Chapter 6 - The fight against social oppression

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All exploited classes face oppression. The systematic denial of real political and economic equality and personal freedoms is both an expression and a reinforcer of the exploitative relationship between the ruling class and the direct producers. But in addition to this class oppression, there are other systematic economic, social, legal and political inequalities which specifically affect women, youth, different racial and national groups, lesbians and gay men.

These specific forms of social oppression are a fundamental feature of class society. They are rooted in the social structures of the family and the nation state. The oppression of women was the first form of systematic oppression and originated alongside the emergence of classes.

Women's oppression remains the most fundamental form of social oppression. But all the special forms of social oppression have been transformed with each mode of production. They have reached their most developed, and in many ways most naked, form in the imperialist epoch.

The social structures upon which social oppression is based are essential to capitalism. Their functions are intimately and inseparably connected to the process of exploitation, but they create an oppression which is not confined to the working class.

Women of all classes face discrimination and disadvantage as a result of the particular role they have within the family of their class. But it is working class women, and likewise working class youth, blacks, lesbians and gay men, who face the most intense social oppression.

The working class is the only class with the decisive interest and capacity to overthrow the system which maintains all forms of oppression. Only under the leadership of the working class can oppressed sections of the exploited classes be drawn into the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, which is a precondition for the ending of all oppression. The working class, therefore, must at all times be in the forefront of the struggle against all inequalities, oppression and exploitation.

However, the existing workers' organisations often fail to take up the battle against social oppression. Indeed, it is frequently the case that the reformist bureaucrats who dominate the labour movement actively encourage attitudes of hostility amongst the masses to the needs and plight of the oppressed.

The oppressed are subject to sexism, racism and heterosexism in such a way as to block their participation in trade union and political life. The task of the revolutionary vanguard lies in combating these prejudices and putting the mass organisations of the working class in the forefront of the struggle against oppression.

The oppressed themselves are not necessarily in the vanguard of struggles simply as a result of being the most down-trodden sections of society. Capitalist exploitation and oppression produce not only revolutionary fighters, but also backward and submissive layers.

Many may embrace reactionary ideas or retreat into private life. The most class conscious elements of the
oppressed will be in the vanguard of the struggle for their own liberation. This vanguard's participation within the overall class struggle can ensure that their interests are actively taken up by the working class.

Special methods of agitation, propaganda and forms of work need to be used to win the socially oppressed to the communist programme, and as a result special forms of organisation may be necessary both to mobilise them to fight their own oppression, and to enable them to enter the ranks of the organised workers' movement on an equal basis with all other workers.

Within the working class movement revolutionaries must defend the right of the oppressed to organise and caucus in order to press for their demands to be taken up by the whole of the class. In certain conditions, working class movements of the oppressed have also proved necessary to achieve these goals.

Such special methods and organisational forms have nothing in common with separatism. They are a means of facilitating fighting unity inside the working class and ensuring that the workers' movement as a whole champions the struggles of the oppressed.

In the first place the revolutionary party has a duty to ensure that in its daily work and in its internal organisation it is responsive to the needs of the oppressed. Where mass revolutionary parties exist party sections, or party-led movements can be formed. These sections will organise the oppressed for communist struggle as party members and take the struggle against oppression into the heart of the workers' movement.

However, revolutionary communists are as yet a tiny minority inside the workers' movement, so the building of mass sections of the party organised to carry out special forms of work has to be approached by other forms of the united front.

In many countries, the common experience of the oppressed has led to the development of movements and campaigns amongst women, lesbians and gays, youth and the racially oppressed. The party cannot leave the leadership of these movements to the petit bourgeois utopians, the Social Democrats or the Stalinists.

We support the building of fighting united fronts against oppression, and argue that they must be based on, and led by, the proletariat utilising class struggle methods. In certain cases these united fronts may take the form of fully fledged movements, with branches, congresses and executive committees. But in each case the organisational form must be related to the concrete circumstances.

The length of time that such organisation may be needed depends upon the degree to which we are successful in winning the labour movement as a whole to our programme. Furthermore, if our temporary allies seek to split or sell out the struggle of the oppressed we will not flinch from splitting them.

We counterpose this tactic to all forms of autonomous or class collaborationist movements of the oppressed. Where bourgeois forces are involved in movements of the oppressed the revolutionary vanguard seeks to break the working class and other oppressed classes away from any alliance with them.

Indeed, by building proletarian movements of the oppressed and by fighting relentlessly for communist leadership within them, we are combating the tendencies to separatism and popular frontism that arise amongst the oppressed. Our aim is to build communist movements of the oppressed, although not all participants in such movements will be members of, and therefore under the discipline of, the revolutionary communist party.

The fight against discrimination
Other sections of society, who are not socially oppressed, face discrimination under capitalism. The elderly, the disabled and the sick, who do not fulfil the requirements of capitalism for wage labour, are discarded and treated as a burden on society. Important sections of the poor are stigmatised and criminalised for actions they take in order to survive. Others are defined as mentally ill and excluded from society. Bourgeois society utilises the marginalisation of these groups in order to impose its concepts of “normality” and its moral code upon the whole working class and to pursue its strategy of divide and rule.

For instance the enforced isolation of the elderly makes them prey to conservatism, the restrictions imposed on people with disabilities allow them to be used as non-union cheap labour. Revolutionaries must support the struggles of the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities against the discrimination they face.

This will facilitate their integration into the working class and thereby strengthen the fight against the common enemy. They should fight to ensure that the workers' movement allows the fullest possible access for all members of the working class to its organisations, meetings and social life. The revolutionary party should ensure that it sets an example to the rest of the workers' movement.

Revolutionaries seek to win the militant fighters from within the ranks of those who suffer discrimination. While supporting all struggles for reforms and improvements under capitalism, communists explain that the profit motive makes it impossible for capitalism to meet the needs of those it puts on the scrap heap. Furthermore, its rapacious nature creates sickness and disability. Only socialised and planned production can release the necessary resources to fully integrate these groups into society and lay the basis for liberation.

Women

The epoch of imperialism condemns millions of women all over the world to suffer the misery of raising children and running homes in conditions of enormous deprivation. Women bear the full brunt of inadequate housing, insufficient food and the struggle to stave off or cope with the effects of disease. Super-exploitation in the factory and on the capitalist or small peasant farm are likewise the norm for the majority of women in the world.

Women of all classes are denied economic, social, legal and political equality with men. The universal nature of women's subordination makes it appear as a natural result of their role in child-bearing. But the systematic social oppression of women only began with the birth of class society and the creation of the patriarchal family as the basic unit within which reproduction, child-care and day to day survival occur.

Throughout the different forms of class society the particular features of women's oppression have changed. But they all contain at their kernel, privatised domestic labour, a sphere of life which is the prime or exclusive responsibility of women.

In the imperialist epoch women perform much of the work on the land and in the factories, but their first responsibility remains to their household and family. This means that the two sexes have an unequal relationship to paid employment, which is at the root of women's continued oppression.

In many semi-colonies the family continues to function as a productive unit, with women and children integral to collective production. But women are still primarily responsible for domestic labour and child rearing, occupying a subordinate position to the male heads of household.

Capitalism has proved unable and unwilling to systematically socialise the labour done in the home and thereby is incapable of ending the oppression of women. The provision of socialised laundries, child-care...
and canteens has proved to be too much of a drain on surplus value for the bosses to provide them, other than partially in the exceptional situation of war.

For non-working class women oppression takes on a very different form. Even amongst some ruling classes women are denied full rights over property and inheritance and are kept as decorative assets and producers of heirs by their husbands. Their continued oppression, whilst a million miles away from the drudgery and misery of the working women of the world, is also due to their role in the family.

The production of heirs requires the strictest adherence to monogamy by the wives. However, ruling class women can offset many of the worst aspects of their oppression through the employment of working class women to perform their domestic labour and raise their children. Moreover they can be never be real allies of working class women since their stake in bourgeois society means they are completely wedded to the very society that is the material basis for women's oppression.

In the imperialist countries the numbers of women employed in wage labour has massively increased since the Second World War. In many countries the majority of married women now have paid employment. Whilst this development has tendencies towards undermining the economic and social dependence of women, the circumstances under which it has happened have proved a mixed blessing for women. Now most women have to combine their hours worked in the factory or office with their hours of domestic labour in the home.

There has been little increase in the amount of household work done by men, so women now have even longer hours to work to balance against the gain of receiving a wage. But since women still receive substantially lower wages than men, their economic independence is largely fictional. Legal restrictions reinforce continuing dependence of women on their husbands or fathers in most imperialist countries.

In addition to its role in the reproduction of labour power, the family also plays an important role in maintaining the social order of capitalist society. The family acts to reinforce the dominant ideas of the ruling class, maintaining the respective roles of men, women and children, inculcating obedience and servility.

Even when the nuclear family has ceased to be the most numerically common form of the household, as is now the case in many imperialist countries, the strength of it as the "ideal" is such that it continues to influence every aspect of women's lives. From the type of education girls receive, through the jobs women do, to the relationships they seek - all these are shaped by this bourgeois family "norm". This family is based on monogamy and heterosexuality, with intense pressure being exerted upon women and girls to conform. The roles of men and women in the family restrict the development of both sexes, but have a particularly repressive effect on women.

The family leads to a division within the working class which is maintained by the ideology of sexism. In the labour movement this is not just a question of backward ideas about women's role. It involves condoning or participating in the exclusion of women from many unions. Such sexism leads to a failure to fight for equal pay and refusal to support women in struggle. Whilst women's oppression is not caused by the attitudes of male workers, their sexism continually reinforces it. Often, through domestic violence and abuse, this happens in the most brutal way.

Male workers do enjoy real material benefits as a result of the oppression of women. They have a higher status within the household and social life. They secure better jobs and wages and have a lighter burden of domestic chores. These privileges help to reinforce sexist ideas and behaviour within the working class.
However, working class men will receive far more important gains from the final liberation of women--the collective responsibility for welfare, freedom in relationships, sexual liberation and the economic gains of socialism. All this means that viewed historically, working class men do not benefit decisively from the oppression of women, but are hindered in the realisation of their fundamental class interests. It is the ruling class, aided by their agents in the labour bureaucracy, who benefit from the division created between male and female workers.

**The struggle against women's oppression in the semi-colonies**

Proletarian women are, from earliest childhood, forced to work for pitiful wages and, after the extremely long working day, have to do the housework or take on extra work to ensure subsistence for the family. Things are no better for peasant women who often, on top of the housework, must also work the land because their men have to work in the cities. Poverty, miserable working conditions and unemployment force many women into prostitution.

Although imperialism undermines the economic basis for traditional patriarchal systems in these countries, nonetheless, old forms of women's oppression, such as dowries, bride price, clitorodectomy and polygamy, are retained. Widow burning in India is a brutal example of this. Among the women in the semi-colonies illiteracy is even higher than among the men.

Despite medical advances the mass of women in the semi-colonies have no control over their fertility and in Africa and Asia half a million babies die at birth each year. Only a very thin upper layer of society benefits from the advantages that capitalism brings, for example, in education and health services.

Under these conditions of oppression it is no wonder that thousands of women have taken part in the anti-imperialist struggles in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Palestine, the Philippines and paid a heavy price with their lives. But their interests have always been betrayed. The petit bourgeois and Stalinist movements have proven themselves completely incapable of carrying through the liberation of women. The PDPA in Afghanistan, for example, was prepared to halt the literacy campaign amongst women to win a compromise with the Islamic tribal leaders.

Against such betrayals we pose the struggle for the liberation of women as an inseparable component of any proletarian revolutionary strategy. Working class and peasant women must be organised around economic demands and for protective measures against rape, forced sterilisation, trade in women, and enforced confinement for sex tourism.

Even when semi-colonial women escape these miseries millions of immigrant and migrant women are drawn into the workforce within the imperialist heartland. There they perform the most menial tasks for very low pay, in appalling working conditions.

Immigration controls and restrictions on visas or work permits constantly menace migrant women. In particular they are denied access to many jobs and so are forced into working conditions that isolate them from other workers, the trade unions and labour movement. They are often employed in domestic service to rich families, where they remain unorganised and highly exploited.

They frequently have no right to unemployment benefits or protection from arbitrary dismissal. In addition they are denied political rights and social welfare provisions. In all countries we demand the right of domestic and home workers to be unionised, for an eight hour day, a minimum living wage and the right to social welfare. We demand of the trade union and labour movement special measures to organise this section of workers.
For a working class women's movement!

To end the oppression of women the fundamental separation of domestic labour from the totality of social production must be abolished. Only with women drawn fully and equally into production, with domestic work being organised collectively in a planned socialist economy, can women be free from oppression.

The socialist programme alone can guarantee the socialisation of housework and child care. But even under capitalism we can march towards this goal by struggling for women's rights to waged labour. Where the bosses say that there is no work available for women we argue for the sliding scale of hours, to share all available work with no loss of pay. Part time jobs for women have been used by the bosses to increase the exploitation of women workers through low pay and no employment protection, while providing a flexible workforce.

We demand full employment protection for part time work combined with the fight for reductions in the hours of all workers, with no loss of pay. We demand the provision of socialised care for children and other dependants to allow women to participate in social production equally with men.

Even where women have been drawn into waged labour on a large scale they have not become economically independent. Women must be granted equal pay for work of equal value to guard against the super-exploitation they currently suffer. This is in the interests of the whole working class.

The low wages of women, far from protecting male wage rates as many reformist union leaders have maintained, have a tendency to undermine male wage rates and therefore the living standards of the whole class. For an equal minimum wage for men and women at a level to be decided by the working class.

Women's earnings must be protected by the sliding scale of wages, where rising prices are matched by rising wages. Working class women will be essential participants in committees that determine price rises and set wage claims. For women in the semi-colonies there is an additional urgent need for equal rights to land holding and ownership.

The inequalities that women and girls experience in education and training make them unable to gain the same employment as men. Women must be given equal opportunities through education and re-training, paid for by the bosses and under the control of the unions, women workers and apprentices. Girls must have equal access to education. Literacy programmes must be instituted for women in countries where there are high levels of female illiteracy.

Since women still have primary responsibility for the raising of children, to have an equal ability to take up paid work there must be free child-care for all, under the control of women workers and the unions, with full pay for maternity leave. Paternity leave should be made available for fathers.

For women who are unable to get paid employment as a result of the inability of capitalism to provide social support for dependent children or other relatives, we demand that the state provides full unemployment benefits, at a level to be decided by the labour movement in each country. This demand must be combined with a struggle of the working class for precisely the social provision which would enable women with children or sick or disabled relatives to be able to work. We are for the collective provision of laundries and restaurants, subsidised by the state, under working class control.

A woman's reproductive role also means that there are certain types of work which may be dangerous to her health or that of her children. Protective legislation must be enacted to prevent the harm which may be done by certain types of work.
Where this has already been enacted by the bosses' state it has been due to a combination of working class pressure and the realisation by some sections of the ruling class that unbridled exploitation in pursuit of short term gains threatened the reproduction of the working class in the long term, and therefore the very basis of the profit system itself. In addition big capitalists also realised that such legislation would help to drive the smaller capitalists out of business.

However, the working class must oversee the implementation of protective legislation, as the bosses will cheat and always find ways to avoid the law so that they can maximise their exploitation of women. The labour aristocracy and trade union leaders have used the notion of protective legislation to exclude women from certain skilled trades in order to protect their sectional craft interests.

Women must not be excluded from any trade or industry. Committees of women workers, not union bureaucrats, must decide what tasks, if any, within a trade may be harmful to women's health.

Women are systematically denied control of their own bodies and are forced into having unwanted children, or prevented from having children they do want. Women are also forced into arranged marriages and obstructed from getting divorced. In short, women are denied control over their own fertility. Child-bearing must be a choice for women if they are to participate equally with men in production, social and political life.

The provision of free contraception and abortion on demand for all women is essential. In many parts of the semi-colonial world women suffer oppression stemming from previous modes of production and the attendant religious ideologies. We are against the forcible circumcision of women, which is part of that oppression. The semi-colonies also suffer from the pressure of imperialism to solve their so-called "population problem" at the expense of women's rights.

No woman should be forcibly sterilised. Women are restrained from participating in social life by legal, social and religious codes and frequently face psychological and physical abuse. Enforced marriage and the sale and trade of women must be legally outlawed and these laws enforced by the working class. Full legal rights and benefits must be available to all women regardless of their age or marital status. Down with the compulsory veiling of women or their exclusion from any aspect of public life.

Women cannot be liberated unless these demands for the immediate interests of women form part of a programme for working class power. But the fight for immediate and transitional demands can draw working class and peasant women into the united fight of the workers for that goal.

Unless women are won to such a united working class struggle they can remain a passive or even backward section of the class, subject as they are to the impact of bourgeois propaganda, particularly religion. But won to such action women can break working class men from the sexist ideology that splits and weakens the labour movement, as well as secure real gains for themselves as they advance towards the goals of socialist revolution and women's liberation.

Women must be recruited to the unions, and organised to press their demands on the union leaders. Where women work alongside men in industry we oppose the call for separate women's unions, even where the sexism of the union bureaucrats makes participation of women very difficult.

The struggle must be waged to unite male and female workers, whilst defending the right of women to caucus and organise within the unions and at all levels of the labour movement. We must demand that the union leaders fund and support campaigns for the recruitment of women, including part time workers who should be given full rights and reduced rates of dues.
We recognise that the legacy of women's role under capitalism as the prime carers and child rearers will mean that many women will be drawn into struggle around the organisation of welfare in times of heightened class struggle and revolutionary crises. However, the revolutionary party must agitate for special measures to ensure that women play a full role in all aspects of the class struggle, and are not held back from any form of political activity due to their welfare role.

A proletarian women's movement, led by revolutionaries armed with a programme for the dictatorship of the proletariat, is essential if women are to play a positive and vital role in the revolutionary struggle. A movement which draws in wide layers of working class women is an essential way of organising those women who are excluded from production, i.e. housewives, unemployed and disabled women.

Such a movement, based on women organised in the factories, offices, on the farms, in the communities and in the unions can, at one and the same time, fight for the interests of women, against the prejudices of male workers, and for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

In key battles of the working class, women frequently organise their own committees and groups. Whatever form these initial organisations of women take, revolutionaries must argue for their transformation into a proletarian movement which draws in all layers of women workers, poor peasants and oppressed sections of the petit bourgeoisie.

In the present period, where revolutionaries are not in the leadership of the mass of working class women, the tasks of organising such a movement still exist. We demand of the Social Democratic and Stalinist leaders of the working class that they provide resources and support for the building of such a movement. In this way we can enter in to a united front with the most militant sections of working class women and, through joint actions and communist propaganda, seek to win them away from their misleaders.

Women of other classes, most importantly peasant women but also urban petit bourgeois women, especially in the imperialised countries, will be drawn into this struggle, behind the leadership of proletarian women. To follow the feminist line of an all-class women's movement would be to surrender the interests of working class women.

The possibility exists of a temporary alliance with parts of the bourgeois women's movement in some semi-colonial countries. But such movements must fight and mobilise for at least bourgeois democratic demands (for instance the fight of the Congress Party in India against the burning of widows). United action also depends on freedom of propaganda and organisation for all tendencies that are prepared to fight. There must be no restrictions on Trotskyists in their revolutionary work.

We oppose the idea of an "autonomous" movement because it excludes the possibility of the women's movement being won to the revolutionary programme, and seeks to prevent communist women from intervening as disciplined members of their organisation. Communist women seek to win the majority of a proletarian women's movement to supporting the revolutionary programme and electing communists to its leadership.

The slogan of "autonomy" also involves the exclusion of men from the organisations, and often meetings, of women. Working class women cannot destroy capitalism and end their own oppression without uniting in struggle with the rest of their class, namely, men. The exclusion of men from the activities of a women's movement places an unnecessary barrier in the path of the fight against sexism. This fight must involve the education of male workers in the process of common struggle with women.

**Youth and children**
The sons and daughters of workers and peasants experience the most intense forms of capitalist exploitation and abuse. Youth are denied the most elementary rights to independence. Youth have no legal right to dispose of their own wages, no independent access to state benefits and, indeed, no right to choose where and how to live their lives. Despite this youth are deemed mature enough to be forcibly drafted into the armed forces where they will be sacrificed by the million in the military defence of the bourgeois order.

The social structure which creates and sustains the oppression of youth is the family. As with women, this subordination is not an eternal feature of human life but a product of class society. The individual family is where infants and children are raised and where the basic skills are learned. In addition it serves to instil into youth the rules by which they are expected to abide in adult life.

Working class children are raised to be obedient workers, and likewise the male children of the bourgeoisie are taught to be efficient captains of industry and generals of the armed forces, and girls, obedient wives and producers of future heirs.

Youth of the working class and poor peasantry are subject to the most intense oppression: oppression in the family co-exists with super-exploitation in production and poor levels of education. Such youth are the backbone of low waged industries. This reflects the position of youth in the family: their wage levels generally assume that they are part of a larger economic unit.

This in turn reinforces youth dependence on parents. As students in schools and colleges working class youth are given little or no income, poor quality training and an education designed to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie.

In its most extreme form the position of youth and child labour is a form of slavery, with all wages being paid to the head of the family, usually the father. Where child labour is common, as in many semi-colonies, the welfare of the growing child is of no concern to the bosses who grind these children into ill health and an early grave.

For the parents such is their own desperate poverty that they feel there is no alternative but to send their children into the hell of super-exploitation. Child protection laws are ignored by bosses and parents alike, proving the truth of Marx's dictum that right can never be higher than the economic foundation of society.

Another consequence of this economic and legal dependence is the repression of young peoples' sex lives. In class society this is an essential starting point for instilling conformity and obedience. Children are not allowed to achieve a rational understanding of their sexual feelings or the interaction of their sexual feelings with social responsibilities.

In fact their sexuality is denied any frank expression; even those feelings that conform to the heterosexual norm prescribed by bourgeois society are repressed. Instead young people are subjected to moral and religious taboos. These serve to cloud their consciousness with irrational fears. The child's whole emotional life is obliged to be centred and fixed on their parents. By these means bourgeois notions of the individual and the private are nurtured as against any co-operative or collective ideal.

To liberate youth from their economic, social, legal and sexual subordination requires the transformation of society to ensure that the individual family household is no longer the exclusive place for the performance of domestic labour and the raising of children.

Along with creating the conditions for the liberation of women, this would also free youth to be independent of their parents, with as much or as little contact with them as they wished, but with the social provision of
Economic independence, proper education and freedom from super-exploitation are the key demands for youth. For those in paid employment, equal pay for work of equal value must be achieved under workers’ control to overcome the gross pay differentials which exist between youth and adult workers.

Reduced hours should be worked by youth when they first enter employment, and they should have the right to longer holidays than adult workers. For youth and children under the school leaving age hours of work must be strictly limited and conditions of work overseen by the working class and committees of young workers. Protective legislation is necessary to forbid night work, long hours, and other work which may be injurious to the health and development of youth. This must be under the control of the workers and youth themselves.

Education and training for children and youth must be fought for by the whole class. The bosses must be forced to provide full time schooling with financial support for families and later for the students. Education should be free with all expenses paid by the state. It should be comprehensive and available to all, being compulsory up to an age agreed by the labour movement.

We fight for the abolition of tests or exams designed to restrict entry into educational institutions. A living grant must be paid to those staying in education beyond the school leaving age, at a level set by committees of students, workers and teachers and protected against inflation.

Education should be equally available for girls and boys and the workers’ movement should strive to integrate boys’ and girls’ schooling. It must be secular--no religious propaganda in schools, no state funds to religious schools. We fight against the bourgeois class bias of the curriculum, for instruction in the history of the workers’ movement and in the nature of capitalist exploitation.

In schools and colleges we fight for the integration of education and training with the experience of production, aiming to overcome the distinction between mental and manual labour which is a feature of all bourgeois education. At the same time, the workers’ movement must fight to prevent the capitalists using students, apprentices and trainees as cheap labour. We fight for adequate cultural and sporting facilities, for free discussion of sexual, social and political questions in schools. We demand instruction for the youth in the use of weapons, while opposing any presence of the police or army in the schools, colleges and campuses.

We fight to place all educational facilities under the control of the working class and students. While fighting against private educational institutions and for the nationalisation of the universities, we fight for the autonomy of educational institutions from the capitalist state. The running of all educational institutions should be under the direct control of the workers, students and teachers involved and representatives of the labour movements.

The representatives must be elected from the mass meetings of all involved on the basis of one vote per person. For the right of school and college students to form unions and political organisations, for the right of access to the schools and colleges for the workers’ representatives. Drive the fascists from the schools, colleges and campuses. Worker and student control bodies must fight for the right to veto the appointment of reactionary teachers.

Students as a whole are not automatically a natural ally of the working class. Many students are drawn from the upper and middle classes. Full time students are in a privileged position because they are not subject to the daily routine of the working class. Moreover, many students can and do receive privileges as
a result of their education. Nevertheless many students--future scientists, technologists, lawyers and artists--can and must be won to the side of the revolutionary workers' movement, thereby strengthening it. Since the time of Marx and Engels the best elements of the intelligentsia in each generation have been won to the proletarian cause.

Mass student struggles--in the degenerated workers' states as well as the capitalist countries--show that students have a vital role to play, shoulder to shoulder with the proletarian vanguard, in the struggle for socialism.

We therefore fight for worker and student unity expressed in permanent links between the workers' movement and the student organisations, where students can be won to the side of the working class and where the enthusiasm and idealism of the students can help rank and file workers overcome their bureaucratic and conservative leaders. Students should take up class struggle tactics--strikes and occupations--to win their demands.

They should fight for rank and file control over the student unions, against state interference and control. In some countries a layer of student bureaucrats exists which, while not being part of the trade union bureaucracy, actively propagates the same ideology and methods of operation. These leaders must be challenged and the student organisations won to the support of workers' real struggles.

Unemployed youth must fight for genuine training and education with full economic support, plus the sliding scale of hours to share out available work under workers' control. For those not in work, full benefits must be available as soon as young people leave full time education, to ensure that unemployment does not result in complete economic dependence on the family.

Within the family the parents are the people immediately responsible for implementing the oppression of their children. This is true even where parents hold progressive ideas. More often parents oppress their children in a brutal way, treating disobedience with violence and abuse. Youth must therefore be given full legal and political rights within the family, as elsewhere, in order to help break the domination and power that parents exert over them.

Social restrictions that the family places on youth, often related to religion, are unbearably oppressive for many young women and men. Since the family denies them the right to pursue their chosen social and sexual activities, social centres must be provided where all the facilities for these activities are freely available. Information and education about sex should be available at the social centres, together with free contraception and abortion referrals.

Age of consent laws do nothing to protect youth in the family from sexual abuse. They do punish consensual sexual relations for individuals below a certain age. Abolish the age of consent!

Youth must also be given full political and legal rights in the public sphere. If youth are mature enough to be drafted into the bosses' army to defend their system of exploitation then they are mature enough to make responsible decisions in peacetime. The right to vote should be fixed at a legal minimum no higher than 16, and to be determined by each national labour movement. The right to make legally binding decisions in financial and civil matters must be guaranteed at the same age.

Youth, mainly male, are the cannon fodder of bourgeois armies. Whether it be in the service of US imperialism in Vietnam or pursuing a diversionary war in Iran, hundreds of thousands of youth, of both genders, have been cynically sacrificed in the service of reaction.

It is necessary to educate the youth in the spirit of proletarian anti-imperialism and anti-militarism. Pacifism
only dulls the mind and prepares the way for future slaughter. The youth must be trained in military techniques under the guidance of the labour movement. Youth will provide the backbone of the picket line defence squads and the core of the future workers' militia.

In times of acute crisis and class struggle, young unemployed workers who have no experience of production and solidarity can be mobilised as supporters for fascist gangs, or used to break strikes. In order to overcome these dangers the organised working class must draw youth into the unions. Reduced dues must be available for young workers joining unions, but with full membership rights. Youth must organise sections within the unions in order to press for their demands, educate themselves and recruit other young workers.

Great opportunities exist to win youth to the revolutionary vanguard of the working class. Naturally more concerned about the future than any other generation they can be quickly won to a revolutionary and socialist outlook. Youth generally lack the conservatism which has broken the spirit of so many older workers. They have not been worn down by experiencing years of reformist misleadership and betrayal.

A revolutionary youth movement must therefore be built as a key organisation in the struggle for working class power and youth liberation. Armed with the revolutionary transitional programme this movement will draw in youth from other classes, notably the poor peasants and urban petit bourgeoisie.

It should be represented at every level of the labour movement. This principle applies with redoubled force in the revolutionary party which should set an example to the whole of the labour movement.

Lesbians and gay men

Sexual oppression has been a feature of all class societies. The imposition of monogamy on women accompanied, and was integrally linked with, the rise of private property and classes. Under capitalism general sexual oppression still exists, especially for women and youth.

Capitalism has also given rise to the systematic oppression of lesbians and gay men. Capitalist society, whatever liberal gestures it has proved capable of in periods of prosperity, is inherently anti-homosexual.

The ideological and economic centrality of the family for capitalism means that any groups who undermine the monogamous, heterosexual "norm" of the bourgeois family are regarded as a dire threat to society and stigmatised accordingly. Lesbians and gay men pose a threat to the ideological underpinnings of the family and to its ideal nuclear structure, by demonstrating that sex is neither a purely functional activity related to reproduction nor a means of cementing the monogamous heterosexual marriage.

They testify to the fact that sex is a pleasurable pursuit in its own right. The fact that lesbian and gay sex is openly non-reproductive is a threat to the legitimacy of the bourgeois family.

Under capitalism lesbians and gay men have been systematically denounced, abused and criminalised. This has led to sexual misery for millions of individuals and fomented harmful divisions within the working class. The bourgeoisie through the manipulation of education, the media, religion and the legal system, and with the connivance of the trade union bureaucracy, promotes the idea that homosexuality is "unnatural".

In the 1980s the bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries used the development of the AIDS epidemic to step up the persecution of homosexuals, especially gay men, who were blamed as the perpetrators of the disease. Inside the working class these arguments have generally been accepted and a deep rooted fear of homosexuality (homophobia) is the norm.
This homophobia often creates the basis for active, and frequently violent, anti-lesbian and gay bigotry in the working class. However, the proletariat as a whole has no material or fundamental interest in maintaining lesbian or gay oppression or in perpetuating anti-lesbian and gay bigotry.

Lesbians and gay men suffer discrimination in all spheres, including legal sanctions. Whilst this oppression affects lesbians and gay men of all classes, it is again working class lesbians and gay men who are most acutely affected. Oppression affects employment opportunities. Men and women who are openly homosexual are less likely to get work, will be isolated and abused at work, and are more likely to lose their jobs, their homes and their children.

Unlike oppressed members of the ruling class, working class lesbians and gay men have no alternative but to seek work. Consequently they are frequently forced to deny their sexuality, suffering the psychological damage that such denial and suppression produces.

The working class must fight for an end to all legal discrimination against lesbians and gay men. This is a basic democratic right. The state should have no rights to interfere in people's sexuality where consenting individuals are concerned. Abolition of the age of consent is necessary to deprive the police and the courts of another weapon to harass and abuse young lesbians and gay men.

Discrimination in every sphere—including employment, housing and custody of children—must be fought. Legal rights should be campaigned for and defended by the working class. The state must be made to provide information about sexuality in schools without proscribing homosexuality as generally happens today. Religious anti-gay bigotry must be swept out of the classroom.

Millions of lesbians and gay men form part of the working class. The great majority do not acknowledge their sexuality through fear of victimisation or persecution. Those who have done so have suffered as a consequence.

The organisations of the working class must be won to supporting the right of all homosexuals to be open about their sexuality, to resist police or fascist harassment, to defend the right to work and to earn a living wage. An atmosphere of mutual respect for people with different sexual orientations must replace the atmosphere of sexist and heterosexist bigotry that currently pervades the world workers' movement.

Working class lesbians and gay men must have the right to caucus within the organisations of the working class in order to fight against homophobia and for full political and social equality. In order to take the struggle beyond specific sectional or local issues, such caucuses need to be linked up with specific united fronts and campaigns which could form part of a proletarian movement for lesbian and gay liberation.

Revolutionaries will fight for political leadership in such united front organisations to win lesbians and gay men to the programme of lesbian and gay liberation and revolutionary socialism.

The systematic oppression of lesbians and gay men will not be ended whilst the bourgeois family is promoted and defended as the model for social life. That is why the struggle to end this form of oppression must be linked to the programme for working class power.

Such a revolution will be able to free lesbian and gay proletarians from the material deprivations that are inflicted on them as a direct result of their oppression and exploitation by capitalism, and end the regime of sexual misery that blights the lives of millions throughout the world.

Racial oppression
Modern nations cannot be identified with so-called races. Racial oppression is the product of the emergence of the bourgeois nation. In the mercantilist period of early capitalism slavery was fundamental to the primitive accumulation of capital in certain countries. The extension of capitalist colonial empires brought with it the systematic denial of basic human rights and even genocide for the indigenous populations.

Racism has taken its most virulent form in the imperialist epoch: economic catastrophes, revolutions and wars have given birth to a modern pseudo-scientific racism. It exists as both a feverish fantasy of the petit bourgeoisie and a conscious tool of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

The "race" problem in our century is not one of supposed racial differences but is a function of racism: the oppression of people because of their (supposed) race. The victims of this systematic racism are many.

In the forefront stand the Jews, who suffered genocide during World War Two, and the black people of Africa, the Caribbean, the USA and those who have emigrated to Europe.

In South Africa the black majority has long laboured under the savage oppression of apartheid. In addition, the post-war boom sucked millions of workers from the semi colonies to the imperialist heartlands, from one semi-colony to another and from less developed to more highly developed imperialist countries. These migrant and immigrant workers are also racially oppressed.

The victims of racial oppression are systematically denied democratic rights. Police and state racism pour down on them. This further serves to encourage violent attacks by individual racists, gangs and organised fascists. The racially oppressed suffer discrimination in education and all spheres of welfare provision. They are subject to super-exploitation at work. Whenever capitalism enters recession racial minorities suffer most from unemployment and low pay.

For the working masses of the racially oppressed there is no capitalist solution to their oppression. Capitalism's tendency to integrate and stratify immigrant communities always benefits the petit bourgeoisie and bourgeois strata at the expense of the poorest masses. Even this tendency is repeatedly thrown into reverse as capitalism resorts to crude racism and national chauvinism in its periods of crisis.

The slaughter of over six million Jews under Hitler demonstrates the epoch's barbaric potential. No matter what level of "equal opportunity" or "affirmative action" is reached, imperialism's sharp turns in politics and economics will always leave the oppressed prey to the genocidal "final solution" of desperate finance capital.

Revolutionary communists conduct agitation and propaganda within the oppressed communities for the strictest separation of the class interests of the workers from the bourgeoisie, petit bourgeoisie and clergy. For this purpose the revolutionary party may set up special forms of organisation, but it resolutely opposes the call for a separate political party of any racial group, no matter what ultra-radical political content this is given. Separatism, nationalism and all lead to a dead end from the point of view of the struggle to end oppression and super-exploitation.

The experience of the black struggles in the USA demonstrates both the pitfalls and the revolutionary potential of the struggles against racial oppression. During the long post-war boom blacks lived under a "democratic" constitution and the formal abolition of slavery was a century behind them.

Yet even in these decades of "prosperity" blacks in the USA were still massively disenfranchised, super-exploited and subject to a form of apartheid in the southern states. Beginning with passive protest, led by the black clergy and the intelligentsia, the black resistance developed into mass revolt and armed clashes
with the police and national guard.

But it was faced with a massive crisis of leadership. On the one side the integrationist petit bourgeoisie were ready to demobilise mass revolt for the sake of reforms and greater access to local and state government. The radical opposition to these sell-outs--the Black Panthers, Malcolm X--was unable to make a complete break with separatism and guerrillaism.

Cut off from the mass of white workers and from the masses of the black community the vanguard was crushed by the US state. After inflicting this defeat US imperialism incorporated a black bourgeoisie and a caste of professional politicians, leaving the overwhelming majority to rot in America's disintegrating inner-cities.

Only the overthrow of imperialism, the freeing of the productive forces from the chains of national capitalism, can remove the material roots of racial oppression. The struggle against racism must form an integral part of the programme and activity of the revolutionary party in every period.

It must focus its transitional action programme around the day to day struggles of the racially oppressed which hit at discrimination in education, wages, employment and working conditions. The party can and must find masses of heroic fighters amongst the men, women and youth of the racially oppressed to rally around this programme.

Because they are led by class collaborators and social chauvinists, the official labour movements of the imperialist heartlands reflect the racism and chauvinism of the ruling class, and are frequently instruments of it. But there is no road to liberation for the oppressed other than through a struggle to win the majority of the working class to united action against racism.

Revolutionary communists fight within the workers' movement for united action against all racist attacks and laws and for workers' defence squads against racist and fascist attack. We struggle for full citizenship and democratic rights for all racial and national minorities, immigrant and migrant workers.

We fight to abolish all immigration controls in the imperialist countries. In the semi-colonies we stand against colonial settlement and support the imposition of time limits and other restrictions on citizenship on white settlers. We are against all new colonial settlements by capitalists and rich farmers. This is the only exception we make to our generalised opposition to immigration controls in semi-colonial countries.

It is scandalous to suggest that the racially oppressed should remain passive or patiently endure racism until the mass of white workers and their organisations have been won to an anti-racist perspective. We demand workers' movement support for self-defence against racist attacks.

To help the racially oppressed to organise against racism within the labour movement and to participate fully within the struggles of the whole working class, we stand for the right of the oppressed to caucus and be represented at every level of the workers' movement, including within the revolutionary party.

The class struggle and the full system of transitional demands are not suspended within the oppressed communities, whatever the acute common oppression they may suffer. Whilst it is possible to conclude limited tactical agreements with non-proletarian organisations within the communities, these must be based on united action and the strictest separation of programmes. At all times the working class of the oppressed communities must be mobilised against its own exploiters of whatever race, and for the liberation of women, youth, lesbians and gay men.