

Statement on International Working Women's Day

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Today we celebrate international working women's day, in solidarity with the women and non-men around the world who are struggling against patriarchy and other forms of oppression. The struggle against patriarchy is an essential part of the struggle to break all chains, the struggle for revolution and communism. Marx and Engels were clear that patriarchy's origin and development are closely linked with the development of class society. As Engels put it, "the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male."¹ If we correctly grasp the relation between patriarchy and the class struggle we can unite progressive struggles against particular instances of patriarchal oppression. This united resistance will be essential to forging a revolutionary movement capable of transforming U.S. society and the world.

At present, there is no nation-wide revolutionary mass movement against patriarchy in the U.S. However, there are a number of progressive movements, and in this past year we have seen an intensification of the struggle against patriarchy, with developments such as the second women's march and the MeToo movement. While prominent voices in these movements are often petty-bourgeois in their orientation and essence (with the women's march also having significant bourgeois tendencies), the movements themselves, and their struggle against patriarchal oppression, do represent a significant force that should be developed in a revolutionary manner.

The MeToo movement in particular has inspired many women and non-men to

¹Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*: "In an old unpublished manuscript, written by Marx and myself in 1846, [The reference here is to the German Ideology, published after Engels' death – Ed.] I find the words: 'The first division of labor is that between man and woman for the propagation of children.' And today I can add: The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others. It is the cellular form of civilized society, in which the nature of the oppositions and contradictions fully active in that society can be already studied."

come forward and speak out against sexual harassment and abuse in new and powerful ways. This has helped to expose the fundamentally patriarchal essence of U.S. society, and the ubiquity of misogynist attitudes and practices among the bourgeoisie. Many so-called progressive members of the liberal bourgeoisie like Harvey Weinstein and Louis C.K. have been exposed as misogynist pigs. This has been revealing on a mass level, and helped to expose the falsity of the bourgeois myth that oppressed nationality men and the Muslim masses are the leading forces of patriarchal oppression at home and abroad.

The fact that many of the men exposed in the MeToo campaign are part of Hollywood and related bourgeois media industries should come as no surprise. Bourgeois media—including music, television, advertising, cinema, and especially pornography—constantly display sexualized depictions of women. These depictions reinforce and develop the patriarchal view of women as sex objects who should be treated as commodities and not as people. This functionally serves to justify exactly the kind of abuse that Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, and others have committed. The ideas of, attitudes towards, and subconscious associations about women which are fostered by these images are extremely deep-rooted, and are widespread among the people. Uprooting them will require much struggle and self-transformation. The patriarchal essence of our society is not limited to romantic relationships, but also manifests in the family-form, friendships, professional relationships, and elsewhere.

Patriarchy is a fundamental aspect of the U.S. state, and an integral component of class society. As such, while certain reforms can and should be part of a progressive movement for change, reformist measures without revolution will not be sufficient to truly overcome and uproot the foundations of patriarchy. Even after revolutionary transformation, patriarchal relations will still exist and will only be finally abolished through continuous revolutionary struggle made possible under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Understanding these aspects of the struggle to overcome patriarchy also helps us better understand the limitations and shortcomings of the existing organized struggles against patriarchy in this country. Measures to oppose sexism and sexual abuse, to help lessen the burden of childcare, and to present non-men in non-commodified roles in arts and media are important steps forward. On the other hand, struggles for better representation in inherently oppressive institutions such as the sex industry, the U.S. imperialist military, the corporate world, and the state apparatus more broadly cannot be part of a revolutionary struggle against patriarchy. Instead, they obscure the inherently oppressive and patriarchal character of these institutions and the bourgeois class which they serve. Clearly, not all reforms are “equal”, and criticizing the limitations and backwards ideas of various campaigns is a necessary part of our work to develop a revolutionary mass movement.

Some limitations of the current movements are evident. The MeToo movement is not in a position to support the vast majority of working women in taking a stand against their managers and supervisors, who are often primary forces of

patriarchal oppression in their lives. Relatedly, the leadership of the Women’s March—caught up as it was in opposing Trump and a few other outright and unapologetic misogynists—was unable and unwilling to see the link between the oppression of women and U.S. imperialism. As a result, they tried to funnel the movement into Democratic Party initiatives, such as by putting out the slogan “Power to the Polls”, a disturbing distortion of the revolutionary slogan “Power to the People.” While mass movements and mobilizations such as the Women’s March and MeToo represent a step forward in the struggle against patriarchy in our society, in their current form they will ultimately be unable to overcome the oppression of women and non-men. What’s more, this lack of clarity and overall petty-bourgeois political orientation will, absent an alternative, lead to cooptation by bourgeois interests.

Historically, the bourgeoisie has used feminist ideas to justify its brutal colonial and imperialist policies abroad and at home. King Leopold II of Belgium justified his genocidal colonial regime in the Congo—which killed over 10 million people through its system of plantation slavery and unprecedented brutality—on the false pretense that he was driving out Arab slave traders who were forcing women into sex slavery. In the case of the U.S., former First Lady Laura Bush justified the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan on the grounds that it was liberatory for Afghan women.² Needless to say, she made no mention of the genocidal history of U.S. invasions and the patriarchal violence that they entail. In condemning patriarchy in Afghanistan she also paved over the vicious patriarchal reality here in the U.S., effectively painting this country as a bastion of freedom and democracy for women.

A similar logic is often expressed in the attitudes and practices of various NGOs working on “humanitarian” projects in oppressed countries. These organizations nominally support progressive causes but often actually function as a proxy for imperialist interests, and thereby play a key role in furthering the oppression of the masses of these countries. In this functional role, it is not surprising either that these organizations are regularly exposed as the source of many of the most shocking examples of sexual abuse and systematic rape. This is particularly evident in the recent case of Oxfam, which has revealed the depth and ubiquity of patriarchal abuse by so-called “aid” workers, although recent reports show that Oxfam is far from the only NGO to support sex trafficking and child prostitution.³ For agents of imperialism—even when operating under the guise of humanitarian aid and assistance⁴—the associated logic of domination

²https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html

³<https://www.ecpat.org.uk/News/uk-laws-fail-to-stop-britons-sexually-abusing-children-abroad>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/feb/28/abuse-of-children-not-constrained-by-borders>

⁴For example, see the series of sexual abuses committed by UN “peacekeeping” in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, and Syria. See, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/dec/15/peacekeeper-babies-mums-haiti-support-un-troops>, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201803070393.html>, and

and oppression tends to be part of the machinery, rather than an accidental byproduct of the operation.⁵

From NGO run schemes to outright invasions, the imperialist domination and division of the world facilitates and furthers the patriarchal oppression of women and non-men. In the U.S. this is not well understood on a mass level. There is also a lot of confusion about the nature of the current petty-bourgeois leadership of mass movements such as MeToo. Revolutionaries must work tirelessly to expose the limitations of this leadership. In particular, we must demonstrate the necessity of forms of organization and struggle not beholden to bourgeois interests. This clarity is needed for the masses to unite in a revolutionary struggle against patriarchal oppressors. Historically, through putting proletarian politics in command, and linking the struggle against patriarchy with the struggle to break all chains, revolutionaries have been able to make huge advances in the liberation of women and the masses as a whole.

This was the case in revolutionary China, where, in the course of revolutionary struggles, prostitution and sex-slavery were abolished, foot-binding was eliminated, marriage practices were transformed, and much of childcare was collectivized, thus freeing women from much of the burden of domestic labor. During the struggles of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the American Joan Hinton noted that she “found an extremely sensitive test of line was and is the attitude toward women. In China, ‘capitalist roaders’ were invariably male chauvinist. To them, women’s place was in the home.”⁶ It should therefore come as no surprise that one of the first acts of these capitalist roaders after the counter-revolution in 1976 was to overturn the ban on sexualized depictions of women and to promote the return of prostitution.

In order to advance the struggle against patriarchy we revolutionaries must go further and deeper among the masses. Through building strong mass links—in particular among the working class and oppressed nationalities in this country—we can advance the struggle against patriarchy as part of the larger struggle for revolution and communism. An important part of advancing this struggle will be uniting with advanced elements of movements like the MeToo campaign, while working out a line to handle the negative aspects of such movements and struggle against its more backwards leadership.

Let’s work hard to build up a genuinely revolutionary movement for the liberation of women!

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/sexual-abuse-aid-workers-syria-women-girls/>.

⁵For more on NGO’s role in furthering prostitution, including ideologically justifying it, in the name of feminism, see: <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/NewVistas/ProstitutionIsSexualViolence-NV-2004.pdf>

⁶<https://www.scribd.com/document/50396729/Joan-Hinton-How-Can-Socialism-Ensure-the-Full-Liberation-o-f-Women>