



# Australian Marxist Review

Theoretical journal  
of the Socialist  
Party of Australia

## *Special Issue*

- ★ *Contributions to a seminar on the problems of the women's movement*
- ★ *Party Work Among Women (CC Resolution)*
- ★ *Character of a Communist Organisation*

**QUARTERLY  
NEW SERIES No 8  
DECEMBER 1982  
Price 60c**

# **Australian Marxist Review**

**Editor: P. Symon**

**Editorial Board Members:**

**R. Gowland**

**J. Henderson**

**H. Middleton**

**A. Miller**

**Published by New Age Publishers  
237 Sussex Street, Sydney  
Phone (02) 264 5688**

## CONTENTS

### Contributions to discussion at a seminar on problems of the women's movement by:

Anna Pha . . . . .	3
Marcia Munn . . . . .	10
Roma McLaughlin . . . . .	13
Celia Bevan . . . . .	14
Ismini Spiroglou . . . . .	16
Monica Chalmers . . . . .	18
Rose Mazengarb . . . . .	20
Xanthoula Mavrantonis . . . . .	21
Party Work Among Women (Central Committee Resolution) . . . . .	24
The Character of a Communist Organisation . . . . .	30

# PARTY WORK AMONG WOMEN

On September 10 this year, the Socialist Party organised a special meeting of women activists from the various States to consider the draft of a resolution — Party Work Among Women. This resolution had been widely discussed and many amendments submitted by Party branches.

The meeting heard prepared contributions covering many aspects of the problems confronting women, the party's policies and its work.

This issue of the *Australian Marxist Review* is largely devoted to the contributions made at that meeting. For reasons of space and to eliminate repetition, many of them have been abridged but we hope that all main points are covered.

The final version of the resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the Socialist Party of Australia following the meeting of women is reproduced on page 24.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

by Anna Pha

Working class women in Australia are not only the victims of the exploitation experienced by all members of the working class — male and female — but also suffer additional exploitation and problems as a result of capital's attempts to divide men and women to enable maximisation of profits and to minimise any united opposition to the capitalist system which may develop through increased class consciousness.

Clara Zetkin, the initiator of International Women's Day, said: "Despite the cheapness and docility of women, despite the cheapening effect of women's labour, women are the first to be deprived of their bread and living by their employers — be they private capitalists, the state or the community. What is the explanation for this phenomenon? In its earlier stages, capitalism forced women to leave hearth and home and to work in a factory, through hunger. Now

it forces them out of the economy and administration to put them back in their homes, whose walls it has broken and whose hearth it has extinguished. Capitalism forces women out of the realm of their social activities, although they have proved to be efficient and 'cheap'. This is due to the following fact. Because of their political backwardness, their lack of organisation and their social weakness, unemployed women are less of a threat to the capitalist than unemployed men."

She said this in 1920 but in 1982, in capitalist Australia, nothing could be truer. With unemployment rising rapidly as capitalism sinks further into a cyclical crisis, it is women who are bearing the greatest brunt of the burden. In addition they are even being blamed by the media, government, capital and more conservative members of our society for causing unemployment.

It is not uncommon to see such statements as: "The first reason why the school-leaver is unable to get a job is his teacher. The second is his mother — she has already taken the job."

(*The Australian*, 14-15 January, 1978).

The main visible thrust of such attacks on women comes from the extreme right, from organisations such as the National Civic Council<sup>1</sup> and its offshoots, the Right to Life and Women Who Want To Be Women. The attacks on women's right to work, right to free, accessible family planning, to have abortions, pressure on married women to stay at home, attacks on provision of cheap, good quality child care facilities, denial of unemployment and other benefits to married women and so on are all designed to keep women financially dependent on men.

The overt and covert discrimination against women, the blatant sexism practiced in Australia disadvantages women, not only in the workforce but also in trade unions, in education, and socially and culturally. This provision of a cheap, docile, reserve, unorganised workforce is needed by capitalists, as Clara Zetkin pointed out. It is also the root cause of deep antagonism between the sexes which, during the recent upsurge in the women's movement in the 1970s, led to many newly aware women (usually middle class) becoming very hostile towards men.

This awareness of the economic and social inequalities of the sexes was not, in the majority of cases, accompanied by a political awareness of the nature of the class struggle and the capitalist system of exploitation of which women, along with blacks, migrants and so on, are all social victims.

Having said that women in Australia suffer even greater exploitation and oppression than many of their male counterparts, just what is their position in Australian society?

In 1933, 26.6 per cent of all women and 5.5 per cent of married women were members of the paid workforce (1933 Census). The 1960s and 70s saw a marked increase in these rates and now, in 1982, 42.5 per cent of non-married and 40.1 per

---

<sup>1</sup> National Civic Council is an extreme right-wing nationalist political organisation, which operates in a clandestine fashion in the labour movement, with strong connections with the Catholic Church.

cent of married women are in the paid workforce (ABS, April 1982). With 36.6 per cent of the Australian workforce now female, women can be said to have undergone a fundamental change in terms of their economic and social role in Australia.

This change in role has not been accompanied by a removal of the inequalities or more extreme forms of exploitation suffered by women in the past.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women working part-time. Over 40 per cent of women in the workforce work part-time. (Less than 10 per cent of males work part-time). This increase in part-time work is, in many instances, not voluntary. Women without adequate arrangements for the care of their children are often forced to part-time work. In many instances, it is the only work available and constitutes under-employment.

The extensive introduction of part-time work is being used as a means of breaking down trade union organisation, and eroding hard fought for conditions. Part-time work and job-sharing are in danger of being introduced as the "norm", with the result that poverty would be shared between workers and more women placed in a low wage "ghetto". Part-time work means less pay and lower living standards and must be distinguished from a shorter working week, which involves shorter working hours but on a full living wage.

In spite of the adoption of the principle of equal wages, women on average still only earn 80 per cent of the male average weekly earnings (ABS, August 1982). In particular:

- Many more women than men are in low income brackets. 12 per cent of full-time male employees as compared with 26.9 per cent of full-time female employees earn less than \$150 per week (ABS, August 1980).
- In the clothing and footwear industry women's average weekly earnings are \$88.50 per week less than men's. (ABS, May 1981)
- Women working as 'out workers' in the clothing trades often get less than \$1 for each item sewn.

Overall, women are paid less because they are more likely to be employed in unskilled jobs, in part-time jobs, in jobs with less chance for promotion, in jobs with less overtime and fewer overaward payments, less likely to be superannuated, and in similar jobs as men but which are sometimes classified differently under an award.

Women tend to be segregated in a narrow range of jobs. Almost two-thirds of employed women were in clerical (32.4 per cent), service (16.9 per cent) and sales (13.1 per cent) occupations. (ABS, August 1980)

This division of men and women into a dual labour force appears to have arisen, in part, out of or been facilitated by decisions of the Arbitration Court in the 1920s which gave women around 54 per cent of the basic wage rate of men. "This was justified by an assumption that a man must provide for his wife and children whilst a woman needed only to provide for herself."

Employers then attempted to have more jobs classified as women's work, and

male trade unionists, whose jobs were under threat, sought to have women expelled from many areas of employment. Women were thus forced into a narrow range of occupations for which they received only 54 per cent of male rates. They ceased to compete for the same jobs as men, at almost half the cost to capital. In the few instances where it was feared men could be driven out by cheaper female labour, equal pay was granted (Judge Higgins, 1919).

During the Second World War, the necessity to replace men by women workers meant that "men's jobs" could no longer be protected from the threat of cheap female labour by sex segregation. Not surprisingly, in 1941 the ACTU adopted a policy which included the general principle of equal pay based on the nature of the job and not the sex of the worker.

It was not until 1969 that the Equal Pay Case was mounted and 1972 that the Arbitration Commission established the principle "equal pay for equal value". Equal pay still remains to be achieved.

Women have been seen not only as cheap labour but also as a reserve labour force, denied the right to work but permitted to enter the workforce in times of labour shortage — and expendable during slack periods in the economy. It is true that some reactionary forces are calling for married women to leave the workforce and return to the home. This call attempts to divert the claim for unemployment from the capitalist system, as women are accused of taking their sons' and daughters' jobs. These demands for women to leave the workforce could be realistically implemented without considerable dislocation to the Australian economy.

While women did enter the workforce in large numbers during the Second World War and taken over "men's jobs", the situation is quite different now. As the economy contracts and unemployment increases, any mass exodus of women from the workforce would result in vacuums in certain occupations which could not be readily filled by the existing unemployed males. This is because men and women have received different training and do different work.

At the end of the war, only 6.7 per cent of females actually left the workforce. Since the war there has been a steady increase in the proportion of the workforce which is female, from 22.4 per cent in 1947 to just over 36 per cent in 1982. This increase in participation has not resulted in large numbers of women-in the traditionally male jobs but an expansion in those industries employing women.

Even in those industries where the nature of work has changed with the advent of new technology, a new division of labour on the basis of sex has developed. To take just one example, in the banking industry, which is rapidly being computerised, women are being put on the tedious, low skilled, low paid jobs of operating machines. The highly-skilled, highly-paid systems analysts and programmers are almost all men.

Many women work with types of employment that are associated with high rates of industrial disease, strain, injury or other health problems.

An example is tenosynovitis. Caused by rapid repetitive movements, it is a

disease suffered by many women for which little preventative action has been taken or compensation provided. Eye strain from video display units is another problem which is becoming more prevalent with the recent technological developments.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions and Victorian Trades Hall Council, through their Occupational Health Unit, are now treating very seriously these types of problems as they relate to all workers. However, a great deal of research and education still remains to be done and protective legislation is also needed.

The increasingly higher levels of unemployment are being severely felt by women with the official rate of unemployment for women being 8.3 per cent. For men the official rate is 5.3 per cent (ABS, April 1982). These are official statistics and do not include the many married women who, being ineligible to receive unemployment benefits, have given up hope of finding employment and have not bothered to register as unemployed.

In June 1982, 460,500 people were officially recorded as unemployed and, according to the ABS, an additional 659,500 were not in the labour force<sup>1</sup> but were wanting work. It was estimated that 80 per cent of these "hidden" unemployed were women. (ABS, August 1982).

The unemployment situation is even more tragic for young women, especially migrants. The rate for female youth, born overseas, was 23.9 per cent in April 1982 (ABS). Lack of English, lack of opportunity to learn English, appalling work conditions, lack of knowledge of rights, social isolation, poverty, ill health and exploitation are common experiences of migrant working class women in Australia.

Within the education system, women and girls also experience many disadvantages. They are often counselled into the traditionally 'female' occupations and leave school unaware of the career options open to them. Girls are more likely to drop science and/or mathematics early in their secondary schooling, thus denying them access to many trades and higher education courses.

There remain many occupations from which women are excluded and which remain tightly closed against women by barriers of not only educational disadvantage but also social and economic prejudice. For example, only 2.6 per cent of the female labour force have trade qualifications, compared with 20.1 per cent for males, while 2.4 per cent of the female labour force work in administrative, executive or management positions. The corresponding figure for males is 8.6 per cent.

The introduction of Equal Opportunity legislation in several Australian States has not eliminated the discrimination against women on the basis of their sex or marital status. Both the present Federal Government and employers resist, discourage or oppose the implementation of policies to give women real equality. The Federal Government has taken no positive action to implement the World Program of Action adopted by the World Conference of Women in Copenhagen

<sup>1</sup> Labour force comprises all persons employed or not employed but actively looking for work.



in 1980 or to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Trade unions in Australia have been traditionally concerned with the issues of wages, conditions and to a lesser extent living standards. It is only in recent years that there has been any serious recognition given to the particular problems of working women. The Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations (ACSPA) was the first peak council to do this. ACSPA adopted a Working Women's Charter and then established, with government assistance, the Working Women's Centre in 1975.

The ACTU adopted its Working Women's Charter in 1977, which was followed by the establishment of ACTU and State Trades and Labour Council Women's Committees. After the merger with ACSPA and the ACTU, the Working Women's Centre became part of the ACTU.

The ACTU organised a conference in 1981 on the question of the involvement of women in trade unions. Irregular work patterns, not speaking English, family responsibilities, lack of child care facilities, ignorance about trade unions, attitudes that trade unions 'are male domains', lack of confidence, lack of encouragement by unions — these were all presented as possible explanations of the low participation rates of women in trade unions and their under-representation in decision making positions. The Working Women's Charter is still far from being implemented; the recognition of women's needs has still to be followed by action.

Child care was one issue taken up by the ACTU as a priority area of need. The lack of cheap, high quality child care, after-school care and other services make it very difficult for women with family responsibilities to compete for jobs on an equal basis. Women who are housewives and providers very often carry the main burden in families near the poverty line, having to struggle to feed, house, clothe, educate and care for the health of children. Women are more likely to suffer from stress related illnesses and tiredness due to the nature of their employment and the additional burden of family responsibilities. Inadequate child care, kindergarten and after-school care also add to the stress of women in the workforce who cannot relax or concentrate on their work when they are still concerned about these care provisions for their children.

The division of women and men by capital has penetrated and is perpetrated by many Australian institutions and the trade unions are, unfortunately, no exception. In practice, women are still far from being equal partners in the trade union movement.

It must be recognised that reforms to better the position of women or any other disadvantaged group under capitalism are possible and beneficial but there are no guarantees of permanency. However, such struggles can be used as a means of politically educating women and men as to the true causes of women's oppression under capitalism.

As women make gains and obtain more rights through reforms, it will become clearer to them that the source of oppression has not been men or the lack of

rights but capitalism itself. With their increased participation in social production, many more women will gain class consciousness and join the class struggle.

Thus it is extremely important to the reactionary forces in our society, representing the interests of capital, to see that women remain oppressed and disadvantaged, as this is not only proving to be a very effective tactic in diverting attention of the working class from the real class struggle but is also ensuring that working class women in particular are not becoming politically aware.

The mass of “feminist” literature that accompanied the rise of the women’s movement during the 70s bears witness to the success of this division of labour and its diversionary nature.

Awareness of women’s position in Australian society has been directed into male versus female, anti-male or so-called “Marxist-feminist” analyses which usually omit any political causal analysis or, at best, find fault with capitalism. This “fault with capitalism” is not fully understood and the realisation that emancipation of women will and can only occur with socialism is either denied or ignored.

It is important that we recognise the destructive nature of the men versus women arguments and oppose them and the behaviour that goes with them. Such attitudes are incorrect and harmful to the interests of the working people as a whole — both men and women.

The real cause of women’s inequality lies in the nature of class society based on exploitation. Capitalism adapts and changes to meet new situations. When it becomes more profitable to employ women as a permanent part of the workforce the capitalists do this.

While a large section of the working class remains un- or under-organised, the whole working class is disadvantaged. It opens the way for the greater exploitation of that unorganised section and leads to an erosion and undermining of the conditions won by those who are organised. This is especially true during periods of high unemployment.

As women constitute a relatively less organised section of the workforce and tend to suffer greater levels of exploitation, for the benefit of the whole working class it is important that trade unions actively encourage women to join and participate in their activities.

The cause of women’s inequality in Australia is not men but the class system of capitalism. The specific issues that affect women more severely than men should not be seen as women’s issues to be solved by women. Women alone cannot solve these problems. Women’s problems are the concern of men and will only be solved by men and women working together.

“The SPA holds the view that the real liberation is not possible without changing our present society to a socialist society.” (*SPA Program for Women*, p.3)

by Marcia Munn

**It has been many years since I have had specific responsibility in the women's movement and my attendance at the recent Women and Labour conference was as a party cadre representing the party and this is how I see myself. It is many years since I have thought of myself as a woman in the party. I am a member of the party and a communist.**

This does not mean that I do not see or understand the need for a specific program for women either in the broad sense or in our party itself. Party work among women is an urgent challenge. Women in capitalist society are kept out of social and political life. The contradictions that emerge from the "ideal" of motherhood and wife are very intense. On television and in the press and women's magazines, women are told that the ideal life is to be at home nurturing children and husband and providing a happy home and environment for them.

But the harsh realities of life mean that more and more women are required by economic necessity to work. Most often they are untrained and work in the most soul-destroying jobs and are constantly in fear of losing their jobs. Most of us here know from experience the kind of work working class women have to do in order to maintain an elementary standard of living for the family.

However, the dreams of the ideal mother and wife are perpetuated by the capitalist mass media and the burden of child raising is placed on parents (particularly women) and they are made to feel that they are alone responsible when problems arise with the children or in the family.

Capitalist propaganda tells women that their interests conflict with the working male. Many women believe that higher wages cause higher prices and inflation but they know from experience that working class incomes do not stretch to all their needs.

In Australia the women's movement has been largely led by bourgeois and petty bourgeois women. There were objective reasons in the past for this but it continues today. There are numerous women's organisations which do excellent work in many fields. They are involved in the struggle for peace, the status of women and numerous other questions concerning academics and the intelligentsia. But there is an almost total absence of working class women in these organisations.

Many such women are feminists and see all the problems of women as being caused by the male dominated society. They do not look at society from a class point of view but from a bourgeois or at best a petty bourgeois position. This is why we have such difficulty. However, the question is a class question and is part of the class struggle as a whole.

Lenin's comments to Clara Zetkin at an earlier time are very apt for us and I would like to quote some of the ideas he spoke to her about. "You must lay stress on the unbreakable connection between women's human and social position and the private ownership of the means of production. This will draw a strong ineradicable line against the bourgeois movement for the emancipation of

women. This will also give us the basis for examining the woman question as part of the social, working-class question and to bind it firmly with the proletarian class struggle and the revolution.” (Lenin *On the Emancipation of Women*, pp 107-8)

Lenin goes on to say that: ‘We want no separate organisations of communist women. She who is a communist belongs as a member to the Party just as he who is a communist. They have the same rights and duties. There can be no difference on that score ... but ... The Party must have working groups, commissions, committees or whatever they be called with the specific purpose of rousing the broad masses of women, bringing them into contact with the Party and keeping them under its influence.’ (Ibid, p 110)

Lenin says we must demonstrate that we are aware of the needs of women and their oppression, that we are conscious of the privileged position of men and that we hate whatever oppresses and harasses the working woman.

Special attention must be given to enabling women in the party to develop their full potential as party members. There are special problems for them. It has been my experience that when women in our party are assisted to develop their theoretical understanding and to see themselves as party members and not just as women, they develop a capacity for leadership and party work second to none.

But, often, women who join the party underestimate their capabilities, especially for theoretical study. They are prepared to help in many ways but often are content to stay in the background as helpers and organisers for party functions, money raising and so on. Only too often our male comrades are prepared to take the easy way out and let them remain in this role.

These are necessary tasks and the party needs comrades prepared to do this type of work without which we would have no party, but it is not enough. We need every woman comrade to be a theoretician as well as a practical worker. We need both these capabilities in each comrade.

The background of most of our women members is working class. They are mothers and workers and their lives are busy. They must have special attention given them, special aid with the care of children and encouragement to read and study, attend classes, conferences and so on.

My own background is that of a worker and mother, but my experience has been that the party has always helped me to study and work to become a comrade in my own right and my gratitude is boundless. I can now see myself as a communist and this is what we must do for all our women.

In relation to party work among the broad masses of women, there are great difficulties for us. Many have never heard of us or our program for women. We are not the first revolutionary party to experience these difficulties. The position of women in society and the backwardness of their thinking which this brings, the nature of their work and their isolation in general makes our task a monumental one.

It is desirable for us to have women comrades working in industry and places where large numbers of women work. We should produce leaflets dealing with specific problems in industry. We should be familiar with the ACTU Working Women's Charter and have a line in relation to it enabling us to propagate our views and policies.

What makes it so difficult for us to win support for our party's program not only in relation to women but in a general sense?

In my opinion, the greatest single barrier is anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. Our cadres have to be prepared at all times to do battle around these questions.

At the Women and Labour conference our best results came from our very forthright and principled stand on this question.

It is a battle that can and must be won if we are to win the broad masses of women to support our program, come to support the socialist alternative and to eventual membership of our party. We must raise the socialist alternative. At the Women and Labour conference it was obvious that many women realise that women's emancipation cannot be won within the framework of the capitalist system but their anti-Soviet and anti-communist position does not allow them to consider socialism as the alternative.

We must always be principled in dealing with this question and it will bring us respect and results. The achievements of socialism and, in particular, the role of women and their position in socialist society in every respect should be dealt with by our party women at every opportunity.

We must use every occasion and platform possible to show that the socialist alternative is the only way that women will reach equality in political and practical life.

I would like to say something about our cadre policy.

It is the party that makes people into communists **not** the mass movement. When women are recruited or become close to the party, then all possible aid should be given to them to become real party comrades. Our cadre policy should aid the development of women recruits as active communists.

To work correctly as a communist in the mass movement is difficult but is necessary if the whole movement is to benefit. It does not mean that every party member has to shout from the rooftops that she is a party member, but I have found that it is always easier to work when one is known as a communist. The main question is the party and its development and new party members should be assisted in every possible way to develop a partisan feeling about the party and why it should come first in every comrade's thinking.

Another question is that of the responsibility for party work among women. It is the responsibility of the whole of the party and the idea that women comrades alone are responsible for this work should be strongly resisted. Lenin spoke of this too and said:

“It is not realised that the developing and leading of such a mass movement is an important part of all Party activity, as much as half of all Party work ... The occasional recognition of the need and value of a purposeful, strong and numerous communist women’s movement is but platonic lip-service rather than a steady concern and task of the party.

“They regard agitation and propaganda among women and the task of rousing and revolutionising them as of secondary importance, as the job of just women communists.

“None but the latter are rebuked because the matter does not move ahead more quickly and strongly. This is wrong, fundamentally wrong! ... It is equality of women reversed! ... In the final analysis, it is an underestimation of women and their accomplishments.” (Ibid, p 114)

by Roma McLaughlin

**I would like to talk about the need to recognise the fact that women have a dual role to play as mother and worker. My work apart from my involvement in the party, includes being a mother, a trained artist and part-time domestic cleaner.**

Being a mother gives me great satisfaction and joy, but I know the frustration of being *only* a mother. It is frustrating to me that society does not allow me to develop my skills and involve myself in the work for which I am trained. Society should share my responsibilities in raising my children and offer domestic services.

My situation is like that of many working class women with children. We have to deal with poor child care facilities and in some areas there are none. They are expensive and in some cases of poor standard. We have to manage three jobs — work, housekeeping and raising children. There is a general prejudice against women which we have to face.

Women who do not have work and are at home caring for young children often face economic hardship if there is only one wage coming into the home. There is loneliness, isolation from neighbours and society. With children and housework there is little time to think about anything else. A lack of identity can arise. Among these women there is, generally, a high rate of nervous tension, depression with prescribed drug taking as a common consequence.

These problems are many times worse for the single mother. Society should give women the free choice to have children as well as the right to contribute to society with what they have to offer as people. Having children is socially beneficial and to work should be the right of every woman.

Our party supports this. The SPA’s Program for Women says: “Recognition of women’s dual role in society as both mother and worker, and the subsequent provision of various rights and services is fundamental to her achieving equality”.

The fact that capitalist society does not support or recognise the dual role of

women creates great problems for working class women. They need to know that our party gives great importance to women's dual role in society.

Unfortunately bourgeois values are prevalent in Australian society and many working class women are affected and confused by what various women's groups have to say.

The reactionary groups like Women Who Want to be Women, the Right to Life and the Festival of Light want to see women back in the home as martyrs to their families. Although working class women are not active in these groups, their values have wide circulation in the media and affect working class women.

The various feminist groups tend to give priority to the working life and careers of women and less emphasis to the fulfilment of motherhood. To be liberated, they argue, women must compete with men in the workplace. This is, perhaps, a reflection of their men versus women analysis of society. These views also have wide circulation with the result that working class women at home feel totally inadequate.

There is pressure on women to choose between work and motherhood and to choose work and a career. Both these groups are the opposite sides of the same coin as both deny women's dual role in society.

The SPA has the job of educating women, showing that their problems are politically based and are essentially a product of capitalist society. Women must work with men in the class struggle against capitalism.

As an artist my work relates directly to the necessity of women having a dual role in society. I present in my paintings working class women and their commitment to motherhood in a society that does not support them. They are about mothers in the home.

I feel that women do not have great confidence in being mothers whether they work or not. I want to say that mothers at home are neither brainless drones nor idealist figures to be put on a pedestal. They are women with a commitment to their children and struggling to survive in a stifling situation.

As an artist I am a member of the Artistic Worker's Union which aims to win better conditions for artists and recognition of the worthwhile contributions made by artists.

by Celia Bevan

**Living in an area which has been traditionally country, then designated an Australian growth region, not only presents issues common to all women, but also generates issues specific to women in country areas.**

Two factors are specific to the country social scene. One is the historical development of more conservative natures and attitudes of country people. This is perhaps attributed to the lack of exposure to more radical influences in the cosmopolitan life

of cities. Also, individuals and families are more exposed to community scrutiny. To be ostracized by the community for leading a different life style or holding radical views is a very isolating experience for those dependent on the one community for social and economic livelihood.

Secondly, more radical women going to live in country areas feel isolated from the hub of feminism or political activity. Sometimes this experience inhibits them from taking leadership roles or projecting out to others to develop political awareness. Such women can spend their energy and time in alleviating their own feelings of isolation, and turn to networks already established in the city areas. Others who go to live in a developing country town aspire to being large bureaucratic fish in a small pond.

Living in growth areas one has contact with people who give quicker access to more senior people in government and business, an aspect of access not so easily available in the city life where one is one of many fish in a large pond.

Some people who are committed to radical thought and activities in cosmopolitan life tend to become conservative when living in a country town. They become more exposed to the public eye and/or reach positions of status which co-opts them into established modes of thought and conduct.

Bureaucratic institutions tend to dominate services provided to women. For instance, there are a smaller number of people available to provide services such as rape centres, information bureaux and family planning clinics. Hence people working in the health and welfare institutions become involved in setting up services. The services become an extension of the bureaucratic approach. Such institutions are dominated by the philosophies of social workers indoctrinated by universities which are controlled by capitalist ideologies.

*This preamble outlines some of the features to be considered when talking about Party recruitment and involvement in country regions.*

## **1. Which Direction?**

The question of tackling the social and economic status of women needs to be viewed in the context of the class struggle. Men and women in the SPA may differ on detail about this issue. The basic policy and philosophy need to be clarified and adopted jointly. Any disadvantages experienced by women in society will not be resolved by women alone; men and women struggling together will overcome the inequalities and differences. Neither sex will be liberated until both are free.

In a capitalist society with a strata of classes, women and men are divided. While two women may talk about inequality, if they are from a different class, then their perspective is different. The middle class woman may not see herself in sisterhood with the struggle of a working class woman because their relative positions means they are not talking about the same issues.

For this reason it is important to identify and clarify the equality debate in terms of those who aspire to the demands and concerns of a capitalist society and those who are in common struggle against the privileges of that section of society and desire to replace it with socialism.



## **2. A change to socialism is the pre-requisite for the change in the economic status of women.**

The capitalist society creates role differentiation. Some work is classified as more important than other work. The reinforcement of capitalist values in the home and school guides women into occupations which equip them for nurturing roles. Here there is a paradox for women brought up in the country. The long hours the men spend on the land has required the women to manage the finances and business of the farms. They develop skills and organisational capacities in managing country clubs and groups.

Following Illich's description of work, there are two kinds of work existing in a capitalist society — work and shadow work. The shadow work is unpaid housework and mothering. Those jobs which concern the nurturing and caring roles are low paid and are work done by women. Labouring, managerial, financial and engineering are all identified as "work" and for the greatest part done by men. In times of war and shortages of men, women have been expected to fill these jobs. In times of unemployment and child rearing, women are expected to leave the workforce. The value put on nurturing and rearing future citizens is reflected in the low wages paid to child day care workers.

An education program needs to be conducted systematically and constantly to make both men and women aware of the alienation they suffer in a capitalist society. Marx's concept of alienation should be an integral part of SPA propaganda. In this way an education program can teach people that the alienation of the worker from the means of production is linked to capitalist values of role differentiation and sex divisions which underpin the attitudes and behaviour in social and work relationships.

The SPA should participate in the womens' movement and other areas where, by involvement of individual members, the party program and ideas can be spread. Members must not allow the divisive elements of other movements to deflect party members' energies from the main intent of the SPA program.

A committee of the SPA should be charged with the responsibility to consider the issues of discrimination and inequalities in Australian society. The issues for women can come under the control of this committee while jointly looking at other disadvantaged groups.

by Ismini Spiroglou

**We must give very serious thought to and grapple with the task of achieving the real equality of women in relation to men, the fulfilment of the personality of women which precedes their entry to a higher political level, their active participation in community matters and a wide range of both personal and non-personal matters which affect their daily lives.**

The resolution, *Party work among women*, correctly points out that "no social change is possible without the active participation of women." Neither can the

liberation of women be achieved or won without a fundamental grass roots change of their social and economic role within society.

The multi-faceted ideological attacks and brainwashing women receive from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois propaganda makes re-education and development of social consciousness a very difficult and sometimes tortuous task.

Many women have not yet discarded the idea that has been imposed on them that social and political action is not for women but is reserved for men. The difficulties of daily life, the threat of dismissal by an employer, the pressure of the ideological machines and reactionary propaganda continue old prejudices that have only been set aside a little. They seek to cultivate among women a psychology of conformism and a climate of fear.

The communists, taking into account the given level of consciousness among women, attempt with ideological and political work and through organised work and struggle to raise consciousness, forge courage and daring, enrich experience and encourage their resistance to the hostile and offensive plans of the reactionary ruling class.

I am an active member of the Panhellenic Women's Movement. It is evident that one of the most talked about and worrying problems is the effect of youth unemployment, its social consequences and its causes — for example, the widespread use of drugs and the results of this. A screening of a film on this problem drew a substantial number of parents and really showed how worried they are and concerned for their children's future.

The Panhellenic Women's Movement collected hundreds of signatures for the peace petition. It has made over 25 radio programs. The programs were progressive and included news and music. It has held lectures on the problems of peace, discrimination, health, the rights of Aborigines and the racial discrimination they are experiencing, the problems of youth, drugs, education and cultural matters.

In this way the organisation helps working women to become an active part of the progressive movement and become politically aware. Women come to understand what an organisation means, how to organise and what it means to be struggling for something.

The realisation of the aims of the document, *Party work among women*, can only be fulfilled when all party organisations strengthen, utilise and control this work. Greater assistance must be given and there must be a re-evaluation and development of the role that can be played by the auxiliary committees. Where no such committees exist, they should be established, always in conjunction with the methods of work within the party, unions and the whole mass movement, taking into account the multitude of obligations that women have as workers, mothers and homemakers.

We must suggest some practical application of all the aims our party aspires to:  
1. We must begin a series of lessons so that party members can acquire a theoretical understanding.

2. The publication of enlightening material by the party and special rallies in places of work and wherever people congregate.
3. Put forward our policies and its answers to the problems of women and workers in general. The party is the broadest organisation of all, taking up many questions. It is only a Marxist-Leninist party that has scientific answers to these problems.
4. Projection of our policies through the unions. Close contact between leadership and workers, formation of factory committees, politicization of the workers and project demands further than the struggle for a log of claims, for example, for national independence, unemployment, the arms race, financial expenditure, women's problems and so on.

From contacts we have had at times with female workers, we ascertained that there is little contact between working women and union leadership. The majority of working women mentioned only that every week they pay the union a certain amount. But which is the union that represents them? Who is their representative or shop steward? What are their rights as working women? They are in total ignorance. This fact is evident and more tragic among migrant women who face the added problem of not being able to communicate due to their ignorance of the English language.

But most important of all is the recruitment of women to the party and their development so that they can take an active part in the community.

by Monica Chalmers

**During 1979 I was asked to report for the Union of Australian Women at a meeting where the combined women's groups were to put the case for a funded Women's Centre in Wollongong to three women from State Government departments. The contribution took as its guidelines the key words "recognition, opportunity and respect" from the United Nations 1975 proclamation for International Women's Year. It said in part:**

"Life in Wollongong immediately presents us with three enormous disadvantages. We have an average wage that is lower than the national average wage; we have an unemployment rate that is higher than the national rate; we are women in an area where heavy industry easily dominates the work scene — coal mines, steelworks and cargo handling — and women do not appear there. Absence of light industry and of women, in the main, from heavy industry has meant we have had a shortage of work for women and thus their confinement in jobs of the servicing type occupations, which both act on women to re-inforce a feeling and status of inferiority."

For years and years there have been letters, petitions, committees, meetings, deputations, demonstrations, leaflets and media coverage of this problem. It reached a peak in 1980 when the Jobs for Women Committee took a Class Action against Australian Iron and Steel (AIS) and they were forced to start employing women in their blue collar departments again.

During these years a survey of the population was carried out to get figures on female employment and to identify skills that were available but idle through lack of jobs. This was a massive undertaking and UAW members took part in it.

Currently the women are getting ready to fight to keep their jobs at AIS both in the general struggle shaping up and a special struggle not to be the scapegoats in any "Women first to go deal".

Women in or influenced by the Socialist Party were the group that organised to set up a Working Women's Charter Group in Wollongong. At the time the main group was a Women's Collective set up by the University Students' Union Women's Officer with off-campus women encouraged to join. Their meetings and activities reflected their well-educated and generally well-heeled lives.

So we set up a Charter Group to try to attract another type of woman. The Charter Group accomplished nothing spectacular. It addressed some factory meetings, leafletted factories about our meetings and so on.

Out of the Charter Group came the Jobs for Women Committee. Our view of the Charter Committee was that it was a class, not a feminist, organisation and that we would not restrict our activities to maternity leave and childcare but we would study ACTU Congress resolutions and see which of them we could work on and achieve something with or just make the property of the thousands or so women working in clothing factories, AIS canteens and elsewhere.

Today the Charter Group is looking at all that is going on and judged that the activities of the steel group of unions as being closest to our liking and we will see how we can become involved and help.

The five unions representing most of the workers in the steel industry are not willing to accept the dictates of management. A recent combined union delegates meeting declared: "We will permit no retrenchments in the industry. If the steel companies try it on, a stoppage will take place immediately. We reject the company's voluntary retirement scheme as totally inadequate."

The Women's Centre is in a position where not much happens in Wollongong that does not touch or is not touched by the centre. Its current and newest venture is to call a meeting, in conjunction with the Federation Ironworkers' Association, on the problems of Housing Commission tenants. A committee was set up to further the work.

The Women's Centre has groups to help women with fertility problems; it has a parenting teenagers group; it has a printing workshop group. Its co-ordinator has taken responsibility to set up a special group of the Committee on Employment (a City Council project) to handle emergency accommodation; it takes part in May Day; it takes part in peace activities. It is anticipating some anti-abortion legislation to be moved and has organised a rally. We have helped to organise a Women and Arts Festival in Wollongong.

**We are now in the second half of the UN Decade for Women but how many women, especially working class women, will find themselves benefiting in any way from the decade or, indeed, now it exists? In 1982 in Australia living under capitalism with its worsening recession women right across the board, but particularly working class women, are being severely hit. One of the most difficult battles facing the SPA is to draw working class women into the struggle for socialism.**

Traditionally party membership has come from militant workers and from the trade unions. Traditionally also, this has meant a predominantly male membership. To attract working class women has been and still is a difficult task. Women represent 50 per cent of the population and yet only about 25 per cent of the party membership are women. It is plain that this percentage must be significantly increased. How do we attract significant numbers of women to our party?

A good starting point would be to work from the decisions adopted at the Fourth Party Congress to build the party in the workplaces. There are many areas of work with a predominantly female workforce. We need to concentrate on those areas. Branches might be urged to adopt such enterprises in their localities and begin by distributing on a regular basis material of a specific nature that relates to women workers.

Another important area of work lies in conferences such as the Women and Labour conference held in Adelaide. It was encouraging to hear of the good work by our comrades at that conference. The fact that women from the middle strata of society tend to predominate at these conferences should give us all the more impetus to be in attendance.

Many supporters of the women's movement, under the titles of feminism or Marxist-feminist, deny the importance of the struggle for socialism and maintain that all that is needed is to win complete emancipation for women. This presumes that males and females can win equality under capitalism.

While significant gains have been won for women, it is generally true that the gains have benefited women from the middle strata of society mostly. Furthermore, these gains may be transitory while capitalism remains. Recession means cutbacks and cutbacks inevitably mean the loss of gains won. One example is that of paid maternity leave in the public service.

The ACTU Working Women's Charter, while being an admirable blueprint for equal opportunity in all areas for working women, is still a document of reform. While the SPA must support the reforms called for in the charter, we must also be constant in our reminders that women's equality can only be achieved through socialism.

The SPA needs to expose fallacious arguments and the inadequacies of a women's movement that does not attack the causes of women's oppression.

Women comrades must be encouraged to work in all areas of party activity. The word "encouraged" needs to be emphasised for women, as a traditionally

repressed section of the population, cannot be expected to simply “shine” in all areas. A prerequisite to any kind of leading role or position of responsibility is confidence. As confidence develops, so too will the level of work of women comrades.

Male comrades can and must become staunch allies in the struggle to strengthen the role of women in the SPA. A development of awareness on the part of males is important in changing attitudes not only within the party but beyond it as well. The assistance of males should be of a constructive, comradely nature (not paternal in character) aimed at developing women to the stage of taking on leadership roles.

We also have many fine, capable women comrades who can act as developers of other women. Where possible schools need to be organised to teach necessary skills, not only theoretical understanding but also the many-sided talents necessary to a communist. We need schools in technical areas, leaflet production, writing, speaking and so on to equip women with the ability to take an ever more active role. Once talents have been developed to the fullest extent, both male and female comrades can be utilised to best advantage in the struggle for socialism.

The role of women in the communist movement is becoming more and more important. Today 40 per cent of the workforce is female. If affected by socialist policies, this will have vast implications. The SPA can and will influence large numbers of women if we carry into the branches the finalised resolution and the party sincerely attempts to implement the decisions contained in it.

by Xanthoula Mavrantonis

**Despite some positive developments in the women’s movement, the great majority of women do not take part in the struggle and remain inactive or are politically disoriented. The ruling class uses every means to keep women politically handicapped, including intimidation and distortion through the press, TV and radio.**

The participation of working women in the life, activities and struggles of the trade union movement is extremely low and that figure becomes even lower for migrant working women. The promotion of women to leading trade union bodies is still a serious problem.

The conditions exist to attract working class women into the struggle because they are often objects of the worst exploitation by employers, receiving lower wages and working under hard conditions often harmful to motherhood. Women, apart from the problems held in common with their male fellow-workers, have a number of specific problems such as unequal pay, lack of substantial protection of mother and child, lack of adequate child and baby care centres, lack of equal opportunities and access to training and education and so on.

Women who are communists have to play a leading role in the mass women’s organisations for the above burning issues. promoting at the same time the

position of the party on these issues and explaining to women the class character of the problems.

Because women's equality is an inseparable part of man's emancipation and social progress as a whole, a great deal depends on the efforts of both men and women.

One third of our planet is building socialism. The socialist countries have put down the foundations for full equality of women in every field of life. In only a few decades, the socialist societies have made much progress, breaking down barriers and prejudices that existed for centuries and creating at the same time the conditions for the fullest development of women and their active participation in the achievements of the people. I will give some examples to justify this statement:

In the USSR today, 50 per cent of all students are females. Out of each 1,000 working women, 739 have either a secondary or tertiary education. 61 per cent of the working women in industrial production have special training. One third of all engineers are women. Out of the 700,000 medical doctors, 550,000 are women. 50 per cent of trade unionists are women. 34 per cent of the Central Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of the USSR are women. There are 475 women in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

I have worked for a number of years in the Greek migrant women's organisation. Unfortunately there was always the tendency to isolate ourselves from the rest of the Australian working class movement and to concentrate on not so relevant issues. Of course this had an explanation: lack of language, different culture and the fact that the women were either from a middle class background or were housewives unfamiliar with the problems facing society and unwilling to take a more active part in the class struggle.

Gradually the Greek women's organisation to which I belonged came to the point of being another social club for women. In the end it stopped functioning as there was not enough purpose. Here I want to say it was not only the fault of the women but also the party organisation which did not take any measures to guide and assist the work or give the women's issue the assistance and importance needed.

It has been proven over the years that the efficient functioning of the party organisation or the party fraction in our area of work determines to a large degree the progress and the activation of the mass organisation. Therefore attention should be given to our party first, to safeguard it and to give it all our might to strengthen it so that it can play its leading role to guide the rest of the working class.

We have to attract more women to the ranks of our party and in this need the support and encouragement of our male comrades. But there are still male comrades who do not regard the participation of women in our party as important. This is very unfortunate and at the same time is foreign to our ideology and we have to fight against it. We can do this by educating our members to understand the necessity of involving and interesting men in women's issues.

We have to approach women of the working class with more confidence and love, trust them, speak to them in a simple language, understand them and not dominate them. We must be first of all friends, talk with them about their immediate problems, even personal. This has to start first of all at the places of work where women spend a very large part of their lives. It is also from local committees, school committees, mothers' organisations and so on that we can become involved in women's issues and recruit more members for our party.



Resolution adopted by the  
Central Committee  
Socialist Party of Australia  
September 12, 1982.

# Party Work Among Women

**Our Party's Fourth Congress gave added emphasis to the importance of our Party as a Marxist-Leninist organisation and the need to strengthen the Party and its position in the workplaces and among working people. It emphasised the need to develop our capacity as Marxist-Leninists.**

The need for special detailed consideration of our Party's work among women arises from two main factors. Firstly, the numerical strength of women in society and the workforce and, secondly, because there are additional problems facing women in society although the same basic problems face both males and females. In response to these needs the Socialist Party adopted a Women's Program.

Women comprise slightly more than 50 per cent of the population.

- 36.4 per cent of the workforce is female.
- 61.1 per cent of women in the workforce are married.
- 40.1 per cent of women who are married are in the workforce.
- 42.5 per cent of non-married women are in the workforce.

(ABS — April 1982)

In April 1982 there were 2,333,500 women in employment with 1,519,000 employed full-time.

In June 1982 207,900 women were looking for full-time or part-time employment.

These figures are sufficient to show that women as part of the workforce are a factor of considerable importance and must be drawn into the struggles of our Party and the labour movement.

While some progress has been made towards the equal economic and social rights of women, much remains to be done. Furthermore, no social change is possible without the active participation of women. Nor can the emancipation of women be achieved without a fundamental change in women's economic and social role in the community.

The continued inequality of and discrimination against women in the workforce is shown by the following facts:—

- 26.9 per cent of full-time female employees earn less than \$150 per week compared with 12 per cent of full-time male employees.  
(ABS — August 1982)

- Women on average only earn 80 per cent of the male average weekly earnings.  
(ABS — August 1982)

- Women tend to be segregated in a narrow range of jobs. Almost two-thirds of employed women were in clerical (32.4 per cent), service (16.9 per cent) and sales (13.1 per cent) occupations.  
(ABS — August 1982)

- The unemployment rate of women is 8.3 per cent and for men 5.3 per cent.

- Of the 659,000 persons not in the labour force but wanting work it is estimated that 80 per cent are women.  
(ABS — August 1982)

Married women with children who want to work but cannot for one reason or another do not usually register for work and are, therefore, not included in the statistics of unemployment. Many mothers who wish to find employment are prevented from doing so because there are so few child-care facilities.

Young women, migrant women and especially Aboriginal women, are particularly hard hit by unemployment. The rate for female youth, born overseas, was 23.9 per cent (ABS — April 1982). Lack of English and opportunities to learn English, appalling work conditions, lack of knowledge of rights, social isolation, poverty, ill-health, and exploitation are common experiences of migrant working class women.

There remain many occupations from which women are excluded by economic and social barriers. Female apprentices account for less than 5 per cent of the total.

Women are excluded from or segregated in some clubs and some social activities. Women are still far from being equal participants in the trade union movement in practice. The Working Women's Charter adopted by an ACTU organised conference in 1981 is far from being implemented. Prejudices, if not the law, maintain de facto discrimination on a wide scale.

Women who are housewives very often carry the main burden of families near the poverty line, having to find the way to feed, house, clothe, educate and care for the health of children.

Women are more likely to suffer from stress-related illness and tiredness due to the nature of their employment and the additional burden of family responsibilities.

Recognition of women's dual role in society as both mother and worker and the subsequent provision of various rights and services is fundamental to her achieving full equality. This dual role is recognised by law in socialist countries.

The protection of motherhood is a prerequisite to women's equality, enabling

her to take her full place in society as both mother and worker.

The extensive introduction of part-time work is being used as a means to break down trade union organisation and erode hard-won conditions. Even though part-time work and job sharing is in demand by women because of the lack of child-care facilities and domestic responsibilities, its introduction is in danger of becoming "the norm" with the result that poverty is shared between workers and more women are placed in a low wage "ghetto". Part-time work means less pay and lower living standards and must be distinguished from a shorter working week which involves shorter working hours but on a full living wage.

The labour movement should strenuously resist the use of part-time work as a replacement for full-time jobs. It should only be introduced by agreement with the trade union movement to meet the need of some workers for a more flexible working life and where proper award conditions are maintained and trade union organisation not weakened.

It is economic inequality and the exploitation of women as a source of cheap labour which is the foundation upon which social attitudes of discrimination and prejudice are built. It is economic inequality and exploitation which may lead to dependence on a male bread-winner and the adoption of attitudes by some men that they have a right to own women like capitalist property. Arising from this attitude women are subjected to physical and mental abuses, domestic violence, pornography, sexual assault, rape, exploitation and harassment and more covert forms such as threats and fears of such abuses. These crimes against women are a consequence of the role and status of women in capitalist society which fosters patriarchy, and not to some inherent nature or superiority of men.

These circumstances however have seen the spread of the idea that men are the cause of women's inequality and discrimination. The men versus women tendency diverts attention from the real cause of women's inequality which is the consequence of class society based on exploitation. It divides those forces who should be used in common struggle for an end to the discrimination against women.

Long ingrained attitudes of male superiority give grounds for and assist those who promote the women versus men argument. It is extremely important to the reactionary forces representing the interests of capital that men and women workers are divided so that women remain oppressed, disadvantaged and exploited even more than male workers. The promotion of a women versus men conflict diverts the attention of the working class, both men and women, from the real class struggle and creates a barrier to working class women becoming politically aware.

The mass of "feminist" literature that accompanied the accelerated growth of the women's movement during the 1970s bears witness to the success of its divisive and diversionary nature, while some useful theoretical work on the history of women's oppression was done.

Awareness of women's position in Australian society has been directed into male versus female, anti-male, or so-called, "Marxist-feminist" analyses, which

usually omit any political causal analysis, or at best, finds fault with capitalism. This “fault with capitalism” is not fully understood and is sometimes accompanied by a view which finds equal “fault with socialism”.

It is important that we recognise the destructive nature of the men versus women arguments and oppose them and the behaviours which go with them. Such attitudes are incorrect and harmful to the interests of the working people as a whole — both men and women.

It remains fundamental to the success of the movement for women’s economic and social equality and liberation that the working class — men and women together — determine the direction of the struggle and become the decisive leadership of it.

Few working class women have yet been provided with the facilities, encouragement and opportunity to assume leadership in many working class and progressive organisations. This cannot be changed by a policy of tokenism but by the education and training of many more women to take their full place at all levels in political and social life.

There are numerous progressive women’s organisations as well as reactionary ones. We support those organisations of women which base themselves on the working people and are active for their political, social and economic rights for equality.

To make the concept of leadership of the women’s movement by the working class a reality there must be a long-term program of cadre development and political work among working class women and all those who are prepared to throw in their lot with the working class in its historic struggle against capitalist exploitation and discrimination

Our Party’s starting point is that fundamentally the women’s question is a class question. The Party believes that because the unequal economic and social position of women arises out of the system of exploitation, the circumstances for its solution cannot be finally created without ending the capitalist system as a whole and establishing a socialist society, which in addition to legislation for equality, provision of child care etc, will actively struggle to end patriarchal attitudes.

Based upon these concepts the Party resolves to strengthen its work among women with the following aims:

1. Promotion of the SPA’s policies on women in as many areas as possible.
2. Attracting more women to the Party.
3. Development of women in the Party.
4. Development of a better understanding of the position of women in Australia, the causes of women’s oppression and the policies of the Party to achieve women’s political, economic and social equality.

The fulfilment of these aims can be assisted by:

- (a) Establish regularly functioning Women’s Committees at the level of the Central Committee and the State Committees in South Australia, Victoria and

Queensland where this does not already exist.

(b) The task of these committees is to advise the CC and the SC's and assist to put into practice the policies of the Party by proposing policies and activities and helping to organise these activities.

(c) By helping to organise educational and training programs (in co-operation with the CC Education Committee) which will equip cadres for leadership in this field. Such education to involve an overall understanding of Marxism-Leninism as well as special attention to the theory of the women's movement and to involve both women and men.

(d) Prepare public statements, multi-lingual leaflets, etc., conveying the Party's policies and opinions, in the first place, to working women.

(e) To stimulate the recruitment of more women to the Party with particular attention to working class women. This calls for careful consideration and attention to the problems of working women who also quite often have a main responsibility for family and home.

(f) To give attention to the broad women's movement with particular attention to working class women's organisations and to assist and help guide the work of Party members who are active therein.

(g) To encourage women to become active members of their appropriate trade union and help train women trade unionists to assume leadership positions at all levels.

(h) To encourage women to participate in activity for peace and disarmament and to pay attention to the effects of the current economic crisis and deteriorating living standards.

(i) Encourage and hold Party branches, select industries or workplaces which employ women workers giving attention to their needs and struggles. Encourage and assist Party working women become involved in campaigns and activities which involve demands for women's rights and conditions.

(j) Increase the coverage of women's issues and activities in *the Socialist*. Popularise the Party Women's Program.

(k) Organise and prepare Party participation in such conferences as the Women and Labour Conference and other seminars.

(l) Hold appropriate Party functions for IWD and participate in meetings and other functions to mark this day and where appropriate to participate in IWD demonstrations.

(m) Work in and bring forward Party policies in an appropriate way in trade unions and progressive women's organisations. Support for and assist to strengthen ACTU and Labour Council Working Women's Charter Committees.

(n) Establish relations with ALP women's organisations; participate in the work of government bodies concerned with the rights of women.

(o) Support for the United Nations Decade for Women and the World Program of Action.

(p) Support the activities of the Women's International Democratic Federation and the work of its national affiliate the Union of Australian Women and other

progressive women's organisations.

(q) Popularise the rights and conditions of women in socialist countries.

The many issues and policies of the Party are extensively set down in the *SPA Women's Program* and it is not necessary to repeat them here.

The Party's work among women is the responsibility of all members and of all organisations and is not only the task of women Party members and those organisations specifically set up for this work.

The SPA by way of its own specific activities and the activities of its members in the broad women's movement aims to influence and unite women into action around their needs, raising working class and socialist consciousness and working for a socialist Australia which is the prerequisite for the real liberation of women.

# The Character of a Communist Organisation

*From time to time the Editorial Board of the World Marxist Review organises discussions on important issues confronting the parties of the international communist and worker's movement. The following is the report of such a discussion held to consider the problems linked to strengthening the revolutionary vanguard. It is reproduced, slightly abridged, from the magazine World Marxist Review Number 8, 1982.*

## Numbers or Quality?

What determines a party's strength, its political weight, its potential for influencing the course of events in society, the way society develops? The Leninist theory of the party of the new type answers these questions, dramatising features such as knowledge of theory, organisation, links to the masses, and consistent internationalism. However, life poses parties with specific issues, notably, what has priority in the given situation and at the given time: to campaign for more members and create a mass party or to concentrate not on numbers but on quality? This was the central subject at the sitting, and on the basis of the experience of their respective parties the participants attempted to define the general principled approach to it.

Ever since it was founded, our party, said, *Ho Chi Bang (Communist Party of Vietnam)*, has steadfastly drawn upon the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism in party building, creatively applying them in the concrete conditions of Vietnam. Our experience is that *to a large extent a party's strength depends on its size, but quality, the ability to lead the masses, militancy, and political maturity are decisive.* Prior to the revolution of August 1945 the CPV had only 5,000 members, yet the Communist-led revolution ended in victory. In the subsequent new conditions the party's ranks began to grow rapidly — within a few years its membership increased to several hundreds of thousands. Primary organisations were set up practically throughout the country. While relying on the core of veteran cadres, we trained and promoted to leading positions young Communists from among

workers, peasants, students, and the petty bourgeoisie who had taken part in the movement to liberate the motherland.

Of course, it would be wrong to underrate the circumstance that only an organisation with adequate militant forces can establish close ties to the people and play a leading role in all areas of society's life. In this context, numerical strength is closely linked to quality. *But it becomes a force only when it is consistent with the requirements of quality.*

Let me explain what we mean by quality.

First and foremost, the fact that a Communist Party has *acquired a sound knowledge of Marxism-Leninism* and abides by that doctrine, applying it creatively in the actual conditions prevailing in its country. In its political, ideological, and organisational work the CPV has been able to embody the fundamental principles of the theory of Marx and Engels. This, in particular, is the reason that although our party developed in a colony, in what was a semi-feudal, backward agrarian country with a small proletariat, its character has always been that of a party of the working class.

The Communist Party of Vietnam combines two aims: national independence and socialism. To achieve them it mobilises and uses all the potentialities of the working class, of the Vietnamese people, and links the strength of the nation's forces with the struggle of the main revolutionary streams of our time. Now, as before it came to power, the CPV distinctly defines its internationalist commitments, thereby reiterating its affiliation to the world revolutionary movement. We censure all manifestations of great-power chauvinism, national egotism, anti-communism, and anti-Sovietism.

Further, the question of a party's quality is a question of the *political, ideological, and organisational unity of its ranks*, of unity of the will, actions, and aims of all its members. It is my opinion, Ho Chi Bang said, that a vanguard torn by internal contradictions and weakened by clashes between factions and personal ambitions will sooner or later suffer a crushing defeat.

The question of quality is also a question of *unbreakable links to the people*. A party's policies and guidelines should unerringly mirror the interests and aspirations of the people, of all the nationalities inhabiting the country. Only in that case will the people sincerely believe the party and rally round its banner.

Our experience of party building, Ho Chi Bang noted, shows that Communist ranks must be constantly augmented not only from among conscious workers but also from peasants, intellectuals, and advanced members of other working strata. Had we failed to do so we would not have built up a strong mass party equal to its mission in society. And in all cases this should be accompanied by exacting demands of Communists.

There was a period when we were on the wrong track in the question of admitting new members and educating Communists: the doors of the party were closed much too tightly, whilst its ranks were inadequately cleansed of accidental and unworthy elements, and no meaningful educational work was



conducted with new members. We corrected this shortcoming without carrying things to the other extreme. The CPV now works tirelessly to improve the qualitative composition of its membership and check any unjustified drive for numbers. The party is ridding itself of persons who have compromised themselves or are politically illiterate, abiding by Lenin's behest that '*such a reduction in the Party's membership means an enormous increase in its strength and weight.*' (*Coll. Works*, Vol. 29, p. 432).

For the *Costa Rican Communists*, *Manuel Delgado* stressed, the task is, therefore, to turn their party into a mass organisation committed to promoting its quantitative and qualitative growth, to fostering the consciousness of its members, so as to be in a position to head the broad mass movement developing in the socio-economic and political crisis gripping the nation. We mean to have a numerically large party functioning in close unity with the masses, the trade unions, public and peasant organisations, the students, and young working people.

This is not a very easy task. Our adversary has huge potentialities for ideologically influencing the population, while we have no access to the mass media. Or take another problem: since the beginning of the 1960s capitalism has been developing swiftly in Costa Rica. It has broken up society's archaic class structure and produced new contingents of workers, chiefly of peasant origin. The industrial enterprises that sprang up in the course of this boom have begun to employ more subtle methods of capitalist exploitation and oppression, skilfully utilising the undeveloped class consciousness of young unskilled workers.

For a long time the People's Vanguard Party was unable to resolve the question of winning new sections of the working class, with the result that it found itself isolated from these numerically large sections of the working people, although it did win greater influence among the rural proletariat (the largest contingent of the Costa Rican working class), the peasantry, and the middle urban strata. This important problem is getting every possible attention from the Costa Rican Communists and has been analysed at their latest congress.

In considering the question of developing the proletarian vanguard it must be remembered that election results are not always an indication of the party's actual influence among the people, of its role in society's life. The Communists are doing all in their power to make the people see the political credibility of the PVP. In carrying out its programme the party must employ flexible tactics allowing it to overcome the inertia and prejudices in society that obstruct the growth of our influence. This is evidently a task that can be tackled successfully only by a close-knit organisation that has many staunch supporters.

We are therefore trying to enlarge our membership. At our 13th Congress in 1980 we decided to introduce the status of probation member. This allows enlisting thousands of working people whose training level is low. However, in the party steps are taken to give them a political and ideological education.

Of course, the PVP would have been much larger than it is if it abandoned, as the class enemy demands, some of its fundamental guidelines. We could

somewhat enlarge our ranks by studiously distancing ourselves from the Soviet Union. However, experience teaches that flexible tactics should not lead to fundamental concessions, to the abandonment of basic guidelines, without which political activity loses its revolutionary character. The Costa Rican Communists believe that the way to a mass party does not lie through concessions of the quality of the party ranks in favour of numbers. *What we need is not simply a large but a revolutionary party that acts effectively.* Fidelity to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism is the condition for the party's consolidation, the growth of its influence, and the enhancement of the effectiveness of the revolutionary struggle.

### **The Dialectics of Objective and Subjective Factors**

It is the view of the Communists of Guyana, said, *Clement Rohee (People's Progressive Party of Guyana)*, that numerical strength is not the sole and not even the most important factor determining the dimension of a party's influence and its ability to draw the masses into struggle. The comrades here have already noted that in some instances small Communist organisations exercise considerable influence on the course of events in their countries. On the other hand, a large but amorphous and organisationally loose party may lack militancy. What then enables a small party to play a tangible role? Naturally, experience, active championing of the day-to-day struggle for the vital interests of working people, a correct general political guideline, and much else. If this is how a party acts, we are convinced that quality will sooner or later produce quantity.

But does everything depend on us, on our efforts?

The PPP is in the process of transformation from a mass but organisationally loose party into a Leninist party of the new type. The numerical strength of the Communists is growing, but the trouble is that we encounter many difficulties that *stem from the operation of objective factors.* These include the development level of capitalist relations, the people's traditions and customs, and the religious beliefs predominant in society. Also, the stage of the revolutionary process, the degree of the people's political consciousness, the socio-economic and political situation, and the ethnic antagonisms inherited from colonialism must be taken into consideration. Believe me, problems such as these can create serious barriers in our day-to-day work among the masses.

But even if we were to take all these factors into consideration and mapped out a sound programme, this would not mean that all problems would be resolved and the party's numerical strength and influence would automatically grow. Here it is important to be patient and conduct consistent ideological work among the masses. This is, of course, no simple task. Even though our party is well organised and conscious of its objectives, we have to reckon with the shortage of trained cadres and our modest transportation and financial resources.

The Communists of India, said *Sarada Mitra (Communist Party of India)*, are of the opinion that the most important yardstick of a party's ability to act is the *extent it influences political processes in its country.* This influence depends, of course, on many factors, including the party's numerical strength, the size of its

representation in the government, the size of its parliamentary faction, and so on. But the *link between numerical strength and influence is not always direct*. If we take the history of the CPI we shall see that in a country where capitalism has not sunk deep roots, has not asserted itself, a relatively small party pursuing an active, militant policy is quite capable of exercising a visible influence on development. *On this policy, in other words, on the subjective factor very much depends*.

We started by projecting a definite *political image* of the Communist Party of India, distinguishing it from other organisations, from the parties of the national bourgeoisie in particular. But the objective conditions for the materialisation of that image were far from ripe at the time. Nevertheless, from the outset the Communists were able to show the people that though it was small there was a purposeful organisation prepared to fight selflessly for national independence. Because of this the party was brutally persecuted by the British colonial regime: most of its leaders spent from 10 to 15 years in prison. But this sacrifice was not in vain — the party's prestige grew.

Or take another important factor: in a multinational country like India with its innumerable religious persuasions it was of immense significance that in the person of the CPI there appeared an *organisation<sup>1</sup> standing above ethnic narrowness and religious exclusiveness, that it was a secular party*. People professing different religions realised that they could unite this party and find a worthy place and position in it.

Lastly, we were able, at the proper historical moment, to advance a *correct slogan* that defined the orientation and content of the national liberation struggle. In the early 1920s the Indian National Congress debated whether India should accept some sort of Dominion status or fight for independence from Britain. The Communists at the time proposed to the INC a programme of national liberation. They demanded the maximum — India's full independence — and articulated the aspiration not only of the overwhelming majority of the population, but also of the broad left wing within the INC. Soon the INC had to go along with this demand.

I must add here that the impact of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia was tremendous on our national liberation movement and this greatly facilitated our task in convincing our people about the feasibility of our demand for full independence as well as about the role the organised workers and peasants could play in the liberation of our country.

To ensure mass support for the movement for national liberation the Communists bent every effort to organise the working class and the peasantry. At the time there were three main industrial centres: Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. Industry was mostly in the hands of the British. The Communists set up trade unions and linked the demands made during strikes with the long-term aim of putting an end to British imperial rule in the country. As a result of the militancy of the proletariat, the INC took a serious attitude to the question of organising the working class and its trade unions.

In states, notably West Bengal, where the Communist Party was functioning we began uniting the peasants and started a broad movement against feudal

exploitation, a movement that sometimes erupted into violence. Having made demands such as a land reform, the abolition of principalities, and an end to feudal administration, the peasant movement greatly influenced the course of the national liberation struggle.

What do I want to show with these examples? Although few in number, the Communists were to some extent able to give the national liberation movement a new dimension. Everybody had to reckon with us. Many leaders of the INC time and again set as an example for the members of their party the readiness of the Communists to make sacrifices for their cause. But the most significant thing was that from the very beginning the Indian communist movement was able to project its own image, which (as we subsequently learned) took firm root in the minds of the people.

Of course, *both successes and miscalculations* affect the growth of the vanguard's influence and numerical strength, Sarada Mitra continued. The experience of the Communist Party of India shows how great the cost of mistakes sometimes is. One of the most serious blunders of the CPI was that on the eve of independence it underestimated the role and potential of the national bourgeois parties. When India achieved independence our slogan was: 'Nehru will go the way of Chiang Kai-shek.' More, in the CPI it was decided that the time had come for a socialist revolution. In March 1949 we chose a day that many of us thought would be enshrined in history in red letters. I will not go into details, but that was a sectarian error that struck hard at the CPI and its prestige. Nevertheless, people did not forget that it was the Communists who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom and for the toiling masses.

The Communist Party of India has a record of impressive achievements. Its membership now numbers just somewhat under half a million, party branches are functioning in 20 states, and the Communists head mass organisations uniting nearly six million working people. But while we take legitimate satisfaction from what has been accomplished, we do not close our eyes to shortcomings in our work and to the problems confronting the CPI.

In a huge country like ours the Communist Party encounters many objective circumstances hindering the growth of its membership. These include the uneven economic development of the states, the exceedingly high percentage of illiteracy, caste survivals (the problem of the 'untouchables'), and the disparate levels of class consciousness. This makes it impossible to employ the same forms of struggle throughout the country.

It is hard even to imagine what a serious problem illiteracy is for us. A considerable number of the CPI members (especially farm workers) are people who cannot read and write. The efforts to wipe out illiteracy among Communists have so far not been completely successful. Sometimes it takes several months for resolutions of party congresses to reach our people living in remote villages. Party leaders have to go personally to these villages and explain its policies. We try to take all this into consideration, and use diverse forms and methods of struggle in the different parts of the country. For example, we publish eight daily newspapers and 22 weeklies in several languages, organise schools to abolish illiteracy among the adult rural population and in workers' slums, and so on.

Or take yet another problem that issues from the features of the development of Indian capitalism. An analysis of the class origin of CPI members will show that industrial workers comprise less than 10 per cent of the total membership. Most of the Communists come from the poorest peasantry and agricultural workers (together they comprise roughly 46 per cent). Why has such a class composition formed in our party? After all, according to official statistics, there are about 16 million industrial workers in India. One of the reasons is that the Communists working in trade unions are much too occupied with purely trade union matters and pay inadequate attention to enlisting new members into our party. But there is another, in my view, more important reason. What is now taking place in Indian society? Capitalism is developing. People working, particularly at modern capitalist enterprises, in both the private and public sectors generally come from petty-bourgeois stock. They have jobs and housing, while in the public sector some are even guaranteed pensions. In other words, they enjoy certain social guarantees and in some respect feel their privileged position. The rest of the working population, particularly those who work in the traditional sectors such as agriculture, are denied such rights. I repeat that this is only one of the reasons for the relatively low percentage of industrial workers in the CPI.

However, as Lenin put it, 'whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics' (*Coll. Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 257-258). Let me say that our party acts as the militant vanguard of the working class, and takes the long-term interests and aim of the proletariat as the starting point of its alternative programmes for the development of the national economy, culture, and social relations. In this lies the principal guarantee that the CPI will honourably fulfil its historic mission.

### **Keep the Organisation Intact Under All Circumstances**

Greek Communists, said *Polichronis Vais* (*Communist Party of Greece*), appreciate the fact that the revolutionary vanguard must have the political image implicit only to itself. This has been confirmed by developments, especially during the past four decades.

In the history of the CPG there have been periods when, whether its status was legal or semi-legal, it strengthened its organisation and won growing prestige among the working people. But there were cases of the opposite, when a combination of unfavourable objective and subjective factors caused the loss of what had been gained earlier, created serious difficulties, and even placed the party's existence in jeopardy. During such periods we lost many thousands of heroic fighters and there was a retreat of the communist and people's movement.

You will recall that when our country was occupied by the nazis the Communist Party of Greece initiated and organised the national resistance of the Greek people. It enjoyed enormous prestige. Hundreds of thousands of people regarded it an honour to join the Communist Party. In 1944 it had 400,000 members. Then followed the imperialist intervention and the defeat of the people's movement in a civil war. Unparalleled terror and harassment, the

mass annihilation of Communists, the incarceration of tens of thousands of fighters in prisons and concentration camps, and the outlawing of the party greatly complicated the formation of illegal organisations, which, on top of everything, encountered formidable difficulties in getting work going among the population.

The party leadership retreated in the face of these difficulties, disbanding small illegal organisations in 1958. To ensure the presence of the Communists in the nation's political life, all CPG members were instructed to join the legal United Democratic Left Party (EDA). The dismantling of illegal party organisations was a terrible mistake because it deprived the party of the possibility of enlisting new members and conducting educational and ideological work among Communists, and led to the proliferation of legalist illusions and revisionist and opportunist views. In the EDA the party was dissolved in a broad front of democratic forces and lost its image and prospect. As a result, some cadres went so far as to back out of the party and set up an organisation that was revisionist, opportunist and anti-Soviet.

Upon seeing the negative consequences of this mistake, the Greek Communists found the strength to revive the party and reactivate illegal organisations despite the military dictatorship. After the dictatorship fell in July 1974, the CPG emerged from underground, renewed and enlarged its ranks, and put an end to the amorphousness of party cells. All this had an immediate effect in that its influence in society began to grow.

Within a short span of time after the fall of the dictatorship of the 'black colonels', the CPG became one of the leading political forces in Greece and the third party for the number of deputies in the parliament. Further, it should be remembered that the influence of the Communists on the country's life and, especially, among the people does not lend itself to simple arithmetic calculations based on the results of the voting in parliamentary elections.

But the Communist Party's commitments to the people demand the further growth of its numerical strength and its conversion into a large, mass organisation. These objectives are set in the programme documents and resolutions of our 10th Congress (May 1978). These orientate us on building a mass party with deep roots in the working class and among all other working people, a party closely linked to the trade unions and other public organisations, and capable of fulfilling its mission under all conditions.

A few words about what we mean by a mass party. In our view, this means *not only a numerically large but also a closeknit, monolithic organisation devoted to the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism, educated in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, and selflessly championing the interests of the working masses*. In short, we see it as a *genuine vanguard force of a fighting people*.

Hence, the high demands made of those who want to join the CPG. Its Rules oblige primary organisations to conduct a painstaking scrutiny of the behaviour and thinking of the people wishing to join the party. Every candidate has to submit recommendations by party members and go through a set period of

probation. Of course, this procedure does not expedite the process of forming a mass party, but it is a dependable barrier to the infiltration of adventurers or simply accidental people.

We give special attention to educational work. Members and probation members study the fundamental principles of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist theory, are educated in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, and learn to be vigilant. This training is vital in the interests of maintaining the party's purity and reinforcing the unity of will and thought of its members.

### **Objective Need for a Mass Party**

The problem of building a mass party is on the agenda of the American Communists as well. In the USA, said *James West (Communist Party of the USA)*, there were many obstacles historically to the development of class consciousness on a mass scale. Among these were the existence of 'free land' taken from the Indian nations and peoples through policies of genocide; the existence of slavery; the successive waves of mass immigration from Europe as a source of cheap labour and which were used by the bourgeoisie to promote disunity among workers; and the favoured conditions under which US capitalism developed. All this acted as a brake on the development of the working class as a class itself. Nor did the various theories about the 'exclusiveness' of US capitalism that arose on this soil likewise contribute to the political maturing of the American people.

Alongside the positive shifts in the world balance of forces, dramatic shifts have been taking place in the USA itself over the past few years. This is due to the growing role of objective factors. These are, for example, the revolutionising influence of existing socialism on the thinking of millions of people; the close of that chapter in national history in which US imperialism grew rich on wars of aggression with impunity; the awareness that if nuclear war breaks out the USA will not escape its catastrophic ravages; and the intensifying struggles of the working class and working masses which increasingly bring them into conflict with the system of state monopoly capitalism.

All these objective factors militate in favour of putting an end to radical discord encouraged by the ruling class and of strengthening the national anti-monopoly movement. The CPUSA believes that the conditions are at hand for the beginning of a new stage of the mass struggle for peace and cooperation between nations, against racism and monopoly.

In this situation the *role of the subjective factor is gaining momentum*. It would be a fatal error to underestimate it or to think that spontaneity alone, without the rule of the party, can crystallise into a potential capable of leading the nation out of crisis. Today much depends on how profoundly the party understands the new objective realities in the USA, and how creatively and flexibly the Communists act. The party is fully aware that it must and can play a special role, help to consolidate and develop the new tendencies. It now has bigger opportunities than ever before to make a unique contribution to the struggle. As Gus Hall said recently, "The doors are open wider for us than ever before — all we have to do is walk through."

However, it would be wrong to conclude that the conditions for building a mass party emerged in the USA only now. The party was a mass party with mass influence in the 1930s. But at some stages negative tendencies took the upper hand in its development. The departure from Marxist-Leninist principles and the descent into revisionism, first by Lovestone (in the late 20s) and then by Browder<sup>2</sup> put the party in a critical position. After the Second World War, right revisionism under the then editor of the *Daily Worker* (then called the *Daily World*), John Gates, nearly tore the party apart in factional struggle. The effect of these negative periods, even though they were relatively shortlived, did great damage and retarded the party's growth and development for years.

*The need for building a mass Communist Party in the USA is indeed great and urgent today.* The Communists are the only force in the nation consistently exposing the threat to civilisation from the militarist circles of US imperialism and their bid for world supremacy. The Communist Party is the only organisation which has put forward a sound programme for a way out of the crisis and combating racism. The Communist Party is fully aware of its responsibility to the people of our country and the entire planet for bridling the warmongers and winning economic and social security. That is what makes the question of a significant growth of the Communist ranks so urgent.

By *mass party* the CPUSA means a party of sufficient size to be rooted strongly among the working class, the oppressed sections, the farmers, and the professionals-intellectuals; a party able to contest and win elections beginning at the local level; a party able to participate in a broad anti-monopoly, all-peoples coalition and make a decisive contribution to it; and lastly, a party which is steadfast in its class and revolutionary principles, and does not forsake them in order to enlist more supporters (as was done by the Gates revisionists).

To build a mass party there must be competent and steeled cadres. Communists able to take their bearings correctly in any situation and resolve the most complex problems. That explains the great significance that the party attaches to educational work and why it shows concern for every member from the moment of admittance to its ranks. By showing concern for new comrades-in-struggle on both the personal and political levels, by establishing good, warm relations with them and their families we strengthen the entire party.

### **Ability to Act With Numerically Small Forces**

Our party is an effective force but it is beset with many objective difficulties, said *Jack Phillips (Communist Party of Canada)*. The vast majority of the working people labour under reformist illusions and at elections vote for either the traditional bourgeois or social-reformist parties. Although Communists are elected to leadership positions in the trade unions and other democratic organisations, in which the party is very active, the masses as a whole are not ready to vote for the Communists at elections to federal and provincial parliaments. We sometimes poll not more than 200-300 votes, although the number of electors runs into many tens of thousands. I would say that this is a clear indication of existing problems.

In some provinces the Communist Party exercises a strong influence in the



trade unions and Communists play a leading part in the peace movement, the civil rights movement, and in many other democratic organisations. It would seem that such influence should have fostered the growth of the party's membership to a much greater degree than is the case. But, unfortunately, realities are often at variance with the ideal.

We have been critical of some Communists, who while they work splendidly in the trade unions and other mass organisations, pay not enough attention to building the party. We have the Communists in the trade union movement who enjoy enormous and merited prestige as leaders. Nonetheless, throughout the many years of their work they have not been able to build the party and extend the circulation of the party press to any significant degree.

Miscalculations of another kind sometimes occur. For example, some years ago we made the mistake of calling for the building of a mass party as our immediate aim. This was putting the cart before the horse, because the needed conditions had not matured. Many party members therefore began to work for a goal that was not attainable. As a result, they were disappointed, and some lost confidence in the party's policy and leadership.

We corrected this mistake, while at the same time stating that the party must be brought out of isolation and an end put to all sectarian illusions and 'self-elimination' tendencies. For this it was necessary to take a more active part in every public movement and give more leadership to the masses. The 25th Convention (February 1982) noted that the building of a mass party requires more initiative from the Communists in the struggle against effects of the economic crisis, for peace, for the rights of the young people and women, for an end to racism and discrimination against immigrants, and in support of the peoples of El Salvador, Nicaragua, South Africa, and other countries fighting for national liberation.

The Communist Party of Canada has to give more attention to popularising and winning support for its programme for a way out of the economic crisis. In other words, the CPC must become a party of mass action in the true sense. This is a pre-condition for building a mass party.

One sometimes hears that a small revolutionary organisation is incapable of responding effectively to developments, that it closes itself up in the 'tiny, narrow world' of inner-party life, and takes a sectarian stand towards allies. Yes, indeed, a party may strike these reefs if it does not fight with determination for the interests and aims of the broad masses, of the working class in the first place. It is fair to say that at present the CPC is a small party. But we are certain that *provided it continues to act boldly in helping to resolve the problems of the working people our party can become a major factor of national life*. In this context it would be appropriate to recall Lenin's words that 'even a small party ... after it has thoroughly studied the course of political development and become acquainted with the life and customs of the non-party masses, will at a favourable moment evoke a revolutionary movement' (*Coll. Works*, Vol.32, p. 476). The experience of many communist parties, including our own experience, confirms this tenet.

At the 25th Convention we concluded that more systematic efforts had to be made to win the support of the progressive people capable of championing the interests of the working class. The leadership and rank-and-file Communists were called upon to give more attention to party building at industrial enterprises and invigorating their work among immigrant workers of Italian, Greek, and Portuguese origin and the people from the Caribbean nations. Today it is not a case of thousands of workers coming to us with the request to be admitted to the CPC. We therefore have to fight for every recruit painstakingly, to educate and enlist people into the party. This requires an organised, systematic approach to party building.

Further, the convention raised the question of the need to improve work with those who have already joined our ranks. At present the grass-roots organisations are too much involved in inner-party work, and insufficiently involved in public activity, but it is at grass-roots level that we should know non-party people better and work in close contact with them. We consider that party building is linked closely to the promotion and education of young Communists and functionaries, including members of the leadership, comrades with the ability to work correctly among the masses in a principled, non-sectarian fashion. This is one of the keys to qualitatively improving the work of the CPC, strengthening its ties to the mass movement, and converting it into a large national political force.

The recent upsurge in the broad peace movement in Canada, in which the role of the Communist Party is a contributory factor, along with the militant struggles of the trade union movement, in which Communists also play a role, are indications of the new possibilities for party growth in Canada.

### **Significance of the International Factor**

Close attention was given in the discussion to the question of the extent international factors affect the numerical growth and influence of a communist party. The speakers were unanimous on the point that world socialism powerfully influences the process of the formation and development of communist parties. This is why bourgeois propaganda maintains its torrent of slander and misinformation about socialist countries, is silent about the epochal achievements of socialism in social relations, economic development, science, and culture, and magnifies the difficulties and problems encountered in the course of the complex process of building a new life. In short, an all-out effort is being made to blunt the attractiveness of existing socialism for the masses. The class enemy is eager to erode the international communist movement, set some communist parties against others, and compel the Communists living and fighting in the non-socialist part of the world to cut, putting it figuratively, the umbilical cord linking them to the Great October Socialist Revolution and the countries of the socialist community.

The class enemy, Polichronis Vais noted, is interfering openly in the affairs of sovereign nations and exporting counter-revolution to, as happened in Greece, suppress the revolutionary forces. For that reason the unity of the international communist movement and a correct understanding of the role played by the Soviet Union in the first place, are an indisputable factor in the struggle against imperialism's plans.

As James West put it, much depends on how the leadership of a Communist Party relates to the question of so-called weak spots in the system of existing socialism. In the history of the CPUSA there have been periods when campaigns have been conducted to 'expose' socialism. The revisionists used this smoke screen in an attempt to push the party onto the road of anti-socialism, anti-Sovietism, and anti-Marxism-Leninism. This was, for example, the substance of the revisionism preached by Gates. This attitude harms the cause of the workers. I am sure, James West said, that for the Communists the main thing is not to accentuate attention on the problems in socialist countries but to explain accurately and meticulously the subjective and objective causes of these problems and show how difficult, thorny, and unexplored is the path of pioneers building a new society.

James West drew attention to the fact that when the notorious Watergate scandal laid bare the entire depth of the rottenness, corruption, and falsity of the American bourgeoisie, the US mass media, acting as if by a signal, began a campaign to defend the capitalist system. And they did this adroitly. They sought to persuade a nation shaken by the Watergate swindle that since it was exposing frauds of this kind and taking court action against members of the government the USA was the most democratic country in the world. This deceit of the masses, this dodging is alien to us. The Communists have every reason to and should act energetically in defence of socialism, vigorously and frankly explain any difficult situation.

For our party, said Sarada Mitra, considerable difficulties are caused by the 'Chinese question'. You will remember that after the revolution was accomplished in China it had a considerable radicalising effect on Asian countries. It is now very difficult for us to explain what happened there, especially why in foreign policy Peking so often plays into the hands of imperialism. The Maoist 'experiments' brought about a split in our party, a catastrophe in the communist movement of Indonesia, and so on. I do not mention the conflict between China and India or Peking's aggression against Vietnam. All this is a very serious problem, for our region at least.

The revolutionising example of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries has been quite rightly mentioned here. This is a fact recognised by the vast majority of communist and workers' parties, Ahmad Azad declared. The socialist community exercises a very great positive influence on humankind's development, especially in the question of war and peace. But it seems to me that we thought for much too long and sought to convince that socialism develops without problems. While spreading the ideas of socialism we did not say, and this is, I feel, extremely important, that in building a socialist society the people encounter considerable difficulties because never in the history of humankind have tasks of such magnitude and complexity been tackled. Socialism resolves problems that have not been raised by capitalism — the moulding of fundamentally new social relations, the upbringing of a new type of citizen, and so on.

Moreover, one should be able to make a comparative analysis. In the capitalist world there is no country that has surmounted the catastrophic effects of crisis.

Japan and West Germany are sometimes offered as models of capitalist development. But neither of them has managed to end the crisis, nor can they ever solve the fundamental problems. At the same time, we can show how the socialist world, which, of course, has its own problems, often difficult ones, looks for and finds effective ways of resolving these problems.

Efforts are often made, said Clement Rohee, to use the difficulties experienced by socialist countries in one period or another to galvanise reformist ideas about a third way. The claim is made that like capitalism, socialism no longer 'works', and therefore there is a need for a 'third way'. One hardly needs to wax eloquent about how important it is to refute these pseudo-scientific views, which sow fatalism, inertia, and pessimism amidst the working class, the working masses.

I should like to note something else. In the face of the exacerbating class and ideological struggle in the world we cannot sit on two chairs at one and the same time. Let's ask ourselves bluntly: Do we gain anything out of concessions to anti-Sovietism? Perhaps we can win more prestige or strengthen our independence? If we in Guyana began speaking of this sort of 'independence' we would be doing a great service to US imperialism and the local reaction, who are anxious to drive a wedge between our links to ruling communist and workers' parties. It is likely that some people may temporarily capitalise on anti-Sovietism and attract the attention of some sections of the population, but in the long run this cannot benefit a party up to the maximum, for this is the only way we can resolve the problems of the development of our parties.

---

<sup>1</sup>The CPI took shape organisationally in December 1925. —*Ed.*

<sup>2</sup>Jay Lovestone and Earl Browder were General Secretaries of the CPUSA. —*Ed.*