

# THE WEAPON OF CRITICISM

## On the Liberation of Women and the March to Communism

by Y. B.

**The Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China**  
Margery Wolf  
(Stanford Univ. Press, 1986)

**Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China**  
Judith Stacey  
(University of California Press, 1983)

**Women in Rural China: Policy towards women before and after the Cultural Revolution**  
Vibeke Hemmel and Pia Sindbjerg  
(Humanities Press: London, 1984)

"They say I'm a Communist girl  
and I, dying, know that at least  
I will not be given to Zhang  
Jiu\*  
Red and White will ever be  
divided  
and we shall see who has  
victory,  
who defeat; the white flowers  
now  
are fading as our scarlet ones  
burst into eager bloom."

— written by a woman  
Communist leader on the eve of  
her execution by the U.S.-  
backed Kuomintang regime

\* A local Koumintang leader.

The three works reviewed here offer major critiques of the line and practice of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) concerning the liberation of women. Unfortunately, none of them attack the reactionary line being implemented today by the Deng Xiao-ping regime, as it restores capitalism, with all its attendant horrors like rape and even the drowning of baby girls, but instead target the correct line of Mao Tsetung and the experience of building genuine socialism in China. Two of the three books reviewed here, Stacey's and Wolf's, are explicit attempts to correct what Stacey calls the "optimistic interpretations of women's liberation in the People's Republic of China." What they see is not unprecedented advance by women toward liberation under the leadership of Mao and the CCP; instead they level charges of the continual postponement or outright betrayal of women's liberation by the Communists in their pursuit of more

traditional "patriarchal" development. The third book, by the two Danish authors Hemmel and Sindbjerg, examines the two-line struggle in China from 1959-1976 regarding women. They argue that though there were differences between the revisionist and revolutionary camps, these were not of a fundamental nature, and that there has been exaggerated importance given to the revisionist forces as a factor holding back the progress of women's liberation. They attribute this instead to a basic "ambiguity" in the line of the CCP as a whole.

The book by Wolf, a social anthropologist, is based largely on on-site investigation, including interviews, done in 1980-81 in China. Stacey's work purports to synthesize secondary sources to arrive at a new theoretical understanding of women in China. The two books offer largely congruent interpretations, covering generally the same territory, and differ mainly on their interpretation of the intent of the Chinese revolutionaries. As Wolf explains, "Stacey and I disagree only on the extent to which China's revolutionaries *intended* to model their new society on the patriarchy of the old. Whereas Stacey believes and argues cogently that the CCP used the concepts of patriarchy to win a revolution and transform a society, I would argue, using the same evidence, that the leadership *did* hope to relieve women and young people of the patriarchal burden but were defeated because they did not recognise their own cultural blinders. Despite their good intentions, their patriarchal lenses ruled out alternatives that might have changed China's history and the future of international

*Chiang Ching, one of the principal leaders of the Cultural Revolution, imprisoned following the reactionary coup d'état.*



feminism." All three sets of authors charge that China's revolutionaries never fundamentally challenged the subordinate position of women or the sexual division of labour.

These three works are part of a larger trend which has arisen in the last few years and which goes against the correct verdict widely established in the 1960s and 1970s among revolutionaries and many others who support the liberation of women that the Chinese Revolution had witnessed an unprecedented turning upside down of women's traditional place in society. Certainly works like those reviewed here existed at the time; but they were to no small extent on the defensive, often sandwiched on bookstore shelves between titles like "Women Hold Up Half the Sky" and others which brought back first-hand accounts of what women were doing in China, and this despite the barrier of lies and silence with which the bourgeoisies of the world tried to surround China. What was happening in China during the Cultural Revolution was unprecedented: a revolutionary headquarters in the party was unleashing mass revolt from below in order to continue the revolution, and in its course the people of China, including the women, were emancipating themselves like no people on earth have ever done before. Former child brides and women whose broken, bound feet testified volumes about women's position in the old society rose up as part of the mass challenge to China's new would-be revisionist emperors, continuing the revolution and leaving no stone unperturbed in the thousands-year old edifice of class society — and this beautiful picture burned itself indelibly into

the minds of millions of the world's exploited and oppressed and also had a big impact on progressive intellectuals, many of whom identify with what is often called the women's liberation movement. It is this legacy, and the lessons of the Chinese masses' world-historic struggle, that these authors turn their backs on and seek to distort and bury beneath a petty pile of vulgar and misused sociological statistics.

Stacey begins by rejecting the analysis of China as feudal or semifeudal and arguing instead that it was a "peasant family economy," whose crisis intersected with international developments to give rise to the revolutionary situation seized on by Mao and the Communists. The latter, she argues, were initially heavily influenced by feminist concern in the urban centres of China, but as they moved to the countryside to organise the People's War, they dropped their "feminism" as they increasingly adapted themselves to the peasants, who were "looking backward to revolution" — by which she means that the peasants were moved principally by desire to restore or "realise" the "Confucian patriarchal family system," not to rupture with it. She attempts to show that throughout the subsequent development of the revolution the Communist Party policies on women were invariably subordinated to the need to mobilise the CCP's main ally in the countryside, the "patriarchal peasants," and that this was reflected in what she calls a patriarchal political line.

Wolf and Stacey spend a large part of their analysis on the Land Reform and the Marriage

Law Reform of the early 1950s; central to the arguments of all three sets of authors is that the CCP failed to do away with the family. They agree that though the position of women in Chinese society improved somewhat, they claim this progress was never meant or allowed to challenge the domination of men and their superior position in the division of labour, especially in the home. Stacey thus argues that, "Far from abolishing the family, the communist revolution in China rescued peasant family life from the precipice of destruction"; "A radical redistribution of patriarchy was the revolutionary essence (of the new democratic patriarchy)." This meant, for Stacey, that, "Chinese patriarchs" had "a new, more democratic basis for their unity — one that future Chinese feminists would find intensely difficult to challenge." Whatever quantitative improvements women made were at the cost of sacrificing the opportunity to achieve "real emancipation" and full equality with men, an opportunity which Stacey considers that the CCP consciously threw away, and which Wolf and the Danish authors believe was lost due to contradictions in the CCP's line.

#### Shortcuts

On a certain level the argument of all three sets of authors is similar and straight-forward: the Chinese revolution didn't lead to very fundamental changes in women's position much less achieve full equality between women and men, therefore this must have been the result of the patriarchal policies of its leaders, intentional or not. This is true even of the Danish authors, though they

are the most supportive of the real progress made by Chinese women. In discussing the Campaign to Criticise Lin Piao and Confucius, an important episode in the Cultural Revolution in 1973-1974 that took up the struggle against women in a major way, they argue, "The campaign's weakness is that it does not tackle the problem; this is clearly evident by the fact that 27 years after the revolution women are still suppressed." For her part, Stacey targets "the inadequacy of socialist theory" and Marxism's "inherent limits in its capacity to theorise the sources of women's oppression." As a direct consequence, "socialism has not liberated women because a socialist mode of production has proven to be compatible with a patriarchal sex-gender system."

What unites all of these arguments is a kind of pragmatic idealism: the CCP *could* have *completely* eliminated women's oppression, it didn't and thus it is patriarchal. This appears to be very radical: seeming impatience with the continued inequality of women is the first line of attack. In fact, in their case it is a smokescreen for avoiding the tumultuous struggle that is the indispensable condition of proletarian revolution and women's liberation.

How could thousands of years of the subordination of women be done away with in a mere 27 years?! Or the elimination of classes, for that matter? If anyone has discovered how to do this, they should let the world know, and now. Unfortunately, not one of our authors allows their readers in on their secret, and so the oppressed are probably doomed to a long wait for such miraculous shortcuts and will, in the meantime, have to resort to more difficult means: mass revolutionary struggle. As we shall see, this is precisely what the authors' line averts; their secret shortcut will prove to be a well-known dead-end.

### Pushing the Family "Over the Precipice"

As noted, a central pillar of the argument of all three is the CCP's policy on the family. Stacey, with her contention that the CCP

"rescued the family from the precipice of destruction," develops this in the most depth. Is there any truth to the picture she paints? In a certain sense — family life undoubtedly was stabilised after Liberation. But what were the revolutionaries supposed to do? Join in with all the oppressive forces that had decimated the ranks of the masses, that had driven them, starving, from one end of China to the other, wrenching families apart; a poverty so grinding, a social order so cruel that husbands even sold off their wives and parents their girl daughters as child brides or, failing this, sometimes drowned them in desperation at their inability to care for or protect them; where hundreds of thousands of women turned to prostitution to survive, and rape by landlords and feudal gangsters was the order of the day. This is what Stacey's "family crisis" looked like in the real world, and damn right the revolution abolished all this, practically immediately too. Is this evidence of "patriarchy" — or of eliminating oppression? In these conditions, Stacey's analysis that the family was "on the precipice of destruction" and so should have been pushed over the edge amounts to a demand to *intensify the ruin caused by the workings of class society*; however much Stacey may want, radical leaps are not shortcuts made by intensifying oppression, they are instead the product of mobilising masses in revolutionary struggle against oppression so that they themselves consciously create and forge new, higher forms of organisation — including by struggle *in their own ranks*.

And real radical leaps were made in China; what the New Democratic Revolution accomplished in China almost immediately was, by the standards of world history, little short of miraculous. The Land Reform turned over land to men *and* women: at the ceremonies organizing this many women heard their names spoken in public for the first times in their lives. The Marriage Law became widely known as the "divorce law" or the "women's law;" nearly a million divorces were carried out in 18 months, an unprecedented event in any feudal

society, as women freed themselves especially from the arranged marriages, including as child brides, that many had been forced into. Go into a feudal village in India or Afghanistan today to try and imagine what kind of controversy *this* stirred up. Landlords, goons, wife-beaters and rapists were hauled into mass public meetings, called "speak bitterness" sessions, where women poured out their rage and organised punishment for the criminals. Prostitution was eliminated almost literally overnight — 60,000 women in Shanghai alone were given training, education, work, and lodging — and rape became virtually unheard of. Female infanticide disappeared. A constitution was adopted that abolished all forms of legal discrimination against women and in doing this went farther than any constitution ever adopted by the big modern bourgeois democracies like England or the U.S. In sum, a society came wrenching forward from a position as one of the most backward on the face of the earth, and leaped decades ahead through the violent means of mass revolution — yet the authors would belittle this as patriarchal!

Mao was always clear that the struggle against the domination of women by men was part and parcel of the New Democratic Revolution: "A man in China is usually subjected to the domination of three systems of authority (political authority, clan authority and religious authority). . . . As for women, in addition to being dominated by these three systems of authority, they are also dominated by the men (the authority of the husband). These four authorities — political, clan, religious and masculine — are the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal ideology and system, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants." ("Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan") It is worth noting that Mao wrote this not in the city but while doing a great deal of investigation among the peasants, where Stacey pictures him as having capitulated to their backwardness.

So it must be affirmed that the victory of the first stage of the revolution *was* indeed a great step forward for society and for the emancipation of women as well. However, it is also true that exactly because the New Democratic Revolution is still a *bourgeois* revolution, its program, for example, calls for “land to the tiller” and not yet for the collectivisation of agriculture, and this has contradictory implications for the position of women in the new society. Stacey argues that the distribution of the land among the peasants led to strengthening the material basis for the family in Chinese society and, instead of advancing the emancipation of women, transformed the feudal patriarchy into “new democratic patriarchy.” Hence her charge that “a radical redistribution of patriarchy was the essence” of the new democratic transformations.

What she is observing, but from a bourgeois feminist viewpoint, is the fact that New Democratic Revolution does not yet do away with capitalism, nor with many of the values and practices associated with it. As Mao put it, new democracy opens the door for capitalism. . . *but* he went on to add, *it opens the door for socialism even wider*. This is the material basis for the struggle between the two roads that took place after liberation in China; Mao fought fiercely *against* those who wanted to “consolidate new democracy” (which meant, in effect, consolidating capitalism) and the institutions associated with it, and he instead led the class struggle forward so as to begin socialist transformation. Yes, land reform could not, in itself, undermine the basis for “patriarchy” — but it did lay the basis for the next, more deep-going stage of the revolution that would begin to do away with capitalism. Stacey, by concentrating attention on this earlier stage, and then more or less simply asserting that “new democratic patriarchy” *was consolidated* and didn’t undergo any fundamental change thereafter, denies the more profound changes that took place with the collectivisation of agriculture in the Great Leap Forward, which was

Mao’s initial big leap towards socialist transformation, and even more so in the Cultural Revolution. It is *Stacey*, and not Mao who ignores the need to deepen the revolution.

Let us look further at Stacey’s analysis of the family and the CCP’s attitude towards it, as this question is a sticking point for the authors of all three works. Central to Stacey’s argument is an effort to raise the family as the pivotal unit of organisation of the mode of production, or at least co-equal with any other category, specifically class; hence her characterisation of the crisis in China as a “realisation crisis” of the Confucian “family system,” and her contention that, “The Chinese Communists never intended to wage a feminist revolution; . . . Believing patriarchy derivative of ‘feudal’ social structure, regarding gender oppression as a nonantagonistic contradiction, the CCP did not seek to eliminate patriarchs as a class, but merely to eliminate a particular class of patriarchs.”

Unfortunately, despite Stacey’s repeated charges of the Maoists’ “atheoretical” orientation on women’s oppression, nowhere in this 300 page book on the “patriarchal socialist revolution” do we find any discussion of what patriarchy is, apart from this reference to patriarchs — which presumably includes all men — “as a class.” Yet what on earth does this mean? Stacey apparently considers that by creating a “class of patriarchs,” she thus elevates and emphasises the struggle of women. Instead, she degrades it and sets it on the narrow footing which underpins the structure of her book (and similar reasoning heavily influences the other two as well). Men as a group do occupy a “patriarchal” position vis-a-vis women, but they do not constitute a *class*, which is determined by the relationship to the means of production. The implication of Stacey’s analysis is that women too constitute a class.

It is beyond the scope of this article to thoroughly explore this question — especially since Stacey herself does not do so — but it is worth stating that her confusion

here obscures the central role of the ownership and control of the means of production (land, factories, communication and transport systems, etc.) and the social surplus product in the division of society into classes. The establishment of the proletarian state and the socialisation of ownership makes a radical rupture with all hitherto existing social formations by placing these in the hands, not of another exploiting minority, but, for the first time ever, of the broad masses themselves. Based on this, the class struggle of the proletariat, including its women fighters, is to carry forward the revolution to eliminate *all* exploitation and oppression — and the oppression of women is certainly a key link in this — and advance, as part of the world revolution, to communism. As Marx put it, socialism is “the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship* of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the *abolition of class distinctions generally*, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations.” (*The Class Struggle in France*) Stacey’s revision of classes to make men and women each a class, instead of helping to shed light on the full roots of women’s oppression in class society, actually narrows these to the relations between men and women.

First, this view misses the truth that it is class society which breeds and reinforces oppression of all kinds, the oppression of women being a key example. The fact that even the oppressed and exploited men are used by the system to act as its agents in keeping women in their place is a product of and reinforced by the division of society into classes. The elimination of patriarchy will not be a product of the elimination of “patriarchs as a class,” as Stacey puts it, but the elimination of class society altogether along with all the social divisions and inequalities which are associated with it. Second, Stacey’s revision also belittles the important

place that the oppression of women has in this system, by narrowing its roots, and thus she degrades the importance of the struggle against the oppression of women as part of the overall revolutionary process, and the role of women in that struggle.

It should not be surprising then that, in her lengthy indictment of Mao and the CCP as "patriarchal socialists," Stacey devotes *scarcely a single paragraph* to the events of the Cultural Revolution. When Stacey (and Wolf too) ignore the path-breaking activity of millions of women in the Cultural Revolution as they leapt to the fore of an epoch-making truly mass struggle and challenged tradition in all spheres — not least of all culture and the thousand-years old image of women as inferior, submissive, good for housework and making babies but not for running society — and instead put forward as the decisive question whether after 10 years women got 60% or 70% of men's workpoints, whether they formed 20% or 30% of the number of cadres, and so on and so forth, they are true to their own logic: the logic of reformism and formulating petty demands for women instead of upholding their crucial, qualitative role in the fight to emancipate all mankind.

Stacey's redefinition of class and the raising of the family above and outside of the context of the proletarian revolution, with her conclusion that patriarchy and socialism are quite compatible, degrades the dictatorship of the proletariat and its world-emancipating tasks. It makes socialism something other than the thorough-going revolutionary struggle to tear up all the roots of exploitative class society and all social divisions and inequalities, including between men and women, to advance to communism.

Part of this is the ignoring (Stacey) or the downplaying and distortion (the Danish authors) of how the Cultural Revolution did just that. Its principal battlecry was "It's right to rebel against reactionaries" — and this meant *everything* reactionary, not everything *except* patriarchal tyranny, or everything except women's

inequality (including that women got only 60-70% of men's incomes in the countryside). It is not possible to leave untouched a single link in the chain of exploitation and inequality, whether it be of one nationality over another, of men over women, of intellectuals over manual labourers. It is in this sense that the revolutionaries in China popularised the citation of Marx above concerning the "declaration of the permanence of the revolution" as Marx's "Four Alls," in that the socialist revolution must uproot not just some but *all* of the remnants of exploitative class society. For the logic that turns aside from struggling against any particular division or inequality, that leaves unchallenged the idea that men are better than women or more suited for important tasks, or that puts off tackling women's subordination to men "for later," or postpones mobilising women against their own oppression or thinks that this is just something that concerns women, or however such a refusal is "justified" — all such thinking reinforces the logic that is behind *every other division* in society as well and will thus objectively give support to the bourgeoisie (and, under socialism, to their efforts to reverse revolution and restore capitalism). Is it possible for anyone to actually be a representative of the proletariat — the class which can emancipate itself only by emancipating all mankind — and tolerate or overlook for even one moment the oppression of *any* section of society, much less half of society itself?

No it is not. Furthermore, it is not even possible to make revolution without the active participation of the masses of women; without waging battle against the chains that hold back women's revolutionary energy, even the men proletarians cannot be transformed to fit the necessities of advancing a thorough-going revolution at any stage, whether it be new democratic or proletarian-socialist. It is for these reasons that Mao argued that the advance of the Chinese revolution could be measured by the position of the women in the revolution. Mao is also reported to have stated

## Militia Women

Inscription on a  
photograph

February 1961

How bright and  
brave they look,  
shouldering  
five-foot rifles

On the parade  
ground lit up by the  
first gleams of day.

China's daughters  
have high-aspiring  
minds,

They love their  
battle array, not  
silks and satins.

By Mao Tsetung



*Women guerilla fighters during the national liberation war.*



that, "the next cultural revolution will be made by the women, for the women," and, "as long as there is a single woman in the world who has not been liberated, no one will really be liberated," and "the day when the women all over the country rise up, that will be the day of victory for the Chinese Revolution." (first two quotes from Michelle Loi, *Half the Sky*, the last from *Socialism and Feminism*, by Elisabeth Croll, an earlier, more sympathetic examination of the liberation of women in China). Indeed, it is a profound truth that it has been at those times when the revolution has posed the deepest and most all-around challenge to every shackle in tradition's chain that the fury of women has been unleashed as a mighty force for revolution.

Certainly then the kind of continuing sexual inequality that Stacey, Wolf and the Danish authors all amply document were not unimportant matters, and in fact these links in the chain holding down women also hold down all the oppressed. But socialism is exactly a *transition*. It is not some static utopia achieved by passing a few new laws or even reorganising a particular institution like the family, it is indeed the "declaration of the permanence of the revolution." If these authors had left their critique at simply saying that there was still inequality, that it was still severely marked by patriarchy, that there was still commodity production and elements of private property, and still many barriers to the full liberation of women, including from powerful capitalist-roaders in the top ranks of the CCP itself, and hence the Chinese Revolution had a long path yet to travel, there could be no disagreement. As Mao himself put it, "Our country practices a commodity system, the wage system is unequal too, as in the eight-grade wage scale, and so forth. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat such things can only be restricted. Therefore, if people like Lin Piao come to power it will be quite easy for them to rig up the capitalist system." (In *Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, 1972) Mao was fully

aware that socialist revolution was a long protracted battle.

But there *was* a fundamental change. The proletariat, led by its communist party, had seized power, and ownership had been socialised; based on this, the masses were being led to restrict the inequalities and break down the divisions in society, through continuing the revolution. And as for the masses of women, including China's hundreds of millions of peasant women, they too went further along the road of challenging every link in this chain of oppression, breaking down the centuries-old divisions in society, than has ever been done before.

### The Cultural Revolution

Where else have women stormed out of their jobs and homes to struggle over the direction of the entire society in the way they did in China in the Cultural Revolution? Under the battlecry "Women hold up half the sky" — never mentioned in Wolf's or Stacey's book — millions of Chinese women took part in the Red Guards, in "iron women's detachments" of workers and peasants, to study philosophy, political economy, and debate and struggle out everything from the organisation of the family to matters of science, philosophy, and art — and above all to defeat those capitalist-roaders high up in the CCP seeking to halt the further advance of the revolution and seize power back from the masses. Tradition was challenged everywhere; contrary to the popular Confucian proverb that said that "chicken feathers don't fly up to heaven," the masses of women stormed heaven, as they burst into every sphere of society, however male-dominated. There could be seen everything from hydroelectric dams run exclusively by teams of women to illiterate peasant women relying mainly on their own efforts to set up factories to produce transistors, motors, etc., in far-flung villages; not a few learned to read by studying a combination of complex electronic diagrams and the Quotations of Mao Tsetung (the "Little Red Book"). Millions of young women Red Guards left the comfortable life of the cities to come to live in the countryside, to spread the

revolution to their sisters and brothers among the peasants, their first duty being to aid the peasants to study the laws of class struggle in socialist society. Commenting on such new things, Mao remarked that China then seemed to be part of another universe, one where the women — who previously seemed to have only the duty of producing infants — undertook "strange things," "unthinkable tasks."

Was male supremacism perhaps the one icon to be left standing, protected by the "patriarchal" line of the CCP? Hardly — look, for example, at the revolutionary works produced during the Cultural Revolution: *Red Detachment of Women*, *The White-Haired Girl*, the Chinese-style opera *On the Docks*, and more, where women are portrayed as revolutionary leaders, including of the armed struggle. The portrayal of these revolutionary heroines was hardly fortuitous. It reflected that the struggle against women's subordination was taken up in *all* spheres of society, including art, and it showed the importance the revolutionaries attached to transforming people's thinking on this question. One observer, Nancy Milton, commented at the time, "It is difficult for a male supremacist in China today to go to the theatre or even to watch TV without being bombarded with stories of heroic women." And these weren't, just to make things very clear, Soviet revisionist-style "model production workers," but women who were engaged in the battle over the destiny of China and the world revolution.

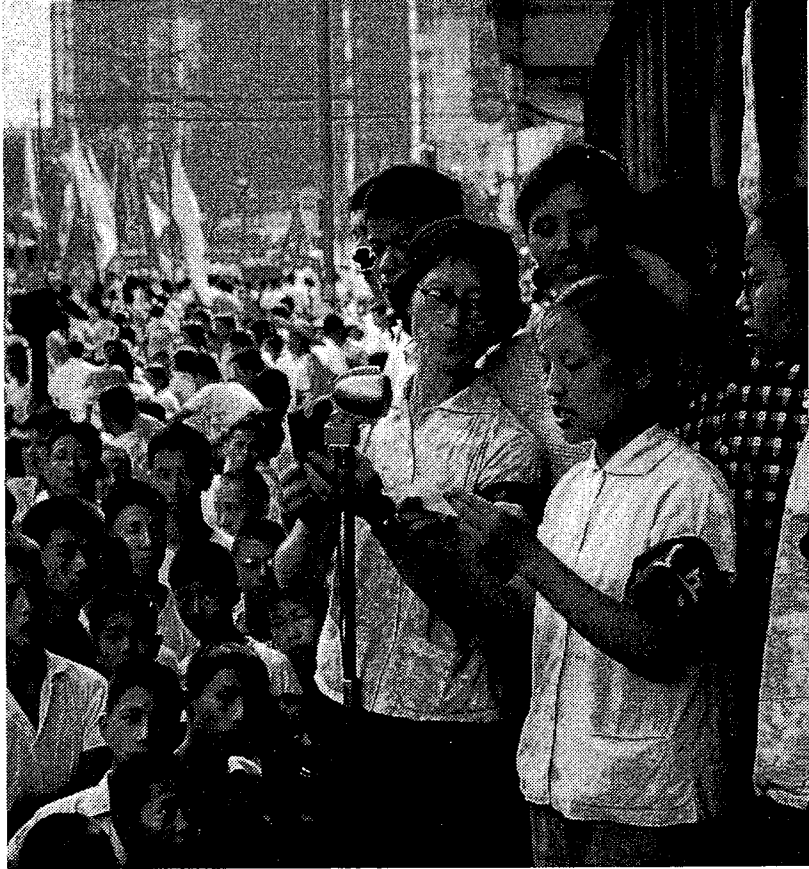
Yes, despite the heroic efforts of the Chinese masses, including the women, as Mao pointed out in many ways things did not change and many inequalities remained. But the seizure of political power by the masses, led by the proletariat and its Marxist-Leninist vanguard, was a qualitative transformation that set China out on an entirely new and different trajectory. This is what is distorted and ultimately denied by the sociological method of the three sets of authors; they look at the narrow "facts" that inequality and divisions still existed in China and were not on the verge of being eliminated to obscure the



undeniable fact that they *were* being progressively dug up, which was part of and reflected the proletariat's advance in the on-going class struggle under socialism.

This outlook shows itself, for instance, in the books' treatment of some of the concrete advances actually made in the course of the Cultural Revolution. One of these measures was the organisation of "iron girls" detachments, shock troops composed entirely of women who undertook collective tasks to go all-out in socialist construction and demonstrate in practice the capacities of women (including for the purpose of breaking through smug attitudes of male superiority and to spur *everyone* on to new heights). For example, peasant women mobilised for large-scale cooperative projects like the Red Flag Canal, where they were 90,000 out of the 250,000 workers. Another one of these measures involved the alteration of the system for determining how peasants were paid for work on the collective farms. The peasants were allotted work-points based on hours put in and actual output; women generally got 60-70% of men's work-points (in the 1960s). During the Cultural Revolution, a new factor was added: one's collective thinking and attitude towards the community at large. Meetings were held at which the peasants did self-assessment: a strong young peasant man might stand up and say that, though he actually had a greater output than female comrade X, he had noticed that during her break she had brought water to the team or helped a less experienced member master some new technique, and so he thought her points should be raised. This observably and concretely lowered the importance of sheer physical strength in the determination of work-points, and thus lessened inequality, including of women.

The Danish authors look briefly at such things, observe that they were not the dominant practice, and conclude that, "these tendencies do not alter the fact that most women are still tied to their families and their family duties." These people are like horses with blinders on, who



*During the Cultural Revolution.*





only see what is immediately before their nose and not what's new, arising, fighting for birth in combat against the old world — and those blinders are their narrow vulgar materialist conception, which has nothing in common with the dialectical materialism of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought.

Is it any wonder that sharing this general perspective and methodology, neither Stacey nor Wolf believes that the 1976 reactionary coup d'état which has placed Deng and Co. in power will have any major implication for women (the Danish women offer no comment). Both consider this as simply another "rightward turn" in an already thoroughly compromised history. Yet take one example of the new rulers' outlook, cited by Wolf: *China Youth News* printed that, "if female infanticide continues, in 20 years this will cause a social problem — not enough women so that men will have wives." The problem for these revisionist pigs is not increasing female infanticide, but that in 20 years *men* might not have enough wives! This shocking outlook reflects the rule of the new bourgeoisie, with its battlecry "To get rich is glorious," which is expanding divisions everywhere, between town and country, between mental and manual labour, and between the workers and the peasants, and strengthening the domination of men over women. China now belongs to the bourgeoisie. This is no mere "rightward turn," but a *complete reversal* which, though it might not restore every single form of women's oppression from old Confucian patriarchal China, has already started and will certainly continue to revive every bit of its horror-filled content for the oppressed, including women.

Nor do any of the authors have anything to say about Chiang Ching and the heroic battle she led to carry the revolution forward, nor about how she has been vilified and attacked by the revisionists in all kinds of misogynist ways, including for wanting to establish a "petticoat kingdom." Chiang Ching personally led many of the transformations in literature and art that were so critical in the Cultural Revolution,

and even more importantly was a political leader of the proletariat in the overall battle. Today she is one of the two main political prisoners in China, along with Chang Chun-chiao, and she has maintained her uncompromising revolutionary stand. Two roads were posed in China — yet the authors, bereft of any real class analysis, are unable to distinguish between them.

#### The Declaration of the Permanence of Subordination

That all of the authors choose to ignore (and actually cover over) the challenge of the political and ideological activity of women in the Cultural Revolution — and it is on this that the good majority of the "optimistic feminist interpretations of women's liberation in the PRC" (which the authors hope to disprove) were based — in part seeks to use the ignorance of readers perhaps too young to be familiar with these events. But, again, there is something more hidden here: an attempt to direct women's eyes down to the level of the family and the economic sphere, and away from things which have never been "women's affairs," the broader issues of society and the world and of course revolution and state power. Stacey tries to support this theoretically by arguing that a cardinal error of the CCP was to have treated the woman question — and specifically the family — too much in the realm of the superstructure, especially as an ideological matter, and not enough in the realm of the economic base. (One can also assume that she considers this further justification for ignoring the superstructure and political power, and specifically the Cultural Revolution.) Further, Stacey argues that the CCP had a metaphysical line on the family, that they treated it as an institution which would and should exist forever, and so as a sacred sphere. She offers a quote, which she says exemplifies "the historically predominant CCP approach to family life," that the family "will never be eliminated" because its existence "is dictated not only by physiological differences of sexes but also by the perpetuation of the race," and that this holds true even under communism. She

follows this with data on the strength of the family in the 1950s, and on women's traditional role within it. Thus her conclusion: the CCP "never wanted a feminist revolution" and so, far from revolutionising the family and doing away with it as part of emancipating women, has even fortified it and consequently undermined the possibility for liberating women.

#### The Family — Base and Superstructure

Stacey's first charge — that the CCP "believed family reform to be 'superstructural'" and "failed to recognise that family reform revised both the base and the superstructure" — is one of the more interesting theoretical questions she poses. Yet though she puts "superstructural" in quotes, though her book is heavily referenced and although this charge is a key plank in her critique and is made several times, Stacey does not give any reference whatsoever for this charge . . . and, unfortunately for Stacey, it does *not* appear to represent the line of the CCP, certainly not of the revolutionary headquarters led by Mao, nor of Marxism-Leninism in general. An article which appeared in *Hongqi*, the theoretical journal of the CCP Central Committee, in 1960 argued, "The family appeared with the birth of private ownership. From the start, it had blood relationship as its natural basis and private property as its economic basis; thus it was an economic unit of society." (reprinted in *The Women's Movement in China*, a valuable collection of original documents concerning the liberation of women in China, gathered by Elisabeth Croll). The article goes on to cite Marx, "The modern family contains in embryo not only slavery (*servitus*) but serfdom also, since from the very beginning it is connected with agricultural services. It contains within itself in *miniature* all the antagonisms which later develop on a wide scale within society and its state." (cited by Engels in *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) This approach hardly treats the family as simply a superstructural phenomena, as Stacey charges.

It is ironic that while Stacey con-



*Peasants during the Cultural Revolution, holding Quotations of Chairman Mao Tsetung. Collectivisation of agriculture helped lay the basis for the liberation of women.*

siders that a cardinal problem of the CCP was its treatment of the family as an ideological phenomenon, Wolf considers that the CCP didn't pay *enough* ideological attention to the family: "Social planners in China, alas, have ignored the fact that patriarchal thinking, the ideology of the men's family system, pervades every aspect of Chinese society and continues to inhibit women's full participation in political as well as economic life. Although there were brief spurts of ideological retraining in 1953 during the Marriage Law campaign, and again in 1974-75 during the Anti-Confucius campaign, the restructuring of the Chinese family has been left to the natural erosion expected to result from other societal changes. Of more concern to the CCP was the destruction of the power of the lineages and of the landlord class

controlling that power. The ideological basis of male supremacy on which the power rested has largely been ignored, or at least discounted as of no further threat to the state."

This from an author who systematically ignores the political and ideological battles of the Cultural Revolution and all questions of political power and has nothing to say about the portrayal of women revolutionary fighters in the sphere of culture. The line of the CCP is concisely expressed in an editorial in June 1958 by *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), which, summing up the experience of the Great Leap Forward, when millions of women were mobilised into production and political activity, observed, "Numerous facts gleaned from the Great Leap Forward have proved that only by enabling women to obtain their ideological emancipation

will it be possible for them to develop their infinite source of power." Furthermore, it was stressed that women themselves must play a vital role in the struggle on the ideological front, so that, as articles at the time put it, never again would men be in a position to monopolise and manipulate their knowledge to the disadvantage of women. This included building up contingents of women theorists, and here too all-women teams were formed. "To strike iron," they said, "we must first have a strong body."

In fact, there is reason to suspect that it is Wolf, not the CCP, who looks down on ideological struggle; she comments, for instance, that, "When young women glibly answered my questions with political slogans and spoke scornfully of their parents' feudal ideas, I had to fight back my impatience with their

shallow understanding. . . .” What’s so bad about scorning feudal ideology!?! Maybe Wolf’s real problem is not that there wasn’t enough ideological struggle, but *what kind of ideology* the struggle was against — Wolf’s own ideology is so “compassionate” and “understanding” of feudalism that she even comes up with the observation that, “There are good things to be said for arranged marriages”!

In sum, Wolf agrees with Stacey on their basic argument, yet one thinks the CCP’s error was treating the family too much as an ideological question, the other too little. The one thing that is clear here is that both lack an understanding of the political process of revolution and the dialectic between transforming the base and the superstructure, and the particular position of the family in this process.

The basic role and structure of the family in China did not depend on the will of the CCP or even of any group or class, but on the fact that it corresponded to the overall level of development of the socialist society in China. With the vast majority of people engaged in agriculture, generally non-mechanised, and with collective ownership and a rather low-level cooperative organisation of the peasants in production, the family still served to carry on certain social functions, and this would continue to hold true for some time under socialism. Furthermore, additional transformation of the role and structure of the family was bound up with the transformation of the production relations in general.

But none of this meant that the family was some sacred, un-touchable institution which the CCP sought to strengthen, as Stacey implies. In fact, the statement she cites as typifying the “predominant approach of the CCP to family life” isn’t typical at all. It actually comes from a *provincial newspaper* that came out in 1959. True, one could probably find other such quotes, but what Stacey, who is ever eager to disparage the Marxist-Leninists’ lack of theoretical understanding of the family, never does cite is the stand of any of the great Marxist-Leninist leaders on this subject. Ma-

for CCP articles quoted, for example, Engels’ statement that, “Participation in social labor by all women is a prerequisite to their emancipation. To attain that aim, it will be necessary to eliminate the family as an economic unit of the society.” More instructive still is Mao’s summation: “Under socialism private property still exists, the small group still exists, the family still exists. The family, which emerged in the last period of primitive communism, will in future be abolished. It had a beginning and will come to an end. . . . Historically, the family was a production unit, a consumption unit, a unit for the procreation of the labour force of the next generation, and a unit for the education of children. Nowadays the workers do not regard the family as a unit of production; the peasants in the cooperatives have also largely changed, and peasant families are generally not units of production. They only engage in a certain amount of subsidiary production. As for the families of government workers and members of the armed forces, they produce even less; they have become merely units of consumption, and units for rearing and bringing up labour reserves, while the chief unit of education is the school. In short, the family may in future become something which is unfavourable to the development of production. Under the present system of distribution of ‘to each according to his work,’ the family is still of use. When we reach the stage of the communist relationship of distribution of ‘to each according to his need,’ many of our concepts will change. After maybe a few thousand years, or at the very least several hundred years, the family will disappear. Many of our comrades do not dare to think about these things. They are very narrow-minded. But problems such as the disappearance of classes and parties have already been discussed in the classics. This shows that the approach of Marx and Lenin was lofty, while ours is low.” (“Talks at Chengtu: Against Blind Faith in Learning,” March 1958, from *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, ed Stuart Schram) Why is it not true

that it is such positions, and not those of some provincial paper, that characterised the line of the CCP — after all, Mao was its Chairman!

Moreover, doesn’t Mao’s remark accurately assess the actual transformations the Chinese Revolution did make in the family? In the cities, private property and inheritance were abolished; children spent large amounts of time in public nurseries and schools, which was unheard of in old China, especially, of course, for workers’ and peasants’ children — not a few children went in Monday morning and came out Saturday afternoons to spend the weekend with parents; divorce was far easier. These and other changes meant that, as Mao pointed out, the family was transformed and was more restricted as a unit for raising labour power and educating children than it had been.

Even in the far more backward countryside, there were dramatic changes, based on the collectivisation of agriculture. This mainly eliminated small-scale private farming and inheritance, which had been one pillar of the old patriarchal family system. Production was now carried out by teams, which, though sometimes influenced by family ties, also went beyond them to a great extent, and later larger units, known as production brigades, took on a more critical role in the production process. Women were mobilised into production on a great scale, mainly into agricultural labour, but including often in small factories designed to help the collectives become self-reliant, into political activity, and into the militias, where high-school girls learned military skills as part of the policy of training a vast guerrilla force to defend revolutionary China. All this meant that the family no longer had the same strength or configuration as in feudal China.

Nonetheless, the more backward objective and subjective conditions made it impossible to introduce as thorough a transformation as in the cities. For instance, parents still preferred male offspring, and favoured their education and advancement, child-care was less available, women tended to be more tied to the home. This reflected not

only the greater strength of feudal ideology but also that, as the revolutionary headquarters in the CCP (the bourgeoisie calls them the "Gang of Four") pointed out, the collective ownership in the countryside represented a lower form of ownership than did state ownership (which had to do with the level of the productive forces), and so weighed more heavily on the revolutionaries' efforts to narrow differences. In a number of villages, there was still not even running water, sewers, electricity, phones, etc. and traditional structures of the organisation of production, like the family, were strong. In some villages parents even pulled children — more frequently, girls — out of school at 10-years-old to care for younger children. But here too the CCP mobilised to counter the pull of tradition, including by encouraging fewer children, later marriages, and even "part-time" schools where children brought their baby brothers and sisters along with them into the classroom.

Furthermore, Mao and the revolutionaries recognised that the persistence of tradition's force made more urgent than ever the waging of ideological struggle for the liberation of women. Contrary to Wolf's assertion that little ideological struggle was carried out, the family was dealt with in a way never seen in history. Recognising its persistence as a social unit, the revolutionary headquarters determined to treat it as a *political unit* too. This meant, for instance, that young Red Guards went literally right into the homes to organise family study groups, including on the roots of women's oppression and her subjugation to the man, on Mao's instruction that "anything men comrades can do women comrades can do too," using examples from the class struggle such as how women played leading roles in certain peasant revolts in China's history.

An Italian visitor to China in the early 1970s, M.A Macchiocci, at the time a member of the revisionist Italian Communist Party, recounts how she was told by one woman cadre: "There must also be a revolution in the families: we must

penetrate there with revolutionary criticism aimed at destroying the five old conceptions and giving rise to the five new ones — we must destroy the thesis of the uselessness of women and ensure the triumph of the thesis that women must courageously conquer half the sky; we must destroy the feudal ideals of a submissive woman and a good housewife and implant in their place the ideal of revolutionary proletarian women; we must destroy the mentality of dependence on and subordination to men, and reinforce an iron determination to fight for liberation; we must destroy bourgeois ideas and implant proletarian ideas; we must destroy the ideal of narrow family interests so as to create in the family an openness to the whole nation and the whole world." (*Dala Cina*, 1971) Macchiocci notes that these five theses were often cited in the Chinese press.

Where, it must be asked, have such politics been taken up right in the hearths of the masses themselves? Or is this just another example of that "shallow understanding" exhibited by the young women who "glibly" "scorned their parents feudal ideology" which so enraged the erudite sophisticated Dr. Wolf? This advanced political understanding as well as the many changes wrought in the organisation of the family and the role of women within society were possible exactly because the proletariat held political power. Wielding such power, the masses could carry out and defend changes in the organisation of society which can only remain pipe-dreams under the rule of the bourgeoisie.

The particular ways this power was wielded in dealing with the family was based on the fact that on the one hand the family corresponded to the level of development in China at that time, yet on the other hand, politically and ideologically it often played a conservative role so that its social role had to be restricted and transformed as part of the advance towards communism. In particular, within the family the man generally plays the role of the agent of the old order, the guardian of its morals, values,

and outlook, so that for the woman and children it is, as one article by the CCP put it, "a small prison."

From one side, the CCP made great efforts to liberate women from the narrow confines of the home. In addition to state efforts of enterprises and communes to socialise domestic work through canteens, childcare centres, etc., they encouraged the local initiative of the masses in such matters.

From the other side, the CCP carried on intense political and ideological education in order to counter-act the conservative influence of the family in society, and as part of this to get men to share in the housework at home. An article in *Hongqi* discussed this on the eve of the anti-Lin Biao anti-Confucius campaign: "... due to the influence of the idea of the exploiting classes of looking down upon women and the restrictions of the material conditions, the question of household chores has not been completely solved. To solve this question, it is most essential to criticise the feudal thinking of looking down upon women . . . and to solve contradictions between revolutionary work and family work. It is necessary to promote the practice that men and women must share household chores. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the specific characteristics of women and help them solve specific problems. Late marriage and planned parenthood should be promoted. It is essential to do a good job in running social public welfare facilities, such as health, insurance for women and children, and nurseries." (cited in *Socialism and Feminism*, Croll)

The Danish authors argue that one of the principal manifestations of the CCP's failings on the family was that it never paid women for the unpaid labour they performed in the home. This misses the more important point about housework stated emphatically by Lenin: "... woman continues to be a *domestic slave*, because *petty housework* crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and

crushing drudgery. The real *emancipation of women*, real communism, will begin only when a mass struggle (led by the proletariat which is in power) is started against this petty domestic economy, or rather when it is *transformed on a mass scale* into large-scale socialist economy." ("Women and Society") Making paying women for staying in the home a central point of policy was more than just a pious pipe-dream in a still backward, largely agricultural country, it also would counteract the task of the proletariat to *liberate* women from this "small prison," to free her from its political and ideological bars so as to play the full role which is required for her own emancipation together with that of all mankind.

#### The "Automatic" Line

Wolf and Stacey also both critique the CCP for holding an "automatic" line: that bringing women into production would "automatically" lead to women's liberation, a view which would serve to justify ignoring the overall struggle for liberation and equality. And no revolutionary would want to challenge all the quotes they found saying such things, for there were powerful forces in the CCP who promoted such revisionist lines, and even held sway in the party, for instance, during much of the 1950s, and this is also a line which has had influence in the international communist movement historically. But once again Stacey and Wolf try to "disappear" Mao and the revolutionary headquarters in the CCP who fought this thinking tooth-and-nail and mobilised the masses in the Great Leap Forward and especially the Cultural Revolution to defeat exactly this kind of "production first" line and the revisionist headquarters behind it.

As one Chinese woman wrote, "Touched by the poison of Liu Shao-chi, according to whom 'women are backwards', some women are still in a situation which leads them to go out and cultivate the land and then to come back home to prepare the meals and, during meetings, to rest seated in a corner without saying a word. Party

committees have organised meetings of the women for recalling the past with them, the fierce exploitation under the old society, so as to reinforce their understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This has evoked strong class sentiments among large masses of women, who have profoundly understood that the cruel past came from the fact that they didn't have power, and that all their happiness stems from the fact that today they can wield power."

It was exactly against the "production first" line of Liu Shao-chi that Mao declared, "Of course it was necessary to give women legal equality to begin with. But from there everything remains to be done. The thought, culture and customs which brought China to where we found it must disappear, and the thought, customs and culture of proletarian China, which does not yet exist, must appear. The Chinese woman does not yet exist either, among the masses; but she is beginning to want to exist. And then to liberate women is not to manufacture washing machines. . . ." (Mao to André Malraux)

This spirit is captured in the stories of visitors returning from China of peasant women who talked of "raising pigs for the world revolution," or of saving grain to support the Vietnamese national liberation war, and so on. It is unfortunate that, swamped in a wrong world outlook, all of the authors treat such women as if they were dupes of the CCP, deceived into working for nothing instead of demanding equal pay! Far better that they should have been proud of their sisters working not for the betterment of their own narrow family interests as women have been taught to do for centuries, but for the cause of emancipating humanity from all class exploitation and oppression.

#### Women Organising Women: Neighbourhood Factories

In the Great Leap Forward, Mao called on the masses of women who were still in the homes to break out and seize the initiative to make a contribution to socialism and the world revolution. One widespread

initiative taken by women was forming side-line enterprises: backyard steel plants, coops, neighbourhood factories that complemented large state factories by providing them material inputs, accessories, etc. Stacey and the Danish authors look at these and decide that the women weren't very well paid and didn't have as good social welfare as others, that the factories weren't very viable, *and that the government didn't give them much help(!)*, so they really weren't very progressive undertakings at all. This is all in the context of Stacey's and Wolf's summation that the Great Leap Forward was simply an effort to expand production, and as Wolf says, that "it was the PRC's first unmitigated economic disaster."

What were these factories all about in the first place? The Italian writer, Macchiocchi, described a visit to one of them in the early 1970s. The women were generally in their late 30s, the majority of them had been housewives all their lives, most were illiterate; in response to the CCP's call in the Great Leap Forward they mobilised to set up a shoe-string operation which produced wooden boxes, and then later, in the Cultural Revolution, went on to tackle making transistors. The women in fact did get some help from the government — bank loans, plus a technical advisor for several years — but were largely self-sufficient. They determined their own economic arrangements, including contracts and salaries.

Was this revolutionary? Liu Shao-chi, the revisionist capitalist-roader overthrown in the Cultural Revolution, opposed these enterprises, for mainly the same reasons as Stacey(!): he argued that they were marginal enterprises, and that from a narrow economic point of view they just weren't worthwhile. Mao vigorously countered him. Such enterprises unleashed the enthusiasm of these women to help build socialism, they helped establish self-reliance in the local areas, since they often provided parts needed by larger local factories, and so contributed to balanced development of the Chinese economy. In the mid-1970s in Shanghai alone one-third of a

million women worked in these types of factories, and in Peking they produced 11% of the total output of industry. But perhaps most importantly this activity brought the women out of their isolation in the homes, taught them cooperative labor and proletarian habits, strengthened their position in society (including vis-a-vis their husbands!) and, whether or not there were short-term economic shortcomings, prepared the women for flying even higher in the battles which were yet to come.

### Class Struggle in the Women's Movement: Choosing Sides

A major source for Stacey's quotes purportedly revealing the sexism of the CCP is the Women's Federation. Yet when it is dissolved in the Cultural Revolution, she is outraged: "When the Communists sought to disturb this isolation (of the women) by organising women's associations, they proceeded cautiously and placed the women's organisations under the authority of the male-controlled peasant associations. This pattern was exaggerated in the PRC, where the National Women's Federation was to survive at the pleasure of the male-controlled socialist state." "The development of a centralised single-party state in the PRC consolidated the formal subordination of the women's movement to the administrative structures and political priorities of its male-dominated polity. As we have seen, even the subordinate Women's Federation was entirely suspended when it fell out of favour in the Cultural Revolution."

Stacey is determined to defend the Women's Federation simply because it is the organisation of women *and covers over the fact* that its central staff was promoting the capitalist-restoration line of Liu Shao-chi which widened the divisions and inequalities in society, and pushed a very backward approach to the woman question. For years the Women's Federation magazine, *Zhongguo Funu*, had been publishing such articles as "A Good Material Life is Happiness," "What Do Women Live For?" and "Whom to Love?" In 1964 Hong-

qi initiated criticism of their line: "Bringing up the question of 'What Do Women Live For' amounts to saying that women, because of their sex and not because of their class, can have their own specific view on life and world outlook." Specifically, the assumption of *Zhongguo Funu* is that what revolutionary women live for is different from what revolutionary men live for, and it should be no surprise that what this meant first of all was their husbands and children. This criticism deepened with the launching of the Cultural Revolution, when especially young female Red Guards lashed the Women's Federation leadership: "Displaying the signboard of solving so-called personal problems of women, *Zhongguo Funu* published revisionism and tried to make the women's class viewpoint blurred and lead the women to show no concern over major state affairs but merely to show concern over the life of their individual families and go after so-called happiness of husbands and children. It tried to dissolve the women's revolutionary fighting spirit and make a breach in China for the comeback of capitalism. . . the individual and the personal."

Stacey does not counter such Red Guard women, nor even mention them — nor do the other authors. Presumably they were victims of the manoeuvring of the "male-dominated polity."

### Equal Pay for Equal Work

All three authors put continuing economic inequality alongside the persistence of the family as principal proofs of the patriarchal character of the CCP's line. In fact the Chinese made great, even unprecedented progress in narrowing sexual inequality as part of the struggle for continuing the revolution (and restricting what they called "bourgeois right"). But even here this was not treated by the Chinese revolutionaries as a victory mainly because of narrow economic reasoning. They had a more far-sighted perspective: "The realizing of equal pay for equal work for men and women is a step towards heightening the political position of women.

When the great masses of women are liberated from the small prison of family life and work and study together with the men, then their class-consciousness and consciousness of the two-line struggle is incessantly heightened." (emphasis added) (*Hongqi*, 1972)

But they *did* narrow these differences too, and this was a crucial task. Let us accept the figures generally agreed on by the three books: that women made roughly 50% of men's workpoints in the 1950s, roughly 60-70% following the Great Leap Forward in the 1960s. This means that in a country where a generation earlier it was customary for women's feet to be bound, where most rural women never had any income of their own, women progressed in two decades to achieve a higher percentage of men's income than in such modern wealthy bourgeois democracies as England or the U.S. (where the figure is about 57% and *not* growing — unlike it was in revolutionary China). Furthermore, the figures are even more favourable to women in the cities, and most favourable of all for the younger generation. All this is belittled by Stacey, who objects, "but China is ideologically committed to sexual equality, and the United States is not." And this is a *historian* talking!

Such ahistoricism is breathtaking: to the extent that what these authors repeatedly object to is simply that the CCP didn't eliminate the family, income inequality, patriarchal thinking, etc. in two decades, then one is tempted to dismiss this as simply academic cynicism. In fact, their reasoning forms part of a worse disease: imperialist feminism. This is manifested repeatedly: in, for example, the Danish authors' dismissal of the value of Chinese childcare centres because their personnel are less qualified than those in Denmark(!), or in Wolf's observation that, though there are some childcare centres in the countryside their real value is questionable because "by American standards they are overcrowded." And just how available are childcare centres in the American *countryside*, which is, after all, what we're talking about here in China?! Or how about the



South Bronx ghetto?! What does one make of the statistic that in the mid-1970s in the cities, 50% of the 1-3 year old children of Chinese working women attend child care centres, or 80% of 3-5 year olds? Let us compare *that* with India or some country which was near China's level of economic development. (It might even compare favourably with the U.S. — but in doing so it would have to be kept in mind that advances in socialising household tasks in China were made on the path of eliminating divisions and inequality and the subordination of women, while such "social services" in the U.S. rest on the U.S.' plunder of the oppressed nations and come at the cost of the devastation and oppression of many millions.) That these kinds of objections enter print in discussing the gigantic strides made in liberating women in China is proof of the power of imperialist chauvinism in shackling the minds of some editors and authors.

Stacey follows this "imperialist feminist" logic to its conclusion: she argues that peasant societies "provide a weak basis for the development of an autonomous feminist movement that is strong enough to play an independent role in the revolutionary process." And: "China's socialist revolution. . . by successfully resolving the prerevolutionary family crisis, may have curtailed the future development of an indigenous feminist ideology and movement. . . . Patriarchy and socialism coexist in China due to the success of a patriarchal family revolution. . . . This suggests that socialist modernisation, like capitalist modernisation, is compatible with patriarchy. . . . Patriarchy may even be more compatible with socialist than with capitalist development processes." "While capitalism has not liberated women, many capitalist societies have been able to provide richer soil for the growth of feminist consciousness and an independent feminist movement."

Having belittled every step forward the masses of women took in rural China, Stacey now concludes that, really, there is not much hope for these backwards peoples, that the real prospects are in the imperialist countries. Isn't it evident

that what Stacey is interested in is not at all the liberation of all the oppressed and exploited, and not really even the masses of women — who after all are still mostly peasants in today's world — but a *bourgeois* women's movement? It is for *this* kind of women's movement that the imperialist citadels offer the best soil — whereas the strides made in unleashing the hundreds of millions of China's women, the steps they took towards emancipation and the lessons learned in the course of the unprecedented debates and struggles over how to accomplish this — the struggle of these poor backwards step-sisters of Stacey's bourgeois women's movement is pooh-pooed and even attacked as just new forms of patriarchy. To rest complacent with Stacey's conclusion that the cause of women's liberation is essentially hopeless in peasant societies stamps her feminist theory with a hideous imperialist chauvinism which does not aid the masses of women anywhere.

"I prefer imperialism, thank you," she says, in essence — at a time when the contradictions of imperialism are rapidly intensifying, thereby heightening the dangers and opportunities for revolutionary struggle as well. Today, what women do determines more than ever whether the revolts of the oppressed and exploited will be able to push ahead towards a whole new epoch of human history. In this critical situation, when the bourgeoisie themselves are doing their utmost to reinforce the barriers holding women in their place, Stacey has chosen to shoot her arrows at the proletariat and its struggle to do away with all oppression, and encourages women to look instead to the "preferable" soil of imperialism — a society in which, in the U.S. for instance, one out of every four women will be the victim of a sexual attack in her lifetime. That she prefers this soil to that of socialist revolution should make apparent that hers is not a programme for the liberation of any women, anywhere, anytime. □

