementioned formula of “marching separately and striking together” is an old definition of unity of action, which was what August Bebel suggested for women’s struggles. In case anyone has doubts that we are distorting Bebel’s thinking and unfairly criticising Waters’ positions, let us resort to Trotsky’s use of the same “formula”.

Referring to the struggles of the Indian proletariat, he said about the support for measures against imperialism: “This support must be inspired by a firm distrust of the national bourgeoisie and their petty-bourgeois agencies. We must not confound our organisation, our program, our banner with theirs for a moment. We must observe the old rule strictly: march separately, strike together.”⁵⁹

At this point, it is clear that this slip of the pen between the definition of unity of action and the “classic definition of a united front” that our author committed is not due to a lack of erudition or memory, but to profound political reasons.

“There are no exclusively women’s issues”

This famous phrase, from which a whole programmatic orientation emerges, is from the Third International. Comrade Waters endorses it in her document, but to say again the opposite of what the Third stated.

Waters says: “We maintain that there are no exclusively ‘women’s issues’. Every question of concern to the female half of humanity is likewise a broader social question of vital interest to the working class as a whole.”

Here, Waters is telling the working class that they have to worry about the fundamental social problem of female oppression. She alerts them that it is not just a women’s issue, that it not only concerns all women but also the working class.

In the same part, she has drawn another conclusion from the same phrase: that it is not necessary to make a revolutionary Marxist women’s party; it is enough to build an independent women’s liberation movement and a mixed revolutionary Marxist party.

For Waters, then, the phrase is fundamentally addressed to the working class and the mixed revolutionary party to tell them: “Be careful, notice that the problems of women, of all women, are not exclusive to them. You will go nowhere if you do not incorporate the demands of all women as a fundamental part of your program and if you do not build an autonomous women’s movement.”

The Third International, with that formulation, wanted to say just the opposite: it was directed at poor and working-class women, to warn them: “Be mindful, don’t be fooled by the exclusively feminine problems that would unite you with bourgeois women.” Let’s look at the full quote:

“The Third Congress of the Comintern confirms the basic proposition of revolutionary Marxism, i.e., that there is no ‘specific woman question’ and no ‘specific women’s movement,’ and, that every sort of alliance of working women with bourgeois feminism, as well as any support by the women workers of the treacherous tactics of the social-compromisers and opportunists leads to the undermining of the forces of the proletariat, delaying thereby the triumph of the social revolution and the advent of Communism, and thus also postponing the great hour of women’s ultimate liberation.

“Communism will be achieved not by ‘united efforts of all women of different classes’, but by the united struggle of all the exploited.

“In their own interests, the masses of proletarian women should support the revolutionary tactics of the Communist Party and take a most active and direct part in all mass actions and all forms of civil war on a national and international scope.”⁶⁰

This quote alone is another death sentence for Waters’ document, if it is intended to be Marxist. While she calls on the working class and the revolutionary party to build, as a matter of life or death, a

59 Trotsky, Leon: “Letter on India”, 24 November 1939, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939–40)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p. 109.

60 “Thesis on methods of work among the women of the Communist Party”, adopted at the 20th Session, July 8th, 1921, *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit., p. 160.

multi-class movement where the working class and the bourgeoisie come together, the Third International calls on working and exploited women to flee, like from the plague, from any relationship with bourgeois feminism.

There are no specifically women's issues because the fate of women is linked to the fate of the working class and all the exploited in the world. Because only the seizure of power by the proletariat will open the doors for the definitive liberation of women. And for the same reason, there is no special program for women.

The *Transitional Program* governs an entire historical stage that goes from the emergence of imperialism to the seizure of power and the triumph of socialism in the world. The axis of its slogans is the interest of the working class, the decisive class and the only one that can consistently lead to its central objective: the seizure of power and the triumph of socialism. But it also welcomes the demands of the peasants, of women, of students, of all the oppressed, because all of them will be increasingly harmed every day by the existence of imperialism and, then, the working class can win them as allies to take power, mobilising them alongside itself in the struggle to definitively defeat imperialism and achieve the liberation of all the exploited and oppressed. This is why we do not have special programs for the oppressed, even apart from our *Transitional Program*, but rather we support their main demands as part of our program and try to win the majority of them for our main task: the struggle for the power of the working class.

All of Waters's attempts to borrow some phrase from the classics to support her positions have the same calamitous end. To insist on her insoluble contradictions, we could ask her a question: how can we have an entire long-term strategy, and even after taking power, around a problem that does not exist as a specific problem? Waters faces a dead end every time she tries to reconcile her positions with the traditional ones of Marxism and Trotskyism.

What program for the autonomous movement?

Waters makes organisation an end in itself, which is above mobilisation. Also, that end in itself is above a program that gives it a reason for being. If we search through the entire document, we will find that the famous independent movement that we must build has no program. Or in any case, we can say that its program is... to build the autonomous movement.

With a stroke of the pen, Waters resolves this complex dilemma of a long-term strategy for all countries without a program, appealing — just to make a change! — to the Third International, taking the same point that we noted in the previous subheading: “While we raise demands that deal with the specific oppression of women, we have no separate program for women's liberation. Our demands are an integral part of our *transitional program* for the socialist revolution.”

Once again, from an apparently common phrase, two antagonistic positions emerge. The Third International did not raise a special program for women because it called on all working women, the poor, the most oppressed and exploited, to occupy a prominent place in the struggle of all workers for communism, the same call that the *Transitional Program* makes.

Waters is forced not to give a program to her entire strategy from here to socialism because wherever she gives a program, her entire construction collapses. A program has to respond to the interests of one class or another. If Waters — as must be her dream — were to propose a program or, much less than that, an orientation that responds to the interests of the working class, it would be repudiated by the women who are part of the dominant class, by the exploiters.

But we are sure that, unlike the Third International, Waters is never going to tell women to organise in the autonomous movement that she wants to build, that she does not raise a program for said movement because, for her, as a Trotskyist, her only program is summarised in three words: dictatorship of the proletariat. She is not going to tell those women that, like all the oppressed who want to fight consistently for their rights, they have an essential and common point among all and with the working class, the fundamental point of struggle of our time: the taking of power by the proletariat and the establishment of its dictatorship.

Once again, we find ourselves faced with Waters' insoluble contradictions: a whole strategy, for all the countries of the world, leading from here to the triumph of socialism throughout the planet, which, as she says somewhere in passing, she intends to fight for... divorce and childcare.

A maximum and ultra-leftist program for the family and women's liberation

Since Waters does not see the complex and painful processes that the dissolution of the family entails for workers, she develops in the face of it an entire ideal program for the reorganisation of society, which includes "free child-care", "free medical care", "systematic development of social services", "healthful, uncrowded housing".

And later she says: "The family as an economic unit cannot be 'abolished' by fiat. It can only be replaced over time. The goal of the socialist revolution is to create economic and social alternatives that are superior to the present family institution and better able to provide for the needs currently met, however poorly, by the family, so that personal relationships will be a matter of free choice and not of economic compulsion. To ultraleft propaganda and agitation for the "abolition" of the family, we counterpose...."

At least there is an element of sanity in her analysis since she rejects the slogan of "abolition" of the family, a slogan that would result in her being kicked out of several working-class homes, but she replaces it with another one almost as ultra-leftist as that one: "economic and social alternatives that are superior" that we will only have after a "long term".

What good is it for the majority of workers, especially those in semi-colonial and colonial countries, to know that in the "long term" after the revolution, they will be able to have cafeterias, daycare centres, housing, etc.? As general propaganda about socialism, it's perfectly fine. Surely the workers will also applaud these proposals and hope that one day the world will be like this. But for everyday reality, for the daily destruction of the working-class and peasant family, for the stultifying work of five-year-old children, for the prostitution of women, what does she propose? Nothing.

Our program for the family includes, as its first concrete point, not of propaganda, the defence of the workers' and peasants' families. We fight for the unions' lists of demands to grant subsidies to workers according to the number of children; we can tactically propose that the state pay women a salary for their work at home, we could propose, as a matter of policy, that the state pay women a wage for their domestic work, and that there be leisure and holiday centres for families, housing plans, etc.

We leave for general propaganda the transformation of daily life under socialism, the replacement of the current family by a "higher social order", etc. As we unfortunately or fortunately live in this stage of the class struggle where we are still fighting to defeat imperialism, we will have to leave the politics for their new societies to the socialists of the new societies. For now, we must deal with solving the daily problems of class struggle and directing our efforts towards the destruction of imperialism worldwide, so that our successors can do and practice what Waters proposes for today.

A "transitional program" for each "sector"?

In the SWP, there is a permanent proposal to seek and raise a "*transitional program*" or a "socialist program" for blacks, for women, for each of the famous "sectors". Furthermore, this is one of the main tasks of the party. The titles of its central documents are illustrative: "A socialist program for women's liberation", "A transitional program for black liberation". In her document, Waters is less clear but ultimately has the same position since she raises a whole specific program for women, which would be "part of the Party program".

Is it permissible to speak of a "transitional program" for women, blacks or other multi-class groups? It is, if we understand this as the search for particular slogans that can drive the mobilisation of oppressed groups, especially the poorest and most exploited, and that orient this mobilisation towards the working class and the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This particular "*transitional program*" would be nothing more than the combination of slogans that act as a "bridge" between the essentially democratic

struggles, typical of the oppressed, and the struggle of the poorest and exploited, together with the workers, for taking power.

Her program is not structured around the task of the workers' government

Waters' program for party work among women is "an integral part of our *transitional program* for the socialist revolution". We agree up to that point, but nowhere in her program does she raise the central task for all working women, which is the dictatorship of the proletariat. The last group of slogans, which refers to the reorganisation of society to eliminate the domestic slavery of women, does not say that this reorganisation has to be carried out for the working women, under their control and direction, and that, for this, the working men and women must establish a workers' government, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore, their slogans for collective laundries, collective dining halls, daycare centres, etc., are reduced to being simple requests for any bourgeois government.

The fact that her program is not structured around the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat makes it appear as the sum of minimal, democratic, transitory slogans, without a clear axis or course.

It does raise democratic slogans, such as "complete economic and social equality of women", for "an end to the hypocrisy, debasement, and coercion of bourgeois and feudal family laws"; some minimal, such as maternity leave; and a transitional, sliding scale of work hours and wages. But they appear as an arithmetic sum, and not as part of the slogans that we are going to raise on the path of the struggle for power.

We are certain that if we secure the program of the CLUW (Coalition of Labour Union Women), the US women's trade union organisation, whose slogans will surely be of a trade unionist nature; the program of NOW, whose slogans will be more democratic; and that of the radical feminists and self-awareness groups, who will surely emphasise the struggle for control over the body and the destruction of the family, and if we mix them all and give them a good stir, the result will be Waters' programme. Moreover, we are certain that neither the CLUW's program, nor that of NOW, nor that of the radical feminists, nor that of the self-awareness groups (if they have one), raises the need for the proletariat to seize power. Nor does Waters's.

Chapter V

The need for a revolutionary party

Chapter Five summarises the central theme of the book: the debate over the role and necessity of building a revolutionary party. Mary Alice Waters (MAW) argues that “the struggle for socialism requires both a mass feminist movement and a mass revolutionary party”. She points out that the absence of a mass feminist movement would explain why revolutions took place but failed to succeed. In other words, she places the necessity of both on practically the same level of importance.

The authors, on the contrary, uphold the ‘classical’ conception of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky regarding the indispensable need for a revolutionary party to lead the triumph of the socialist revolution. A conception that was perverted by Stalin’s rise to power and the Soviet bureaucracy in the former USSR. In her work, MAW ignores the existence of the various political parties active in the struggles. In doing so, she gives free rein to the anti-party currents operating within second-wave feminism and misleads revolutionaries in their struggle against various political rivals, be they bourgeois parties or reformist workers’ parties.

Autonomous movement and party

For Waters, “the struggle for socialism requires” both. “The mass feminist movement” and the “mass revolutionary Marxist party”. Her strategy of permanent and universal unity of all women of all classes inevitably leads her to a position that underestimates the role of the mass revolutionary party, equating it in importance with the “feminist movement”, and thus capitulating to the non-partisan pressures that have developed in the feminist mobilisations and organisations of recent years.

Our differences with Waters would be secondary if she said: “Our great task is to build a mass revolutionary party that will lead the mobilisation of workers for power. In relation to this central task, everything else is tactical. We will fight for an independent women’s movement in certain circumstances, as long as it serves to mobilise the masses for power, and allows us to build a powerful mass revolutionary party. But if an independent feminist movement does not serve these objectives, if it slows down mobilisation, if it prevents winning broad sectors of workers for our politics, we will use a different tactic.”

Unfortunately for the Fourth International, Waters proposes that we divide our efforts at least equally to build the revolutionary party and the feminist movement, since one is “as important as” the other to the revolution.

Let us recall Trotsky: “But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party. Opportunism, which consciously or unconsciously thrives upon the inspiration of the past epoch, always tends to underestimate the role of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership.”⁶¹

Although for Trotsky “the key to the whole historical process” passes into the hands of the party when the objective conditions for the revolution are in place, Waters adds a second key: the mass feminist movement.

Although it may seem like the ABC of Trotskyism, we have to quote Trotsky to show that Waters says something completely opposite. For him, the party was more important than the soviets themselves, than the powerful English trade unions, and, moreover, it was decisive for maintaining the Soviet State. No matter how hard we searched, we couldn’t find any reference where he stated that the party was as important as women’s groups, or even as important as the parties that represented the peasantry.

Let us see, for example, his 1924 work, *Lessons of October*, where he analyses the experience of the triumph of October 1917 and the defeat in Germany in 1918-1919. Referring to the soviets, those organisations of workers’ struggle to take power, definitive organisations in the insurrection, even more than the independent women’s movement, Trotsky said that: “(...) in spite of the enormous advantages of soviets as the organs of struggle for power, there may well be cases where the insurrection may unfold on the basis of other forms of organisation (factory committees, trade unions, etc.) and soviets may spring up only during the insurrection itself, or even after it has achieved victory, as organs of state power (...).”⁶²

Later, he concluded by saying: “Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past decade. The English trade unions may indeed become a mighty lever of the proletarian revolution; they may, for instance, even take the place of workers’ soviets under certain conditions and for a certain period of time. They can fill such a role, however, not apart from a Communist party, and certainly not against the party, but only on the condition that communist influence becomes the decisive influence in the trade unions. We have paid far too dearly for this conclusion – with regard to the role and importance of a party in a proletarian revolution – to renounce it so lightly or even to minimise its significance.”⁶³

Regarding the importance of the revolutionary party in the USSR and for “socialist construction”, he continued insisting in the same sense when he fought against the bureaucratisation led by Stalin. Let’s look at some examples. In his “Draft Thesis on the Russian Question” in 1931, he said: “Without the

61 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International after Lenin*, Pioneer Publishers, New York, Second Edition, May 1957, p. 84.

62 Trotsky, Leon: *Lessons of October*, MIA, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch8.htm, consulted on 17 March 2026.

63 Ibid.

idealistic and cementing force of the Communist Party, the Soviet state and the planned economy would consequently be condemned to disintegration. (...) 6) Socialist construction, under the conditions of class contradictions at home and of capitalist encirclement abroad, demands a strong, farsighted, active party as the fundamental political precondition for planned economy and class manoeuvring.”⁶⁴ The previous year, he wrote: “If the party were excluded from the Soviet system, then the whole system would soon collapse.”⁶⁵

Waters replies to Trotsky, saying: The autonomous women’s movement is as important as the party, without its participation the socialist revolution cannot be carried out, it is “a precondition for democratically arriving at the correct economic and social decisions” and, therefore, is part of the strategy of the Fourth International. For the soviets to be maintained, a women’s movement is also needed; for the planned economy to be maintained, the feminist movement is needed.

Waters puts an end to the struggle against reformist and reactionary parties

The document paints an idyllic marriage, which correctly divides the tasks between the revolutionary party and the autonomous movement that is supposed to be built, regardless of who leads it: “There is no contradiction between building the independent women’s liberation movement, building trade unions, and building a revolutionary Marxist Party of women and men”, because both are necessary “for the struggle for socialism”, and because in that struggle each one has different functions: the first “mobilises women in struggle around their needs” and the second “through program and action, provides leadership for the working class and its allies, including women, and uncompromisingly orients all facets of the class struggle towards a combined drive to establish a workers government and abolish capitalism.” Later, she gives a more precise goal for the party: “to win the leadership of the women’s liberation movement by showing women in practice that we have the program and perspectives that can lead to liberation.”

Except for some passing mentions about the “enemies”, nowhere does Waters say who leads that movement whose leadership must be won, and even less that the revolutionary party is indispensable to carry out a struggle to the death against the reformist and reactionary leaderships to wrest from their ranks as many women as we can and align them with our class politics, since it is the only one who can do it.

The reality is the complete opposite of what Waters describes. Building a party among women will be a permanent contradiction between our politics and that of the reactionaries and reformists, who are currently much stronger than we are, and who are the leadership of those women, just as there will be permanent contradictions between the needs of the masses of women and the orientations of those reformist and reactionary leaderships.

Our participation in the struggles of the mass movement is a constant war, exploiting all contradictions, against the pro-bourgeois and reactionary reformist parties that lead it. We know perfectly well that today they are strong and powerful, and we are weak. This is the greatest tragedy of our time. Our politics is the art of taking advantage of all contradictions, all opportunities for struggle to advance the consciousness of the workers. What dimensions, what results we can have, will depend on the class struggle, on its results. In this daily struggle that exists between us on the one hand and the bourgeoisie and its agents of different types on the other, which will later become a physical civil war, we run the risk of winning or losing at every step. Each victory brings us closer, even if it is just a small step, to taking power; each defeat gives a break to our enemies, the reformist and bourgeois leaderships. Our work among women is no exception; there, they are also active and powerful, more than we, the liberals, the social democrats, the Stalinists, the non-partisans, who, to a greater or lesser degree, are all our enemies.

We know very well that all these nefarious leaderships can, at a certain moment, favour the mobilisation of women and, moreover, lead them to a partial victory. We have seen it clearly in some of the feminist struggles that took place in this decade, and we will continue to see it. These situations, far from diminishing, increase the contradictions between the autonomous movement and the revolutionary party, much to

64 Trotsky, Leon: “Problems of the development of the USSR”, 4 April 1931, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1972, pp. 252 and 262.

65 Trotsky, Leon: “To the Bulgarian comrades”, 4 October 1930, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*, op. cit., p. 53.

Waters' chagrin. They make these enemy leaderships more powerful; they make the task of the revolutionary party more difficult, even when there has been mobilisation and some successes have been achieved. But for Waters, everything is simple. What bothers her strategy, she deletes it, ignores it. Let us ignore these very powerful enemies and rejoice in the struggle for the building of the autonomous movement, with the mobilisation, regardless of who leads it, what politics it is nourished by and where it is going.

We are as happy or more than Waters with the mobilisation, we promote it as much or more than her, but because we know that the mobilisation allows us to advance our policy and fight for it: to make this the permanent mobilisation of the working class and the most exploited, particularly poor and working women, to seize power and establish socialism throughout the world. Standing between us and that goal are our mortal enemies, the reformist, conciliatory, and bourgeois leaderships. In our battle against them, we will take advantage of all organisational forms that strengthen revolutionary politics and objectives, and we will discard all those that weaken or hinder them. And only the revolutionary party can consistently bring this struggle to an end.

A liquidating conception

Waters' document gives a position that is even more serious than minimising the battle of the revolutionary party with the other parties. She absolutely minimises the importance and daily need of building the revolutionary party, of winning the best fighters for the party. Because she tells the feminist activist that she has two paths: that of building the feminist movement or the revolutionary party. Because she tells struggling women that they "must wait for no one to show them the way". If we ask Waters what is more important, she will surely answer that the party is more important, but that is not what emerges from her document.

Which path can women define for themselves? That of the socialist revolution? They may be able to define their path of struggle to a certain extent by particular demands, but they will never, ever be able to find the path of revolution on their own without the help of the party.

As far as we know, the revolutionary party is the only one that leads the masses, including women, along the path of socialist revolution. No union, group or different organisation replaces it in this conscious activity of directing the revolutionary process, and that is why it is essential.

For us, there is an immense difference between a party member, a Trotskyist militant, a trade unionist, an activist for democratic rights, and a feminist. We know that it is not easy to win over these militants.

Winning a new militant for Trotskyism is winning him/her for the only organisation that has the socialist revolution as its objective; it is winning him/her for the organisation that has the highest degree of political consciousness in society. This new militant has come to the revolutionary party against the pressures of the bourgeoisie and its parties, which control radio, television, newspapers and governments; against the reformist parties that lead millions of workers in the world. Therefore, no feminist, no trade unionist, a democrat who simply engages in feminist, trade union or democratic activity will never be equal to a Trotskyist militant. The Trotskyist militant will be the best union fighter, the best feminist fighter, the most consistent democrat, because he/she will be the one who will most consistently carry all these struggles towards the seizure of power, an activity in which no one who only fights at the union or democratic level can replace him/her.

Waters capitulates to anti-party feminist currents

The feminist mobilisations of recent years have developed, as we have already seen, amid a slow rise in workers' struggles, with low worker participation, without strong mass revolutionary parties and without a decisive participation of the large communist and social democratic workers' parties.

These events have allowed the emergence of large currents that reject the participation of political parties, which "fear" their attempts to "manage". This apathy towards politics is ultimately another instrument of the bourgeoisie to alienate us from the great masses of working women. They try to present

women's struggles as an "exclusively feminine problem", apolitical, precisely to distance women from revolutionary politics.

All of Waters's verbiage about the independent women's liberation movement, that women are sisters, that the autonomous movement must not be "subordinated" to any political current, etc., is a concession to the backwardness of the majority of women and a capitulation to non-partisan politics, consciously encouraged by the bourgeoisie. It is a wall that is placed between us and the masses of poor women to win them over to revolutionary politics, and it plays into the hands of the bourgeoisie, which wants women not to participate in politics so that they do not support workers' parties, in short, so that we do not snatch them from their influence.

We are mortal enemies of non-partisanship, as much as of Stalinism or social democracy, although at this moment they are the ones who lead the majority of the workers' movement and, therefore, they are our main enemies. But anyone who opposes the building of the revolutionary party is an enemy of the workers' revolution, and for this reason, they deserve all our attacks.

Waters's underestimation of the revolutionary party is, therefore, a capitulation to non-partisan currents, and it is because she does not see the objective role of the revolutionary party. At the bottom of her position, there is an element of reality, which is the current weakness of the truly revolutionary parties, of the Fourth International.

Currently, the majority of sections of our world party do not have the strength to positively define a revolutionary situation. Their activity is not yet a definitive factor in the class struggle and, for this reason, they play a fundamentally propagandistic role. But the fact that this is the current reality does not mean that, as a rule, the revolutionary party will always be weak and unimportant in the class struggle.

As Trotsky said, "as soon as the objective prerequisites [for the revolution] have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party."⁶⁶ In a revolutionary situation, the objective weight of the subjective factors, that is, of politics, the leadership of the masses, is decisive. And the triumph or not of this situation depends on a key that is the defining one: the party, the party, and the party.

That is why the most important task of every self-respecting Trotskyist, a strategic, absolute condition, irreplaceable for the triumph of the world revolution, is the building of the revolutionary party.

That is Trotskyism *raison d'être*. That is why the first sentence of the *Transitional Program* says: "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." The Stalinist betrayal left the working class without revolutionary leadership, it allowed the triumph of fascism in the first place and in recent years it has been the decisive factor, together with social democracy, in stopping the revolutionary mobilisations that have taken place (Czechoslovakia 1968, Portugal 1975, Spain, Italy, France). That is why everywhere we are and participate, our obsession is one and only one: to build the revolutionary party and wrest the leadership of the majority of the masses from the reactionaries and reformists.

By contrast, Waters is not obsessed like we are because she does not see the importance of the party. Thus, she creates an entire theory, a strategy and a policy that presupposes the weakness of the revolutionary party as a permanent fact. Therefore, "given the relative weakness of the sections of the Fourth International and the relative strength of the liberals and our reformist, class-collaborationist opponents", she proposes creating a united front of women of all classes, which is a condition for the revolution.

Her politics is based on the fact that, since we are too weak to mobilise large numbers of women, we must permanently unite with those who do lead them. This may be tactically fine in a given situation, but our strategy is to win them all for our politics, and when this is the case, we do not see why we should maintain an "independent women's liberation movement", "not subordinated" to our political current.

For her, the women's movement is more important; it is a condition, it is "one of the factors that explain why none of those revolutions could be carried to their end." It does not occur to her to think that the reason for the defeat of all revolutions is the lack of a revolutionary party.

66 Trotsky, Leon: *The Third International after Lenin*, ob. cit., p. 84.

In conclusion, the central task of our work among women is to win them over to the revolutionary party, and everything else is tactical. We say, like the Third International: “Every opponent of the Third International is an enemy of women’s liberation.” For us, “every enemy of the Fourth International is an enemy of women’s liberation” and “it is the sacred duty of all women Communists to condemn those who flinch from the revolutionary tactics of the Comintern”.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ “Thesis on methods of work among the women of the Communist Party”, adopted at the 20th Session, July 8th, 1921, *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit., p. 161.

Appendices

I. The Tasks of Trotskyism Among Women

Draft resolution presented in January 1980 by Mercedes Petit and Carmen Carrasco to the meeting of the Bolshevik Faction, predecessor of the IWL-FI.

The recent congress of the Unified Secretariat approved the document “Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women’s Liberation”, prepared by Mary Alice Waters, a member of the executive leadership of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States. This document, which reflects the SWP’s conception of the work of Trotskyists among women, is now the official policy of the USec and its followers.

It is a revisionist document, which expresses a sectoral and multi-class conception of the permanent evolution and the relationship between the struggles of the exploited and those of the oppressed, and between these and the working class and the revolutionary party. These conceptions that lead the SWP and the entire USec to capitulate to the positions of anti-Marxist feminism — which calls for the unity of all women, regardless of their class, to fight against men, which calls for a permanent popular front of worker and bourgeois, revolutionist, reformists and counterrevolutionary women — are the same conceptions that led the SWP and its USec followers to capitulate to the National Reconstruction government in Nicaragua.

The purpose of the present resolution is to categorically refute this policy and to establish some initial theses on the policy of the Parity Committee for the work of Trotskyists among women.

I

After the Second World War, for the second time in history, massive mobilisations of women demanding their rights took place. From the mobilisation of women in the Chinese revolution to the mobilisations over abortion and divorce in Europe and the United States, women fight for their own demands, either supporting an ongoing revolution (China) or fighting against it (Chile and El Salvador), sometimes in unity of action, demanding democratic rights, as in Europe and the United States. This fact of the class struggle deserves the attention and response of the Trotskyist Fourth International.

With the new rise of the world revolution, women increasingly participate in political and social struggles, through the mobilisations, parties and organisations of their respective classes, and, circumstantially, they carry out unitary mobilisations for their specific demands. The question is whether this growing political and social participation of women tends towards the permanent unity of all women of all classes or whether, on the contrary, this unity is the exception, the temporary, and the political and social division of women is the rule.

In short, it is a question of whether we can apply to these mobilisations the general guidelines indicated in the first congresses of the Communist International or if, on the contrary, these phenomena force us to review the policy that Marxism has upheld for the work of the revolutionary party among women.

II

Faced with the mobilisations of women for the right to vote and other demands, the Communist International gave a categorical response: it called on the communist parties to fight in these movements to separate women workers from bourgeois feminism.

III

The class struggle has proven right the conception of the Communist International and, consequently, its politics; the women's mobilisations of the last decade [late 1960s to mid-1970s, Editor's Note] only managed to manifest the unity of women in a temporary and episodic way, not permanently. The experience of the United States, Spain, Italy, France and England demonstrated that once the specific objective of the mobilisation was achieved — and even in many cases without having achieved it — the supra-class unity of women dissolved.

We categorically assert, following our conceptions, which have been corroborated by facts, that the permanent unity of women above classes is impossible, due to the political and social contradictions of the struggle between revolution and counterrevolution, at least until the triumph of socialism.

IV

Faced with the mobilisations of women in the last decade, a current has emerged within which the USec, influenced by the SWP in the United States, occupies a place of honour. It is the current that calls on all women of all classes and political tendencies — workers, bourgeois, revolutionists, reformists, counterrevolutionaries — to fight together and organise themselves in a permanent autonomous movement. The USec document states that women's struggles will continue to spread and that the party's strategy must be the building of an autonomous and unitary movement of women from all social classes. It is the so-called policy of the "sisterhood of women" that, as we see, opposes both the thesis of the Communist International — a sharp separation between working-class and bourgeois women — and the lessons of history.

V

According to the USec, the oppression of women and their confinement in the family is the "pillar", "basic policy", and "essence" of capitalism. This is why it holds that the family, including the peasant family, is a scourge of class society that only deserves to be extirpated. Reality, on the contrary, shows that capitalism, by incorporating her into production, has equalised the working woman with the proletarian man, in poverty and exploitation, in burdens and duties. However, contradictorily, capitalism is incapable of taking this trend to the end because it cannot employ all women on a global level. Hence, the brutal contradictions it causes, by calling women to work at a certain time and then confining them again to the home and family to remove them from production, always according to their convenience. This reality causes painful contradictions for worker and peasant women. It destroys their families without leaving them any other institution that allows them to satisfy human needs for affection and companionship.

VI

According to the USec, all struggles for women's liberation —for abortion, divorce, or whatever— go against that "essence of capitalism" described above. This leads to the conclusion that all these struggles, even the most partial and circumstantial, have an "objectively anti-capitalist" dynamic.

The reality, on the contrary, is that the tasks of women's liberation are of a bourgeois-democratic nature. Historically, it was a task of the bourgeois revolutions that they did not carry out.

The process of women's liberation has, because of its dynamics, a transitional character, because it has to do with the most retarded aspects and the most retrograde customs of society. But this transitional perspective will be thoroughly accentuated in a socialist society where, once the battle against counterrevolution and imperialism is won, the doors will be open to solve these problems so deeply felt by humanity. Hence, we categorically reject the a priori assignment of the anti-capitalist label to all women's struggles, organisations and movements. The anti-capitalist dynamic can only be generated when women — and it will not be all of them — support the proletarian revolution and the revolutionary party.

VII

The USec document correctly points out that all women are oppressed as women; the same could be said of Blacks, who are all oppressed as such. From there, it concludes that oppression is equal to exploitation; that the bonds that unite the oppressed among themselves are stronger than the contradictions between exploiters and exploited, between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. And from there derives its entire policy that women must unite as sisters for the common struggle.

The reality is that, while it is true that all women and all Black people are oppressed, at the same time, there are exploitative and exploited women, exploitative and exploited Black people. From now until the triumph of socialism, women workers will fight against the exploiters, whether men or women, Black or white.

At a certain point, women of different classes can march together for a specific goal: the right to divorce, abortion, etc. But the reality of the revolutionary situation is that, when it happens, society will be divided by a barricade. On one side, the working class with its revolutionary party and, with them, the revolutionary working women, the revolutionary Blacks. On the other hand, the bourgeois imperialist counterrevolution and with it the bourgeois women, the bourgeois Blacks, etc.

VIII

From the above, it is clear that the USec has a revisionist conception of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, which it views as a sum of oppressed sectors, of multi-class movements that, on equal terms with the proletariat, are permanently mobilised for power. From there, it derives its popular frontist policy of unity of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie (“all women”), in an organised and permanent manner.

Our conception is that only the socialist revolution will liberate all women, but not all women will support the socialist revolution. We reaffirm the social and political character of the permanent revolution, in the sense that it is carried out by the proletariat, dragging behind it the poorest and most exploited sectors of society, against the exploiters of all sexes and races and their allies, the reformists. This struggle only triumphs with the seizure of power by the proletariat led by its revolutionary Marxist party, the Trotskyist Fourth International.

IX

As a result of its popular frontist policy of uniting bourgeois and proletarian women in an organised and permanent manner, the USec reaches the height of revisionism by proposing that the building of an autonomous and unitary women’s movement is part of the party building strategy. In other words, the building of the women’s movement has the same strategic importance as the building of the workers’ party.

On the contrary, the strategy of the Trotskyist Fourth International — and its *raison d’être* — is the permanent mobilisation of the proletariat — men and women — for the seizure of power, supported by the revolutionary movement of the oppressed masses and, to this end, the building of the revolutionary Marxist workers’ party. This strategy, the only one of the Trotskyists, demands the sharp separation of the workers from bourgeois and reformist influence, and repudiates the popular frontist unity advocated by the USec document.

X

The rise of the class struggle of the last decade, coupled with the crisis of the reformist parties — incapable of responding to the masses of women who awaken with the rise — and the weakness of Trotskyism, opened the space for the organisation of autonomous women’s movements, whose positions run the gamut from the most democratic to the most ultra-leftist and ultra-feminist. On this objective basis, the USec elevates to the category of permanent norm what is nothing more than a temporary manifestation of the revolutionary rise, the betrayal of the reformist workers’ parties and the weakness of Trotskyism.

XI

Having defined our strategy, we assert that we can and must participate, support, and form unity of action in the struggles for the specific democratic demands of women. In the course of such mobilisations, we will define our tactical orientation towards the different organisations that may exist. But the participation of the Trotskyists in such movements will at all times be framed in the objective of winning women, mainly workers, through mobilisation, so that they break with the bourgeoisie and reformism and join their class and the revolutionary party.

XII

The current upsurge of the class struggle and the crisis of the reformist apparatuses give the Trotskyist Fourth International the best possibilities of becoming the revolutionary leadership of the masses. The upsurge shocks millions of women who begin to look for political solutions and answers to their demands. For this reason, we Trotskyists must formulate a revolutionary policy for women, especially for working women. They will constitute a central force in this upsurge and, as historical experience confirms, women workers, because they are doubly exploited, quickly place themselves at the forefront of the struggles.

XIII

We Trotskyists, the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, are the mortal enemies of oppression in all its forms. This is why we are in the front row of the struggle for demands against the oppression of women, and are willing to participate in all their struggles, in unity of action with all those who promote them.

We want to integrate all working women into the proletarian front against the bourgeoisie and its reformist allies. We fight against all subjection or collaboration of women workers with the bourgeoisie, and we want to win them all to the ranks of the Trotskyist Fourth International.

XIV

To achieve this, the Trotskyists' program must contemplate democratic demands such as free abortion, divorce, full legal equality, elimination of discrimination against children born out of wedlock, etc.

XV

We fight in the front row for the demands and claims of poor and working women: equal pay for equal work, reduction of the working day by 50% if they wish; for nurseries, child care centres, dining rooms and collective laundries; for a salary for the housewife, for full employment for women.

In unions where women work, we demand representation of them in the union leadership, in proportion to their number in the workforce, which means, of course, that in predominantly female trade unions, the union leadership must be predominantly female; we demand that these demands be incorporated into the union statutes. We are for the creation of women's commissions in the unions.

XVI

We are for the defence of the working class and peasant family: for free public health, education and recreation services; for subsidies for their children.

XVII

This democratic and *transitional program* has a single objective: the mobilisation of working and poor women together with their class, for the seizure of power by the proletariat and the world socialist revolution, which is the only thing that can guarantee full and permanent equality of women and all the oppressed.

XVIII

As we have already said, the attention of the Trotskyists is directed mainly to working women. But we do not rule out that in a national and international conjuncture of rise in workers' and popular struggles, and given the existence of a strong revolutionary party, women of the petty bourgeoisie may be willing to accompany the proletariat in its struggles and to see in the revolutionary Trotskyist party their leadership.

XIX

The only party that fights consistently for this program and this strategic objective, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, is the Trotskyist Fourth International.

We denounce and repudiate the treacherous policy of Social Democracy and Stalinism, which maintain and reinforce the oppression of women and are, within the ranks of the workers' movement, the bitterest enemies of the proletarian revolution.

We also reject the conception of the SWP and the USec, which considers that "the struggle for socialism requires both a mass feminist movement and a mass revolutionary Marxist party". This position denies the leading role of the revolutionary party and calls on it to share its historical responsibility with sectoral organisations that represent the oppressed. For us, the struggle for socialism needs only one condition: the permanent mobilisation of the masses, led by a revolutionary Marxist, Trotskyist party.

XX

To the women of the workers' states, we tell them that the counterrevolutionary bureaucracy that has usurped workers' power is directly and absolutely responsible for their brutal oppression. They must fight with the proletariat and its revolutionary party for the political revolution, the overthrow of the bureaucracy, and the establishment of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

Bogota, January 1980

II. The rebellion against sexual violence

Mercedes de Mendieta⁶⁸

The fourth wave of the women's and LGBTQ+ rights movement began in Argentina when thousands took to the streets on 3 June 2015, to shout #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less). This cry spread throughout the world in the fight against gender-based violence. For the first time, thousands dared to leave their homes to denounce the violence they had suffered and raise their voices for those who could no longer do so; it was a battle cry against machismo. From then on, gender-based violence became increasingly visible and denounced in all its forms: physical, psychological, symbolic, and economic, with sexual violence reaching a particularly significant level.

Globally, a woman was murdered every 10 minutes in 2023. These femicides were perpetrated by partners, ex-partners, or family members, according to the annual report published by UN Women. This survey estimates that nearly one in four women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence at least once in her lifetime. Gender-based violence is structural within the capitalist and patriarchal system, its most extreme expression being femicides and other hate crimes. Women and gender-diverse people from the working class and popular sectors suffer the most from the consequences of this scourge.

Every right conquered, every public policy wrested through mobilisation, is challenged by the global far right, which positions itself as the patriarchal reaction. This current denies patriarchy and its consequences, raising the banner of "traditional values and the family" against the progressive social changes we have achieved through mobilisation to break down the gender binarism and gender stereotypes. Faced with these reactionary arguments, we are unequivocal: gender-based violence exists and is not an ideological problem, but a social one that occurs in every corner of the planet.

The pact of silence was broken.

In December 2024, 51 men were convicted of raping Gisele Pelicot, a French woman who, for decades, was drugged by her husband, Dominique Pelicot, who raped her and handed her over to dozens of men to abuse her. The dramatic end of the trial revealed the cruellest face to which women are subjected. How can anyone be capable of such an atrocity? How can this act of inhumanity be repeated time and again? On the other side of cruelty, there is the courage and strength of a woman who dared to overcome her fears and shame, and who transformed her pain into an example for millions around the world. Although ending impunity does not heal the pain, Gisele became an emblem of the fight against sexual violence.

We are witnessing one of the strongest and most progressive phenomena of this period: the fight that women and gender non-conforming people are waging against sexual violence by beginning to question something very profound in interpersonal relationships. Abuse and rape are a consequence of the

⁶⁸ **Mercedes de Mendieta** is a political scientist and professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Buenos Aires). She coordinates the women's group Isadora and is a leader of Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left). She is a national deputy for the Left Front-Unity coalition. She writes of the newspaper *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar) and contributes to the journal *International Correspondence* (www.uit-ci.org).

historically privileged social position of men over women, where female sexuality is imposed to serve male pleasure.

Sexual violence arises with patriarchy and class society. Since then, women's bodies have fulfilled the reproductive function of bearing the legitimate children of property-owning men, and female pleasure has been rendered invisible. In this way, all kinds of sexual practices without women's consent and at the service of men's enjoyment are condoned. One of the most abhorrent practices is rape. What the rebellion against sexual violence exposes is the naturalisation and legitimisation, through institutions (including the family), of interpersonal practices of harassment and abuse. Historically, men have used positions of power to discipline women through their sexuality, employing a system of punishments against those who dare to speak out and denounce abuse. Sexual violence manifests itself in practices that have been normalised for thousands of years; this is why we speak of a true revolution.

Milestones in the fight against sexual violence

This movement, which brought the scourge of sexual violence to the forefront, spread throughout the world with significant milestones such as #MeToo in the United States in October 2017, when a group of Hollywood actresses launched the hashtag #MeToo on social media with the slogan: "If you have been sexually harassed or assaulted, write 'me too'." Thousands of women quickly came forward to report having suffered such abuse. During 2019, in the wake of the #NiUnaMenos (Not One [Woman] Less) campaign, dozens of universities in Chile were occupied to protest sexual violence and harassment and to demand non-sexist education. Thousands of young people reported situations of harassment and abuse by male lecturers and fellow students, demanding protocols for victim support. In Spain, there was a massive fight against the impunity surrounding the "La Manada" (The Pack) case, in which a group of men gang-raped a young woman at the San Fermín festival. Outrage and anger transformed into massive mobilisations across the country against the patriarchal justice system that sought to impose impunity. In 2024, Netflix released the documentary "You Are Not Alone: Fighting the Wolf Pack," which recounts the trial against this group of supposedly "healthy" offspring of the patriarchy, who were ultimately sentenced thanks to the strength of the feminist movement.

In Argentina, the fight against sexual violence swept across the nation. It took place in universities with accusations against lecturers; in the media, challenging journalists who used sexual harassment as a daily practice, as in the case of Pedro Brieger; in workplaces, where women's committees were created, and protocols for cases of gender-based and sexual violence were established; and in artistic spaces, where singers and actors were denounced. One of the most emblematic cases was when actress Thelma Fardín denounced being raped by actor Juan Dhartes when she was 16 years old, a case that gained visibility under the hashtag #MiraComoNosPonemos (Look How We Are). Finally, accusations were also made against very powerful politicians, such as the former governor of the province of Tucumán, José Alperovich, the mayor of La Matanza, Fernando Espinoza, and the accusation of gender violence against former Peronist president Alberto Fernández.

These milestones demonstrate the strength of the rebellion against gender violence, which has spread around the world and into every sphere and institution where women move. We stopped blaming ourselves and began to understand that sexual violence is not the exception but the rule of the patriarchal system.

Sexual abuse and rape are as old as patriarchy. Women had to endure them in silence because they knew that if they spoke out, they wouldn't be believed or would even be blamed. What is new, progressive, and revolutionary is that women have begun to report abuse and rape after years of agonising silence and are beginning to be heard. Although, of course, we also continue to be questioned by a sector of society that still believes the perpetrator.

In this context, sexual violence is beginning to shift from being seen as an individual or private matter to a public issue, leading to a change in awareness regarding patriarchal violence. Today, when a woman dares to say she has been abused, thousands respond with #IBelieveYouSister. This is why women

are finding the courage to speak out, and reports are gaining visibility and credibility not only within the feminist movement but also within many institutions.

What is consent?

For years, the belief persisted that rape only occurred in the street or in an open field, where one or more unknown men intercepted a woman, beat her, and raped her. This image, reinforced by the media, helped create the idea that only such acts constituted rape. However, as more women reported rapes and abuses by acquaintances or even family members, this perception began to change. The majority of rapes are committed in private settings, even within relationships. Rape happens every day and, in many cases, it's normalised. This is part of what we challenge through the feminist struggle.

The fourth wave allows us to challenge the notion that sexual abuse is not only that which occurs in the streets. A truly profound change has been the understanding of the meaning of consent in a sexual act and the various ways in which men take advantage of different situations to sexually subjugate a woman. For example, if a woman is intoxicated or under the influence of psychotropic drugs and is unable to articulate a firm “no” or strongly object, it does not mean she consents to sexual intercourse. Another serious issue is the insistence by men on having sex without a condom, which is also considered an abusive practice. Sexual violence is a normalised and legitimised practice in which the victim is often blamed. Phrases like “she provoked it,” “deep down she wanted it,” “look how she was dressed,” or “she goes out dancing and gets drunk”, etc., are commonly heard.

Sexual consent implies a voluntary and free choice for all parties involved. Remaining silent or not saying “no” is not the same as consent. As we have pointed out, a person who is unconscious or incapacitated by alcohol or drugs cannot give consent. Sex under coercion or intimidation is not consensual sex. Neither is lying nor deliberately concealing certain intentions, nor is having unprotected sex. Likewise, consenting to a kiss, for example, does not mean consenting to a greater degree of intimacy. A good rule of thumb that men should learn is this: if in doubt, stop and ask. If you're still unsure, stop.

Debunking the myth of “false accusations”

The rebellion of women and gender dissidents faces a patriarchal backlash worldwide, spearheaded by the far right and conservative sectors, which attack the rights won through mobilisation in an attempt to guarantee the patriarchal pact that favours male impunity. One tactic they commonly use to discredit the victim's testimony is to claim that the accusations lack sufficient evidence, taking advantage of the fact that abuse occurs, in most cases, without witnesses and in the privacy of the home. That is why we fight to ensure that victims' accounts can be used as a central element in any accusation.

Reactionary sectors are waging a false campaign, lacking any supporting statistics, about the rise in “false accusations” of gender-based violence. That is why it is important to debunk some of their myths. For example, the fact that an act cannot be proven does not mean that the accusation is false. Nor does the fact that a legal process ends without a conviction mean that the perpetrator is innocent. That's why we say that an abuser can be acquitted by the patriarchal justice system due to a lack of “evidence”, but that doesn't mean they are innocent. That is why we talk about the myth of “false accusations”, which is based on the stereotype of women as liars who exaggerate abuse or who are responsible for the sexual assault. In the patriarchal justice system, mechanisms that re-victimise those who file complaints continue to prevail, discouraging further reporting. Statistics show that women report far less than they should, and the few convictions that are secured are achieved thanks to mobilisation and public pressure.

An arm wrestling against patriarchal impunity

Defining bourgeois justice as patriarchal means understanding how this institution has historically constructed a mechanism favouring men, and that women's conquest of rights has been achieved through struggle. The right to a defence in court emerged alongside the bourgeois revolutions as part of democratic freedoms and “citizens' rights” from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards, but exclusively for men.

Women were relegated to second-class citizens, with our democratic rights diminished or outright denied. While women have been punished through patriarchal violence, condemned to silence and submission without the right to a defence, violent men have enjoyed impunity.

In the case of women who are beaten, abused, and raped, the bourgeois legal principle that “every citizen is innocent until proven guilty” does not apply. Women are, in principle, considered responsible for the man’s violent act or abuse, and in most cases, have no chance of defending themselves. This is what the fourth wave challenges. Accused men do not lose their right to a defence. What they lose is impunity. The novel aspect is that even powerful men are denounced, and convictions have even been achieved. We are constantly engaged in an arm wrestling between the feminist movement and the patriarchal backlash that seeks to roll back our hard-won rights. We must fight with all our might to maintain our gains while organising to end patriarchy and capitalism. Only in this way can we build a socialist society free from oppression and exploitation in every country and across the world.

III. The Role of Women in the Struggle for Militant and Anti-Bureaucratic Unions

Mónica Schlotthauer⁶⁹

Most women work in education, healthcare, cleaning, or textile production, due to the patriarchal sexual division of labour. This results in entirely feminised sectors of the economy that are poorly paid and operate under conditions of absolute precariousness. We are also the first to be laid off, the heads of the poorest households, and the majority of retirees who receive the minimum pension in our country.

The global gender pay gap – which Milei denies exists – stands at 20% (data as of February 2024) according to the United Nations (UN), meaning that women earn 80% of what men earn globally. In Argentina, this difference reaches almost 27% less for women (26.6%). In addition to the wage gap, women endure various forms of violence in our workplaces: harassment, abuse, discrimination, insults, humiliation, mistreatment, and more.

Despite these difficulties for women, our participation in the trade union struggle is crucial, and it is important that we take it into our own hands. We must not only organise within unions but also fight for their leadership against the bureaucratic sectors that make deals with the bosses or are directly complicit with austerity-driven governments, working alongside workers to build and strengthen a new, anti-bureaucratic, combative, and democratic unionism.

Faced with the reactionary advance, we need more feminist organisations

Through mobilisation, we are achieving significant gains, such as maternity leave, lactation rooms, legal abortion, and protocols for assisting victims of gender-based violence in the workplace, along with their respective leave provisions. But there is still much to be achieved, especially in a context where the patriarchal backlash from those in power seeks to strip us of each one of our rights.

The far-right government of Javier Milei, in its “cultural battle” against feminism, launched an unprecedented counteroffensive. The dismantling of the former Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity and the scrapping of the 144 helplines for gender violence leave us in a position of greater vulnerability and neglect in the face of a patriarchal system that perpetuates violence against us. The prohibition of a gender perspective in public administration was a declaration of war against women workers, as it ceases to recognise gender violence in the workplace and dismisses victims’ complaints. It is a true attack, even against international laws that have constitutional status in our country, such as Convention 190 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which has been in force in Argentina since 2021.

Faced with such an attack, we women workers must promote the broadest possible unity of action among all workers to defeat Milei’s austerity plan, which harms us even further. We must also organise within unions to fight for our specific demands as women against sexism. This is one of the many lessons learned from the fourth wave of feminist struggles, lessons we, as militant unionists, uphold as we

⁶⁹ **Mónica Schlotthauer** works for the Sarmiento railway. She is a member of the militant, delegates committee of the Western branch of the Railway Union. She is a founding member of the railway and feminist group “A Beautiful Woman Is One Who Fights” and of “The House That Embraces”. She is a leader of Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left) and a national deputy for the Left Front-Unity coalition. She writes for the newspaper *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar).

continue to fight against all forms of discrimination. We demand equal training and pay across all job categories, and as we have been saying for decades, equal pay for equal work.

IV. We defend sex education and demand its implementation with a gender perspective

Pilar Barbas⁷⁰

As a counterpoint to the progress achieved through feminist mobilisation, the obscurantist far right promotes what it calls a “cultural battle”. According to this sector, in recent years, the mobilisations of women and gender dissidents have posed a threat to the values of “family and traditional gender roles”. Their spokespeople question laws such as those on same-sex marriage, the right to abortion, and gender identity. They also go so far as to deny the gender pay gap, or to dismiss femicides as mere acts of violence in general.

For these sectors, the various educational settings are one of the preferred spaces to wage this “cultural battle”.

And one of their most concrete and specific goals is to eliminate comprehensive sex education (CSE), which was established by law in Argentina in 2006. The tenacious crusade against CSE is not exclusive to our country. For example, in Peru, a conservative NGO launched the “Don’t Mess with My Children” campaign in 2016 to oppose gender policies in education, labelling them “indoctrination”. This campaign quickly spread throughout Latin America. On their website, they write: “Gender ideology proposes a new anthropological and philosophical conception of the human being, based on subjective and fantastical thoughts rather than on the ‘objective and verifiable’ reality of our human nature and essence.” A declaration of principles against the gender perspective and the social advances of recent times, driven by feminist struggles.

Against obscurantism, we demand secular, scientific, and gender-sensitive sex education

The fight for sex education in Argentina has been going on for years. When National Law 26.150 was enacted in 2006, the Catholic and Evangelical churches vehemently opposed it. Although they couldn’t prevent its enactment through their parliamentary lobbying, they did impose some of their demands. For example, the term “comprehensive” was a result of pressure from the churches to incorporate a “spiritual” religious dimension into sexual relations. They also managed to include provisions in the wording that mandated sex education be taught according to their institutional ideology. Thus, for example, religious schools teach that sexual relations should only be for procreation, or that contraceptives should not be used, among other absurdities.

But beyond having achieved a confusing wording in the law at the time, these groups continued to challenge its implementation. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is an influential and substantial advancement for the rights of children and adolescents, which, thanks to the persistence of teachers and feminist movements, has been increasingly and comprehensively incorporated into school curricula.

⁷⁰ **Pilar Barbas** is a drama student in National University of Arts (UNA). She is the national coordinator of the Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left) Youth (JIS) and a leader within Izquierda Socialista. She is the Executive Secretary of the Argentine University Federation (FUA). She writes for the newspaper *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar).

The lack of funding and training, but to a greater extent the interference of churches in educational matters, means that CSE has its limitations. However, almost 20 years after its enactment, and despite attempts by reactionary sectors to replace it, many children and adolescents have been able to recognise situations of abuse or violence thanks to CSE. Often, school is the only place where girls and boys can express a situation of violence occurring within the family.

CSE does not encourage perversions or prematurely introduce sexuality in childhood, as ultraconservative sectors that campaign against it try to claim. On the contrary, it is a valuable tool for preventing gender-based violence and protecting children and adolescents. This is why we defend it against those who seek to eliminate it, while also demanding funding for its scientifically sound and gender-sensitive implementation.

V. Debates about Prostitution

Paola Mariani⁷¹

Prostitution is a complex issue encompassing various facets and contentious debates within the feminist movement. A multitude of situations exist, ranging from the different circumstances in which people in prostitution find themselves to the varying laws governing it in different countries: prohibition of prostitution, abolition of pimping, or regulation of the trade, among other combinations. Moreover, various actors and institutions with their own interests participate in this complex web.

Prostitution exists because patriarchy exists, and women, along with gender-nonconforming individuals, are objectified and transformed into sexual objects. This scourge is a form of patriarchal aggression and brutality that places female sexuality and bodies at the service of male use and pleasure. We want to frame this debate as a complex political dilemma, analysed within the frame that we are experiencing the greatest capitalist crisis in history, where governments are implementing brutal austerity measures that are increasingly driving the working class and popular sectors — especially women and gender minorities — into unemployment, hunger, and destitution. Today, we situate prostitution and the debates surrounding it within this context, where the worst forms of violence inherent in patriarchy and capitalism are expressed.

One of the fundamental debates within feminism is whether prostitution is work, even more so among those of us who identify with Marxism. From this, diverse positions emerge among different feminist currents regarding the legislation in force in each country. Our argument, from a Marxist perspective, is that under capitalism, those who do not own the means of production must work for a wage to survive. Any work involves material, physical, and emotional strain on individuals to produce goods or services. Therefore, prostitution is work because, in economic terms, it produces value, and the bodies and sexuality of those engaged in prostitution become commodities. However, we maintain that it is not just any job, since prostitution normalises patriarchal violence, which is expressed in the commodification of the sexuality and bodies of those engaged in prostitution. For this reason, we begin by considering prostitution, above all and first and foremost, as an expression of patriarchal violence.

Around the world, there are different “legal models” for understanding prostitution, ranging from prohibition to regulation, legalisation, and abolition. Within feminism, there are also diverse perspectives, most of them linked to these “models,” which broaden the scope of the debate.

Abolitionist currents, in their various forms, emphasise their policies and actions in understanding prostitution solely as a form of slavery and gender-based violence, defining brothels as clandestine centres of torture. They focus on combating pimping and fail to distinguish between the different situations of prostitution (hard trafficking, soft trafficking, prostitution as wage labour, and self-employed work). One of the serious problems with this perspective is that the capitalist state’s prohibition of prostitution increases clandestine activity and, consequently, repression against those who engage in prostitution. That

71 **Paola Mariani** is a primary school teacher, a union leader with the *Docentes en Marcha* (Teachers on the March) group, co-ordinator of the *Isadora* women’s group, and a leader of *Izquierda Socialista* (Socialist Left). She writes for the newspaper *El Socialista* (www.izquierdasocialista.org.ar).

is why we believe that abolitionist movements often treat prostitution as a moral problem, without considering that prostitution can only be eliminated to the extent that we can dismantle the capitalist and patriarchal state.

Regulationist currents, on the other hand, advocate for prostitution as just another job, implying an autonomous decision by those who engage in it, a form of sexual liberation that fails to fully grasp the patriarchal violence that underlies the very existence of prostitution. They fail to consider, among other things, that in “regulationist” countries, the legalisation of brothels and pimping did not reduce sex trafficking, but rather led to an expansion of the sex industry, and that legalisation increases the profits of pimps, who become sex entrepreneurs, resulting in greater market competition among prostituted people, which leads them to have to work more for less money.

From our perspective, as revolutionary socialist feminists, and understanding prostitution as a highly complex issue, we do not choose between the options proposed by capitalist governments or even feminist organisations (abolitionism, regulationism, prohibitionism, etc.). In short, we are neither abolitionists nor regulationists. Why? Because we fight for a future socialist society where all forms of oppression and exploitation are eliminated, and therefore we do not endorse any form of relationship that objectifies human relations, including sexuality, beginning with prostitution. In that future socialist society, the social and economic conditions will exist for the scourge of prostitution to gradually disappear and cease to exist—to be “abolished”.

But today, we are not yet in that socialist society. We live in a capitalist society in the midst of a crisis that increasingly condemns more and more people to growing misery, where a growing number find themselves in situations of prostitution, the vast majority forced into it by circumstances of poverty, not by any free and personal choice. Therefore, we do not in any way support clients and/or pimps, but we do stand in solidarity with, respect, and defend the right to independent organisation against police and judicial violence against those who consider themselves sex workers. At the same time, we demand an end to the criminalisation, stigmatisation, and persecution of people who engage in prostitution by governments. Furthermore, we demand funding for public policies that provide support, employment with full rights, and access to healthcare and education for people who want to leave prostitution.

We denounce and attack the economic, social, and cultural causes of prostitution, always from a class-conscious and revolutionary perspective. We encourage mobilisation to end the sexual exploitation of people and hold that only through the seizure of power by the working class and the people, the destruction of capitalism, and the triumph of the socialist revolution and its subsequent development, will it be possible to end prostitution, along with the patriarchal family and other institutions that guarantee the oppression of women and gender non-conforming people. Only in a society not based on the objectification of human beings and the hierarchical commodification of some for the benefit of others will we be able to end prostitution and achieve a freer and more humane sexuality.

Biographical Appendix

Beauvoir, Simone de (1908-1986) was a French writer, lecturer, existentialist philosopher, and one of the leading figures of feminism after the Second World War. In 1949, she published her best-known work, *The Second Sex*, which ranks as one of the most important and influential books on the oppression of women and their liberation struggle. In her ideas and her own life experience, she championed open relationships, bisexuality, and political engagement. Her most famous and longest-lasting partner was the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, whom she never married. She chose not to have children. She associated with prominent left-wing politicians such as Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong, and along with Sartre, actively participated in the May 1968 protests in France. At age 63, she co-authored “Manifesto 343” with other feminist activists, published in the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* in April 1971, advocating for the right to abortion.

Chungara, Domitila (1937-2012) was a prominent Bolivian fighter against dictatorships. She denounced the living conditions of miners. In 1978, she led a women’s hunger strike against the Banzer dictatorship. Her father was part of the miners’, workers’, and peasants’ militias that played a leading role in the Bolivian Revolution in 1952. She remembered it like this: “My father announced that he was going away on a mission. He had bought victuals. He asked me to look after my sisters... The next day, I saw the women sitting in the streets, crying. They said the men had gone to fight. Shortly after, one morning, the bells and sirens began to sound, and people came out shouting, ‘We’ve won! We’ve destroyed the army!’ And that night, the band arrived first with their banners... all in a line, their helmets gleaming, several rows of miners. There was my father with his rifle slung across his chest... ‘Daddy, Daddy’. He looked at me with great joy and said, ‘We’ve won, my child, now children will never go barefoot again.’ And the economic measures for the workers began: production bonuses, family allowances, and social security funds. Now we could all go to the hospital...”

Engels, Friedrich: see Marx, Karl.

Friedan, Betty (1921-2006). She studied social psychology and, since the publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, became the most influential figure in the American mass feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. She was the one who most profoundly and comprehensively described and denounced the post-Second World War process that massively relegated women to their role as mothers and housewives, confined exclusively to motherhood, raising their children (amplified by the baby boom), and household chores, leaving them out of the labour market and the broader issues of American society. In 1966, she co-founded and served as president of the National Organisation for Women (NOW), affiliated with the Democratic Party, which played a fundamental role in driving the struggles of the second wave of feminism from the late 1960s onward, and later in the 1970s in achieving legislation on abortion rights, women’s right to work outside the home, and other issues. As a leading figure in liberal feminism, she made controversial statements and was reluctant to champion the demands of lesbian women. While she supported women’s right to choose, she considered abortion rights a secondary issue compared to the fight for equal opportunities with men.

Gouges, Olympe de (1748-1793). French writer, playwright, and pamphleteer. She embraced republican ideals after the bourgeois revolution of 1789 in France and consistently fought for equal rights

for women. In 1791, she wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, in which she stated that “woman has the right to mount the scaffold, so she should have the right equally to mount the rostrum”. This writing cost her her life. She was imprisoned after a summary trial without legal representation and was guillotined. At 17, she married a man much older than herself. She was soon widowed with a child. She never remarried, calling marriage “the tomb of trust and love”. Like so many other feminists of her time, she advocated for the abolition of slavery, a stance for which she was criticised by the noble families who had enriched themselves through the slave trade.

Grierson, Cecilia (1859-1934) was the first female doctor in Argentina and a leading figure in the fight for women’s civil and political rights. After completing her secondary studies, she began her medical studies at the University of Buenos Aires and, upon graduating in 1889, became the first female doctor. As a member of the Socialist Party, together with Alicia Moreau de Justo and other prominent women, she participated in the 1899 International Congress of Women in London. The following year, she founded the Women’s Council and, together with the Association of University Women, spearheaded the first International Feminist Congress in Argentina, where women’s education and employment were discussed, along with universal suffrage.

Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich (1870-1924) was a Russian revolutionary and founder of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, which was part of the Second International) and later of Bolshevism, the first workers’, internationalist, and revolutionary party built to seize power. He constantly debated and fought against the reformist socialist faction within the Second International, led by Eduard Bernstein. At the start of the First World War, in 1914, he rejected the betrayal of the majority of social democrats who supported the imperialist bourgeoisie in their respective countries. Along with Luxemburg, Trotsky, and others, he led the minority that broke with and denounced the inter-imperialist war. Lenin called for “transforming the imperialist war into a civil war” and for the need for a new international.

In 1917, after years of exile, he returned to Russia shortly after the February Revolution that overthrew Tsarism. He immediately began — initially as a minority — to reorient the Bolshevik Party towards rejecting the new bourgeois government led by the reformist parties and towards the prospect of socialist revolution and the seizure of power by the workers’ and peasants’ soviets. From the victorious October Revolution of that year, he and his party led the first revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ government to date, based on mobilisation, democratic soviets, and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. Under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, the Bolshevik government and the soviets promoted numerous measures in defence of women’s rights. Early on, he began to detect and combat the danger of an emerging bureaucracy in the workers’ state. His health began to deteriorate in 1922, and he was practically absent from activity throughout 1923.

He devoted his last efforts, with Trotsky’s support, to fighting Stalin and the bureaucratic faction that was gaining ground in the state and party apparatus. After his death, Trotsky continued the consistent struggle against the bureaucracy and for revolutionary politics. With the USSR isolated and weakened by the effort of the civil war, the advance of the sector led by Stalin was unstoppable. A political counter-revolution was imposed in the USSR and the world, masked by the banners of Marxism and Lenin himself, and expressed in the lie of building “socialism in one country”.

Luxemburg, Rosa (1871-1919). Born in Poland, she was one of the main leaders of the revolutionary wing of the Second International and of Polish and German social democracy. In 1889, she had to emigrate and settled in Zurich, Switzerland, where women were admitted to university. In 1892, she was one of the founders of the Polish Socialist Party (PSP). She came into conflict with the leadership of the PSP because she rejected the struggle for Polish independence, directly contrasting it with the struggle for socialism. In 1894, she broke away and founded another party, which would become the Polish social democracy. In 1896, she participated as a delegate to the Congress of the Second International. In 1898, she settled in Berlin, and then she was in the front row of the opposition to the reformist wing headed by Bernstein. She was the leading female figure in the Second International. In 1900, she published her famous polemic, *Reform or Revolution*. She disagreed with Lenin’s conception of the revolutionary party, its objectives, and the method of democratic centralism. In 1914, she was part of the internationalist minority that rejected the betrayal of the social democratic majority in the face of the inter-imperialist war. In 1916,

she formed the Spartacist League. She supported, with criticisms and disagreements, the 1917 Russian Revolution. When the revolution broke out in Germany, she actively participated, was arrested, and murdered by the police of the new social democratic government in January 1919.

Mandel, Ernest (1923-1995), a Belgian, was one of the best-known Trotskyist leaders and a Marxist economist. Captured by the Nazis, he managed to escape to France, where he met Michel Pablo. Together, they spearheaded the reorganisation of Trotskyism in the postwar period. From 1951 onward, they embarked on an irreversible course of opportunistic capitulation to Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist leaderships, leading to the division of the Fourth International and initiating a crisis and dispersion that has yet to be reversed. In 1963, Mandel promoted the reunification of the two factions formed in the early 1950s, resulting in the Fourth International (United Secretariat), whose majority quickly capitulated to Castroism, promoting a guerrilla deviation in Latin America. During the 1970s, Mandel became well-known in academic circles for his works on Marxist economics. In 1979, he supported the Sandinista bourgeois government in its repression of the Trotskyists of the Simón Bolívar Brigade. This led to the definitive distancing of the Moreno faction from the ranks of the USec, which continued to further abandon the task of building revolutionary Trotskyist parties. From the late 1980s until his death, he continued to support Castroism, as well as the pro-capitalist course of the bureaucracy, particularly Gorbachev's "perestroika," while denying the advances of capitalist restoration. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, he rejected German reunification and continued to defend the GDR (East Germany). Some of his last books included *The Meaning of the Second World War*, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story*, *Beyond Perestroika: The Future of Gorbachev's USSR*, *Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy*, and *Trotsky as Alternative*, among others.

Marx, Karl and **Engels, Friedrich** (1818-1883 and 1820-1895). Both were born in Germany and were the founders, in the 1840s, of scientific socialism, the revolutionary movement for the liberation of workers, which later became known as Marxism. In 1847, they wrote the program of the first workers' and internationalist political party, the Communist League: *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848. In this work, they argued that capitalism would lead to increasing misery for the working class, which had to fight not only to defend its living conditions but also to organise itself into a political party to seize power and govern, to end the political and economic domination of the bourgeoisie and begin to build a new system, communism, by abolishing private ownership of the means of production. Regarding women, they questioned their use as mere instruments of production and advocated for the prohibition of child labour. They also raised the need for free public education for all children. Both were actively involved in the workers' and democratic struggles of their time and in the organisation of workers. In 1864, they participated in the founding of the First International, which dissolved after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. Engels accompanied the initial steps in the transformation of socialist workers' parties into large mass organisations in several countries. In 1889, he participated in the founding of the Socialist International, the Second International. And until his death, he continued the fight against the reformism that was beginning to take root within German and European social democracy. In 1884, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels established that the subordination of women is linked to the rise of capitalist private property and the consolidation of the patriarchal family.

Moreau de Justo, Alicia (1885-1986) was a physician, writer, and teacher. She was a prominent figure of the 20th century with an intense political life in which she confronted the patriarchal mandates of her time. She graduated from Normal School No. 1 and then pursued university studies at the Faculty of Medicine, where she earned her degree. Her initiatives paved the way for women's first participation in political and social life, which at that time was the exclusive domain of men. A leader in the Socialist Party, she was one of the pioneers in the creation of the suffragist movement in the Río de la Plata region.

Moreno, Nahuel (1924-1987). Hugo Bressano was born in Argentina and was the most important Latin American Trotskyist leader. In the 1940s, he founded the first Argentine Trotskyist group that became linked to the working class and its struggles, at a time when Peronism was emerging. The GOM (Marxist Workers Group) later became known as POR (Revolutionary Workers Party), the Buenos Aires Federation of the PSRN, Palabra Obrera (Workers Word), PRT, PRT-*La Verdad*, PST, and at the time of his death, he was leading the MAS (Movement for Socialism). He always maintained his political and theoretical activity and work linked to the construction of parties in Argentina and other countries, to the

internationalist tasks of the Fourth International, and to monitoring the main revolutionary processes. In the 1950s, he was part of the sector of the divided Fourth International that fought the opportunism of Pablo and Mandel, which was led by the SWP (Socialist Workers Party) in the United States. In response to the reunification of the Fourth International in 1963, Moreno promoted the entry of his current a year later, critically denouncing the SWP's capitulation to the opportunistic Mandelist wing and its tendency to yield to Castroism. In the 1970s, under his leadership, the PST of Argentina became one of the most important Trotskyist parties in the world. When the genocidal military dictatorship seized power in March 1976, the PST was outlawed and forced underground. From June 1976, Moreno lived in exile in Colombia, where he consolidated political ties with the Socialist Bloc, which later founded the Colombian PST. In 1979, from Bogotá, he spearheaded the formation of the Simón Bolívar Brigade, which participated in the armed struggle against Somoza led by the Sandinistas. After the fall of the dictatorship, the Sandinistas formed a bourgeois government with the anti-Somoza business sector. In August, the Simón Bolívar Brigade was expelled, and both Mandelism and the SWP supported this expulsion. From then on, Moreno and his current broke with the United Secretariat, promoting an international organisation to continue the consistent struggle for the reconstruction of the principled and revolutionary Fourth International. Since their origins, the groups and parties of Morenoism have championed the struggle for the demands and tasks for the liberation of women. After he died in 1987, his international organisation entered a process of crisis, leading to its division into several groups.⁷² His legacy continues today in the building of the International Workers Unity–Fourth International (IWU-FI) in numerous countries and the publication of the journal *International Correspondence*. In addition to his daily and practical dedication to party building in Argentina and within his international current, Moreno left behind a substantial body of written work on Marxist politics, theory, history, and logic. Much of his written work is available at www.nahuelmoreno.org, sponsored by the IWU-FI (www.uit-ci.org) and Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left) of Argentina (www.izquierdasocialista.org).

Pankhurst, Emmeline (1858-1928). A leading figure in the fight for women's suffrage in England, she became one of the main figures of the suffragette movement. In 1903, she founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), an organisation of women advocating for the right to vote. When the inter-imperialist war broke out (1914-1918), she sided with the British government and later opposed the Bolshevik Revolution.

Pankhurst, Sylvia (1882-1960), was a visual artist, journalist, and writer. She was a leading figure in the fight for women's suffrage in England. The daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst, with whom she shared only the early years of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), her political differences deepened, particularly after the outbreak of the First World War. She embraced socialist ideas, arguing that the right to vote was not an end in itself, but part of a broader struggle against all social injustices. She travelled through working-class neighbourhoods organising women against all forms of oppression and for the right to a wage, education, and public healthcare. With the First World War, she strengthened her anti-imperialist and internationalist views and repudiated bourgeois governments that sent their workers to fight against other workers. She defended the Russian Revolution and its achievements.

Stalin, Joseph (1878-1953). He joined the social-democratic movement in Georgia towards the end of the century and joined Bolshevism. He was arrested several times and sent to Siberia. In 1917, he became part of the wing of Bolshevism led by Zinoviev and Kamenev, which opposed the October insurrection that brought the soviets and Bolshevism to power. He was the leader of the nascent bureaucracy that began to emerge in the revolutionary workers' state. His misguided policies (such as abolishing the monopoly on foreign trade) and his brutal methods were fought against, with Trotsky's support, by Lenin until his death. From 1924 onward, he imposed the counter-revolutionary orientation of "socialism in one country". From then on, he promoted political unity with bourgeois parties in the various revolutionary processes, the "popular fronts", and "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism, along with increasing repression. He imposed a totalitarian dictatorship within the USSR. He expelled Trotsky from the party and the country, and executed or sent to their deaths in Siberia almost all the former leaders of the revolution. From the 1920s onward, Stalinism seized the banners of Marxism, of Lenin and the 1917 socialist revolution, forming a powerful global bureaucratic apparatus with the communist parties of each country. This

⁷² See the work *MAS: A Historical Balance Sheet*, 1997 at nahuelmoreno.org/en/mas-a-historical-balance-sheet-1997/.

apparatus imposed a dogmatic and unscientific “Marxism” and counter-revolutionary policies almost entirely, policies that were combated by the Fourth International. In his 1936 book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky extensively documented and denounced the rollbacks imposed by Stalinism on the rights and gains achieved by women since the October Revolution of 1917, such as the right to abortion. He died in 1953.

Tristan, Flora (1803-1844) was a French writer who embraced socialist ideals while simultaneously fighting for women’s rights. Her tragic life, filled with violence, led her to reflect on the plight of all the oppressed. A poor woman, stigmatised as an illegitimate daughter, she was the victim of an arranged marriage from which she had to flee with her two children and a pregnancy. Her life experiences led her to denounce the scourges of a profoundly unequal society: “Everyone is against me. Men, because I demand the emancipation of women; property owners, because I demand the emancipation of wage earners.”

Trotsky, Leon (1879-1940) was Ukrainian and joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in Odesa. He remained independent of both the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. For years, he did not share Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ conception of the centralised party structure for seizing power. However, he opposed the reformist policies of the Mensheviks. In the 1905 revolution, he was vice-chairman of the St. Petersburg Soviet and was later arrested and sent to Siberia and into exile. In 1915, he joined the internationalist minority that rejected the betrayal of the Social Democratic majority and its support for the imperialist bourgeoisie in the war. In May 1917, he embraced Bolshevism. Alongside Lenin, he led the October Revolution of 1917 and the Soviet seizure of power. He founded the Red Army and led it during the three years of the civil war. He supported Lenin’s fight against the incipient bureaucratisation in the USSR. After Lenin’s death, Trotsky was defeated by Stalin. He was expelled from the party in 1927 and from the USSR in 1929. From exile, he continued to promote the opposition to Stalinism and the revolutionary struggle, always defending the USSR. From 1933, he promoted the formation of new revolutionary parties and a Fourth International. He guided groups of his followers to intervene in numerous countries, for example, in the fight against Franco during the Spanish Revolution. In 1938, he founded the Fourth International and wrote the *Transitional Program*, the founding principles.

He was assassinated by an agent of Stalin in August 1940 in Mexico. After his death, the Fourth International entered a period of crisis and split between consistently revolutionary sectors and opportunistic and sectarian sectors. Currently, the Trotskyist movement exists in numerous countries, but it is dispersed. It has different currents, some of which politically support bourgeois governments and reformist leaderships, and do not promote the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

Waters, Mary-Alice (1942-). She was part of the new youth leadership of the SWP from the late 1960s through the 1970s, along with Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, and others. She wrote several books on feminist topics published by the SWP’s publishing house, Pathfinder Press. She edited the weekly newspaper *The Militant* and the magazine *New Internationalist*.

Wollstonecraft, Mary (1759-1797) was an English writer and philosopher. She authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a foundational text of liberal feminism. In it, she argues that women should be considered rational beings, just like men, and therefore participate in political and social life with full rights, including the management of property. She married the anarchist philosopher William Godwin, with whom she had a daughter, Mary Shelley, author of the famous novel *Frankenstein*.

Glossary

Revolutionists and Reformists

In the 1840s, Marx and Engels founded scientific socialism, the revolutionary movement of the working class for its liberation. The First International, founded in London in 1864, arose from the convergence of anarchist and Marxist sectors, with strong influences from both. It dissolved after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. In the last two decades of the 19th century, the growth of socialist workers' parties in Europe and other continents laid the groundwork for the creation of the Second International in 1889. These mass workers' parties identified as Marxist and called themselves social democrats. Their first major action was the organisation of an International Day of Struggle for the eight-hour workday on 1 May 1890. Its main component was the powerful German Social Democracy.

At that time, the development of industrial production, the global market, and imperialist capitalist plunder in the colonies allowed for the emergence of privileged strata within the European working class. These strata, entrenched in the leadership of large trade unions and the parliamentary seats won by the socialist parties, fostered trends within the political and trade union leadership towards abandoning the path of socialist revolution envisioned by Marx and Engels and *The Communist Manifesto*. On the contrary, they argued that, given the general progress of the economy and the growing trade union and political organisation of workers, it was possible to reach socialism peacefully and gradually through the accumulation of social reforms and the increasing influence of socialist deputies in parliament. Their principal theorist was Eduard Bernstein. In 1898, the first public debate took place, marking the beginning of the division between reformists and revolutionists within the working class. Rosa Luxemburg, a leader of the revolutionary sector, published her work, *Reform or Revolution*.

In 1914, the overwhelming majority of the reformist social democracy led to the bankruptcy of the Second International, which definitively lost its revolutionary character when, at the start of the war in 1914, its deputies approved the funds for the inter-imperialist war of their respective bourgeoisies. They abandoned internationalism and became complicit in the massacre of millions of workers in every country. A small minority of revolutionary leaders, including Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg of Germany, Lenin and Trotsky of Russia, and others, completely opposed this capitulation to the imperialist bourgeoisie, denouncing their betrayal of the interests of the working class. They issued an appeal against the war and for maintaining the revolutionary and internationalist path. From then on, the division and confrontation between revolutionaries and reformists was sealed in each country and throughout the world. The reformist socialist workers' parties of the Second International continued to have weight in many countries.

First World War

Between 1914 and 1918, the world war raged between the major imperialist powers and their respective allies. On one side, Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and on the other, Great Britain and France, with Italy, Russia, and the United States. It was a direct expression of the dawning era of capitalist decline, the imperialist era, and the beginning of a crisis in the leadership of the working class. The

majority leadership of the workers' parties and the Socialist International used their influence to incite workers to support their respective bourgeoisies and to become cannon fodder in the trenches.

Triumph of the Socialist Revolution in Russia and the Third International

In October 1917, for the first and, so far, only time, revolutionaries seized power, overthrew the bourgeoisie, and began implementing the first steps towards the transition to socialism. This happened in Russia, a very large country, essentially agrarian, with a working class highly concentrated in some cities. Since the end of the 19th century, revolutionaries and reformists had been vying for power within Russian social democracy. Lenin would spearhead the construction of a revolutionary party – the Bolsheviks – that would gain a foothold among the working class and prepare to lead the revolution and seize power. Amid the hardships caused by the inter-imperialist war and an increasingly revolutionary world situation, in February 1917, insurrections in the main cities overthrew the tsarist dictatorship and the “soviets” – democratic bodies of delegates from workers, peasants, and soldiers – reemerged (having originated in 1905 during a first revolution that was defeated). A bourgeois government was formed, headed by a reformist socialist, Alexander Kerensky, and for several months it enjoyed the support of the soviets. The Bolsheviks, in conflict with the other reformist workers' and peasants' parties, and as workers' and popular hardships and the carnage in the trenches deepened, gradually gained a majority of the delegates in the soviets, the trade unions, and many army regiments. In October 1917, led by Lenin and Trotsky, the Bolshevik party planned and led an insurrection against the bourgeois government, and under their leadership, the soviets seized power. For the first time, a socialist revolution triumphed, establishing a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government whose objective was to advance towards socialism in Russia, extend the revolution to other countries, particularly in Europe, and end capitalism worldwide. The bourgeois and imperialist counter-revolution instigated a bloody civil war, which was defeated after three years of fighting by the Red Army, founded and led by Trotsky.

Following its victory, and despite the precarious living conditions imposed first by the country's poverty and later by the sacrifices of the civil war, the Bolshevik government implemented numerous measures to benefit women in various areas. From the very first days, civil marriage was established (taking it away from the Orthodox Christian Church), divorce was granted through a simple procedure at the request of either spouse, cross-dressing was decriminalized, same-sex marriage was legalised, women were granted access to the Duma (parliament), women received the right to vote, and in 1920, it became the first country in the world to legalise abortion, providing it free of charge in hospitals.

In March 1919, in Moscow, in the midst of the civil war, the Third International was founded, with the participation of revolutionary Marxist parties and groups that had broken away from reformist socialist parties in a significant number of countries. It was called the Communist International, after the name adopted by Bolshevism in the USSR, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which was also adopted by the other members of the new international. Its first four congresses, from 1919 to 1922, made progress in establishing the programmatic, political, and organisational foundations for revolutionary workers' parties, whose objective was the revolutionary seizure of power by the workers, peasants, and other popular sectors in each country, initiating the path towards the construction of socialism, ending the capitalist system, and promoting the transformations that would lead to world socialism.

The first two congresses consolidated the break and differentiation from the reformism of the Second International, reclaiming the programmatic and political principles and tactics of revolutionary Marxism and Leninism that had been abandoned by the socialist parties. At the third congress, several theses and resolutions were adopted to promote the work of revolutionary parties among women, and a women's secretariat was formed. At the fourth congress, in 1922, while positively evaluating these achievements, it was noted that, unfortunately, some sections had not fulfilled these tasks or had only done so partially, and their importance was emphasised.

Isolation of the First Revolutionary Workers' State and the Stalinist Bureaucratisation

From 1918, with the end of the First World War, there was a great wave of global revolution, particularly in Europe, in Germany, Italy, Hungary, among other countries, but it was halted and defeated. In none of these countries — because of the betrayal of the reformist parties of the Second International's social democracy and the youth and weakness of the recently founded communist parties — were there new socialist revolutionary victories like the one that had happened in Russia in October 1917. The USSR was isolated and bled dry by the effort required to win the civil war. Lenin and Trotsky held the internationalist view that if the USSR was not accompanied by other victories like that of October 1917, if socialist revolutions were not repeated and spread, this first revolutionary workers' state would be annihilated by the imperialist bourgeois counter-revolution. It didn't happen that way. The USSR survived, but underwent an accelerated process of bureaucratisation of the party and the state, spearheaded by Stalin and opposed by Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin died in 1924, and Trotsky continued his struggle. Stalin led the betrayal of the revolution and its bureaucratisation. He imposed increasing repression, crushed all opposition, and expelled Trotsky from the party and the country. The official policy of the CPSU and the Third International completely abandoned internationalism and embraced reformism, with its "socialism in one country", class conciliation, and "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism.

Regarding women's rights, the Stalinist bureaucratic regime dismantled much of what had been achieved by the October Revolution of 1917, such as the right to abortion. Trotsky denounced this in his important book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, in 1936.

The Fourth International and Trotskyism

From 1933 onwards, Leon Trotsky began calling for the founding of a new revolutionary international. The Fourth International was launched in Paris in 1938, on the eve of the Second World War. A handful of representatives from small Trotskyist parties and groups gathered to promote revolutionary continuity against the political betrayal of the Stalinist communist parties grouped in the Third International.

In its founding document, the *Transitional Program*, written by Trotsky, it is stated that decadent capitalism strikes its hardest blows at women, both as wage earners and as housewives. It adds that the sections should seek their support and that among them will be found inexhaustible reserves of dedication, selflessness, and a spirit of sacrifice.

Trotsky was assassinated in 1940. The Fourth International was greatly weakened, and since the early 1950s, most of its leadership fell into opportunistic positions of capitulation to Stalinism and nationalist bourgeois leaderships, leading to crisis and division. The Trotskyist movement still exists today, but it is dispersed among countless groups, parties, and currents in many countries.

Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was founded in 1938. Previously, it was the Communist League of America. Its founder, James Cannon, had been part of the Trotskyist opposition since 1928 and accompanied Trotsky in forming the international opposition and founding the Fourth International in 1938. For decades, the SWP was one of the largest Trotskyist parties in the world. In the 1930s, it managed to gain a foothold in working-class sectors. In the 1960s and 1970s, it played a significant role in the mobilisations against the invasion of Vietnam by US troops. It also participated in the struggles for the civil rights of African Americans and women. In 1976, its presidential candidate garnered nearly 100,000 votes. From the mid-1970s onward, the SWP embarked on a path of no return, abandoning internationalism and completely capitulating to Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party government, distancing itself from all Trotskyist and revolutionary policies.

Second World War

On 1 September 1939, Nazi German troops invaded Poland. This event led the governments of Britain and France to break relations with Hitler and begin the military confrontation with Nazism. The war ended in 1945 with the surrender of Germany on 8 May and Japan on 25 August. The third major component of the Nazi-fascist bloc, Mussolini's Italy, had already capitulated.

It was a different war from the First, because it combined inter-imperialist aspects with the confrontation of different bourgeois political regimes. On one side was the repressive and genocidal Nazi regime, which spread across most of Europe. On the side of the "Allies" were the imperialist powers of France and Great Britain, joined by the United States in 1941. These are countries with regimes of democratic freedoms. For his part, in August 1939, Stalin had signed with Hitler an infamous "non-aggression" pact between Germany and the USSR, which was vehemently denounced by Trotsky. In June 1941, just as Trotsky had predicted before his assassination, the Nazi armies began their invasion of the Soviet Union. From then on, Stalin joined the Allied side. Despite the leadership of the bureaucracy, the Red Army and the mobilisation of the Soviet people played a key role in defeating Nazism, with a death toll of 20 million throughout the entire conflict. From the moment the German army was defeated in Stalingrad in February 1943, Nazism began its retreat and a revolutionary upsurge swept across Europe. The combination of the Red Army's advance from the East, which captured Berlin in April 1945 and forced the German army's surrender, the internal resistance of the partisans in the occupied countries, and the Allied landings in Normandy led to the final defeat of Nazism.

Workers' States

Trotskyism uses this term in relation to countries where the bourgeoisie was expropriated. The October Revolution of 1917 gave birth to the first and, to date, only revolutionary workers' state in history. This process combined the elimination of the bourgeoisie's power and expropriation with the existence of the revolutionary leadership of the Bolshevik party and the organs of workers' democracy, the soviets. From the 1930s onwards, Trotsky defined the USSR, dominated by the Stalinist bureaucracy, as a "degenerated workers' state". He argued that as long as the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and state ownership of most of the means of production were maintained, the USSR did not change its class character. Thus, a workers' state persisted, but one degenerated into a counter-revolutionary bureaucratic regime.

As it advanced against the Nazi troops, the Red Army occupied Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the three Baltic states, and eastern Germany, including the capital, Berlin. In all these countries, through a process involving several distinct factors, the bourgeoisie was expropriated, and dictatorial, one-party, Stalinist political regimes, which we call "bureaucratic workers' states", were established. Germany was divided. The Third International had already been dissolved in 1943. The Stalinist apparatus labelled the countries it dominated as "real socialism". This was a completely different process from the October Revolution of 1917. Bureaucratic workers' states also emerged from the triumphant revolutions in Yugoslavia, China, and Cuba, since, although they advanced towards the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, they were not led by revolutionary parties or Soviet-style democratic regimes.

Since the 1970s, the bureaucracies of these countries, where the bourgeoisie did not exist, have gradually opened their economies to imperialist penetration, and a process of capitalist restoration began to unfold. In 1989, the dictatorial apparatuses of the USSR and Eastern Europe were ousted from power by massive mobilisations against the bureaucracies. However, due to the absence of a revolutionary leadership, these democratic victories did not halt the restoration of capitalism. Since then, bureaucratic workers' states no longer exist in the world.

Chinese Revolution

In October 1949, the peasant and guerrilla armies led by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party overthrew the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek, who headed the Kuomintang, a bourgeois nationalist

party. In the heat of the revolutionary mobilisation, although it was not his program, Mao moved towards the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and landowners, transforming the country into a bureaucratic workers' state. At the end of the Second World War, with the defeat of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese Empire, the invading Japanese army troops withdrew from Chinese territory. A mass uprising ensued in which women, victims of tremendous and millennia-old oppression, played a leading role. It was common, for example, for peasants, burdened by taxes, to sell their daughters to pay them.

Yankee invasion of Vietnam

From the 1950s onwards, the Indochinese peninsula had been divided into North Vietnam, a small, bureaucratic workers' state bordering China, and South Vietnam, a semi-colony of the United States, with a significant military presence since the end of French colonial rule in 1954. In 1964, based on perceived aggressive intentions from the North toward the South, the United States Congress passed a resolution that gave the Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson the green light to increase the military presence without a declaration of war. Johnson launched a bombing campaign against the North and began deploying combat troops, dramatically increasing the deployment to 184,000 soldiers by the end of 1965 and to 536,000 by the end of 1968. The Americans normalised the use of napalm, an incendiary chemical that devastated vegetation and villages. From 1969, Republican President Richard Nixon, faced with the growing difficulties confronting the invaders, began a policy of "Vietnamisation", which consisted of providing more weapons to the South Vietnamese army while American forces dwindled. The resistance of the Vietnamese people and the Viet Cong was heroic and gained worldwide sympathy. In the United States, in particular, massive demonstrations took place demanding the return of the soldiers. In April 1975, Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, fell to the Viet Cong. The Americans suffered the first major military defeat in their history. In 1976, North and South Vietnam were reunified.

The French May and the Global Rise

From the early 1960s, various oppressed and exploited sectors began to mobilise. Latin America was shaken by the advances of the socialist revolution in Cuba, and guerrilla groups proliferated. In Africa, the struggle for liberation triumphed in Algeria, and the uprising in the Portuguese colonies spread and deepened. In 1974, the Carnation Revolution triumphed in Portugal, ending a decades-long dictatorship. In the United States, the struggle for equal civil rights for African Americans was joined by those of other sectors, such as women and homosexuals. Solidarity grew with the struggles of the Vietnamese people against the invasion of Yankee troops. In 1968, this upsurge leapt forward with the French May. Student youth mobilised *en masse*, occupied universities, and "demanded the impossible". Workers' strikes and factory occupations began. Barricades proliferated in the streets of Paris, and the cry "Workers and students united, forward!" was heard. The strikes shook France, and President De Gaulle was mortally wounded. The movement spread to the youth of the rest of Europe, and in several countries, the working class also joined the movement. The Prague Spring, a revolution against the dictatorship of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, was crushed in 1968 by the army of the Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR and was widely repudiated. The second wave of women's struggle spread throughout the world from the United States, France, and Italy. In Latin America, the rise of these struggles took hold in the Southern Cone. In Argentina, the Cordobazo took place in May 1969, when, amidst a national strike, workers and students mobilised and occupied the city centre, paralysing the repressive forces. In 1970, a million people gathered in Washington, DC, demanding an end to the Vietnam War.

Struggles for the Civil Rights of African Americans

One of the first components of the upsurge of the 1960s was the struggle of African Americans, who faced severe discrimination from racist sectors, particularly in the South. Let us not forget that the abolition of slavery was achieved in the 1860s after several years of a bitter civil war. And that white racism continued to exist as a deep-seated scourge in American society, with segregation in all areas (education, employment, public transport, etc.). A symbol of white supremacy has been the infamous Ku Klux Klan.

In 1963, 250,000 people marched on Washington DC for equality. In 1964, Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, passed by Congress, into law, prohibiting discrimination based on sex or race in hiring, promotion, and firing. Another step forward came in 1965 with the Voting Rights Act. In any case, these advances did not eradicate racism, and the struggles continue. In 2008, Barack Obama, a Democrat, became the first African American president. He was re-elected four years later. In 2013, the #BlackLives#Matter movement emerged on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of African American teenager Trayvon Martin due to a gunshot. In 2016, Republican Donald Trump, a far-right conservative and white supremacist, won the election. In May 2020, white police officers murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis, an act that was condemned in several cities across the country and the world. Trump lost his re-election bid later that year. However, he did win another term in 2024, defeating Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, an African American woman, at the polls.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

In the United States, the demand for women to have full constitutional rights on equal terms with men was first introduced in 1923. In the 1960s, it became a rallying cry for women's rights movements, particularly for the leading liberal feminist organisation, NOW, headed by Betty Friedan. In 1972, it was passed by Congress and began to be ratified by an increasing number of states. It has not yet achieved constitutional status.

The Right to Abortion in the Second Wave

The right to abortion was a central demand of the feminist struggles that unfolded during the second wave in Europe and the United States. In the United Kingdom, it was legalised in 1967. In France, until the 1970s, women had abortions clandestinely, given the total prohibition. In 1971, a manifesto that shook the country was published, signed by 343 prominent women and drafted by Simone de Beauvoir, which stated, among other things, "I declare that I have had an abortion". Signatories included Marguerite Duras, Catherine Deneuve, Jeanne Moreau, Françoise Sagan, and Agnès Varda. In 1972, the Neuwirth Law was passed, allowing the widespread use of contraceptive pills, and in 1975, abortion was decriminalised with the Simone Veil Law. In March 2024, access to voluntary abortion became a constitutional right.

In 1978, abortion was decriminalised in Italy up to 90 days of gestation, despite the overwhelming influence of the Catholic Church, which has since never relinquished its reactionary campaign, spearheaded by the Vatican and the pope of the day. In 2024, the reactionary Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni promoted measures to facilitate pressure from anti-rights activists and healthcare professionals on pregnant people to dissuade them from their decision to have an abortion.

In the United States, the Supreme Court ruled in January 1973 that the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution protected a pregnant woman's right to choose to have an abortion. This landmark ruling, known as *Roe v. Wade*, led to the overturning of many federal and state laws restricting the right to abortion and to its complete rejection by reactionary sectors, particularly evangelical churches. In June 2022, the Supreme Court, composed mostly of Donald Trump supporters, ruled to overturn the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. With this ruling, abortion became a matter of individual state discretion, and it is totally or partially prohibited in 26 states.

Right to Divorce

In the heat of the second-wave feminist struggles, the right to no-fault divorce was won. Until then, this right had been restricted in most European countries, or the procedures were so complex and costly that they only benefited wealthy men. In England, the major change came in 1969 with the passage of the Divorce Reform Act, which allowed couples to divorce after two years of separation, or five years if only one partner requested it. This allowed marriages to end without either party having to prove fault or the grounds for divorce, which were generally adultery, insanity, abandonment, incest, and other reasons. In Italy, it was achieved in 1970 and in Portugal in 1975.

In the United States, California was the first state to legalise no-fault divorce in 1969. By 2010, every state had legalised divorce. Pressure from conservative and religious circles persisted, alleging a threat to the “sanctity” of marriage and the concept of the “American family”. Even today, some conservatives, capitalising on the setback of the overturned *Roe v. Wade* decision regarding abortion rights, campaign against no-fault divorce, complaining about how easily women can divorce.

In Argentina, the law legalising no-fault divorce was passed in June 1987. After the fall of the civic-military dictatorship, the debate on divorce, which obscurantist and reactionary sectors refused to discuss, began. The Catholic Church, which had been complicit in the genocidal dictatorship, its torture, disappearances, and the theft of babies, launched a major nationwide campaign in defence of the family.