

INTRODUCTION

"JOIN HANDS" is an attempt by the Communist Party of Australia to develop the debate on women, socialism and liberation. It seeks to "fill out" the "bare bones" represented in the 23rd Congress political statement "The Left Challenge for the 'Seventies", which appears below.

Primarily it seeks to provide socialist women with a journal where they may express themselves, advance policies, debate and discuss issues. It has no "line" beyond the fact that it is committed to the overthrow of all forms of exploitation and oppression, and, in this context, it does not set out to claim that particular forms of exploitation or oppression are more important than others, or hold greater revolutionary potential. It does, however, focus attention on one of the greatest divisions in society and the working class - sexism.

It reflects the belief that the struggle against sexism in the working class (and in revolutionary organisations) will bring a new unity essential to any movement for socialism which, in our view, is the pre-condition, although not the guarantee, for human liberation.

The contributions which appear here include a number of articles by individual women, a submission prepared in Victoria by a group of communists on child care, a submission to the Senate Committee Enquiry on Divorce prepared by Mavis Robertson for the National Committee, and a document from history - The Woman Question by Edward and Eleanor Marx Aveling.

If the response to "JOIN HANDS" merits it, further issues will be produced.

Articles may be forwarded to "JOIN HANDS", 4 Dixon Street, Sydney; or handed to any of the women members of the National Committee (Alice Hughes in Brisbane; Kath Olive in Newcastle; Mavis Robertson, Joyce Stevens, Judy Munday, Lyn Rendell, Aileen Beaver in Sydney; or Barbara Bound in Tasmania).

Contributions will be welcomed from communists and others on the left, from men as well as women, on any topic pertaining to the statement which follows:

THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN

The rapid growth of the movement for liberation of women is a reflection of the growth of the consciousness among women against their oppression as a sex.

It has already developed the basis for a significant mass movement around the fundamental demand of women to control their own bodies through an end to sexual ignorance, free birth control and the removal

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of laws prohibiting abortion. It campaigns for the right to work and against discrimination in education, training and rates of pay. It seeks social responsibility in areas of 'private' housework and child care through the provision of community-controlled catering and cleaning services, pre-school education and twentyfour hour day-care centres. Communists support these important reforms. At the same time, communists recognise that the movement for women's liberation expresses a growing consciousness that oppression may not be simply narrowed down to the economic exploitation of working people but exists in all human relationships and institutions in capitalist society.

Far from dividing the anti-capitalist forces on sex lines, communists believe that this movement contributes a new dimension of struggle, with the potential to overcome existing divisions which arise out of concepts of male supremacy and the bourgeois institution of the family, both of which reinforce the ability of capitalism to divide and immobilise the working class and thus to limit class struggle.

The Communist Party rejects the notion that women's liberation is aimed at fighting against the system. While recognising, and seeking recognition in the women's liberation movement, that the goals of the movement cannot be achieved in a society which exploits anyone, communists also recognise that male chauvinism is a fact, and that men, both oppressors and oppressed, exploit women.

A major factor in this situation is the conditioning of all men and women in capitalist society to assume particular roles. Role definition has to be challenged and defeated.

In a similar context, the C.P.A. believes that the legal basis for police persecution and prosecution of homosexuals, and social and economic discrimination against them, must be ended and homosexuals accepted as full citizens in their own right.

By challenging the structures and institutions which reinforce and condone sexist attitudes and practices, women are freeing themselves, and men and children as well, to fight for a new society and to determine its goals.

Communists support the independent movements of women, developed and led by themselves, in their own struggle for freedom. The Communist Party seeks allies for such movements in all sections of the workers' movement.

Recognising that it is not free from sexist attitudes, the Communist Party welcomes the influence of the women's liberation movement and seeks to provide the fullest equality in practice for men and women communists to act together for human liberation by overcoming these attitudes.

..... The Left Challenge for the 'Seventies,

A policy statement adopted by the 23rd
Congress of the Communist Party of Australia,
April 1972.