

Socialist Feminism AND THE Revolutionary Party

A radiant program for new generations

by Andrea Bauer

What follows is an in-depth explanation of why Marxist feminism, embodied in a revolutionary party, is the contemporary answer to the crisis of capitalism. Drafted on behalf of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) National Committee, this political resolution was adopted at the party's July 2010 convention. It incorporates additions put forward by the FSP membership.

I Overview

The world and U.S. economies are profoundly troubled, experiencing the most severe crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The economies of entire nations have flat-lined. A mountain of debt forced Iceland into bankruptcy; Greece, Ireland, and other poor-neighbor countries of the southern European Union may yet face the same fate.

The unprecedented breakdown of capitalism today is a symptom and signal of a system battling desperately to maintain itself long past its expiration date. Its convulsions are upsetting bankers and bosses, to be sure, but its main miseries are borne as always by the workers of every country — first among them women, the very young and the very old, and those marked for special suffering by skin color, nationality, and sexual orientation.

The crisis has wrenched millions from their homes and jobs. In the U.S., in the middle of what bourgeois commentators describe without shame as a recovery, the economy continues to shed jobs month by month. Government stimulus spending, whether in the form of Wall Street bailouts or vast Pentagon payouts to “defense” industries, does nothing but boost the profits of the corporate summitters.

In 1938, as the profit system struggled to right itself from its last great tumble, Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky was preparing the proposed program for the founding of the Fourth International, the new world party of Trotskyism. In it, he wrote: “If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish.”



To end the misery of war, mass protest is not enough: what's needed is the determination to change the system that breeds it.

No moral or logical defense is possible for a technologically advanced social structure that cannot meet humanity's basic needs — and in fact runs the clock of progress backward by increasing the brutality and insecurity of people's lives, subjecting them to unending war and occupation, stripping them of formerly held rights, and reinvigorating sexism, racism, and national chauvinism.

And yet, logic and morality notwithstanding, capitalism has many defenders. They include not only CEOs, heads of state, and their associated underlings and hired guns, but representatives of the working class and the oppressed as well: high-paid union officials, movement spokespeople tethered to the Democratic Party, CEOs of grant-dependent “nonprofits,” and the like.

These are the people who make up what Trotsky called the “middle caste.”

In the 1982 political resolution of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP), Murry Weiss, Sam Deaderick, and Clara Fraser characterized this group of charlatans in the United States as a “vast and obnoxious layer of opportunist professionals, technocrats, labor bureaucrats, mass movement reformist leaders, and slightly left-of-center politicians.” The writers go on to describe its function:

The middle caste diffuses, derails, and when pressured, violently combats any substantive confrontations between capital and labor. This caste claims to represent labor or women or gays or people of color or war resisters or consumers, but actually acts as a transmission belt that carries the interests and ideology of the ruling class back into the very mass movements it pretends to lead.

The maintenance of peaceful coexistence is the middle caste's business, all the way from international politics to the shop floor.

To solve the social, economic, and environmental crises of our time in favor of working people, the overwhelming worldwide majority, it is necessary to challenge the defeatist ideology of these misleaders and the deadly inertia of things-as-they-are. This means allaying fears about radical change and propounding a reality-based alternative. It means putting forward and fighting for transitional demands to address the astronomical unemployment and underemployment of Black workers and Black youth. It means recognizing and supporting the leadership of immigrants, low-paid women workers, public-sector employees, and students who have already stepped into the fight with strikes, mass demonstrations, road blockades, and other protests. It means uniting a divided class.

What's called for is a program of socialist feminism.

Every essence requires a form, every ideology a means of realization — an organization. The organization capable of making socialist feminism effective is the vanguard or Leninist party, a leadership body designed to disseminate and update Marxist theory, maintain the continuity of the struggle by passing on the lessons of yesterday, guide the battles of today, give the best and most passionate class fighters a home, and inspire and encourage every revolt against injustice and exploitation.

The crucial significance of socialist feminism and the vanguard party make the Freedom Socialist Party more important than many may realize day to day. What the FSP has to offer in meeting the current staggering crisis is no less than the real key to the way forward.

II Capitalism's inevitable slide

Capitalist flacks would have the rest of us believe that today's economic turbulence is a passing affair, a bump in the road caused by this or that specific and fixable problem. And in this Big Lie they are backed up not only by mainstream media but also by top leaders of the unions and other social movements.

In truth, however, the system's contradictions are catching up with it fatally. One may be tempted to ask: Is this crisis the Big One? The one from which capitalism cannot recover — short of resorting to fascism or another world war? This is impossible to answer right now. More to the point is the question: Is this the crisis that will spur the international working class to overcome its divisions, reject the useless strategies of its misleaders, and fight for fundamental change?

Causes and meaning of the economic meltdown

The blame for this debacle (a receding recession according to the politicians and CEOs, a plaguing depression according to people's real lives) is placed on



Even before the recession, a Dallas job fair for ex-prisoners attracted 5,000 people.

“bad apples” in the capitalist barrel: shifty speculators in the housing market and inadequate regulation of the financial sector. But this is a skin-deep and essentially false analysis. This depression, like all recessions and depressions, is caused by a *crisis of overproduction* of goods that is built into capitalism's DNA — a crisis specific to the system of production driven by the profit motive.

Capitalism is by nature an expansionist beast. Profits are made through growth — the production of an ever-increasing amount of items to sell — and by attempting to beat the costs of competitors, above all through a constant bid to hold down labor costs. The combination of these two drives leads inevitably to periods in which markets are flooded with goods and services but wage-earners can't afford them.

The early to mid-1970s were one such period, a serious warning that the decades of growth arising from the blood-soaked fields and devastated cities of World War II had come to an end. Neoliberalism — the U.S.-driven global policy of privatization of public wealth and the forcible opening of protected markets — was the capitalist recovery strategy. But, as predicted by socialist analysts, neoliberalism only worsened the tendency toward recession it was designed to circum-

vent — although it did provide outrageous profits for a few capitalists. As Megan Cornish writes in “A Marxist Looks at Capitalism's Meltdown”:

In the last 20 years, free trade, globalization, privatization, and deregulation have transferred enormous wealth from workers around the world to U.S. and European capitalists. This has increasingly diminished the international purchasing power of working people — at the same time that more and more products are being produced.

So the very economic strategies that kept profits up in the recent period have been building this disaster.

In this latest period, while all workers watched their buying power shrink, millions were laid off and saw their paychecks disappear altogether. This illustrates one of capitalism's nastiest features: greater unemployment as workers' reward for their greater productivity.

Pre-recession, between 2000 and 2007, U.S. economic output (gross domestic product, or GDP) rose dramatically, thanks to rising productivity. By the first half of 2010, GDP had almost bounced back to its 2005 level. The official unemployment rate, however, remained stuck at just below 10 percent, or nearly 15 million people — up from 6.1 percent in 2005. (*Dollars and Sense*, Sept.-Oct. 2010.)

Increased productivity means that fewer hours of labor create more goods and services. It's a historical trend that results from technical innovation and stepped-up use of machinery — plus, under capitalism, forced speedup on the job. In a rational world free from the addiction to profit, the tendency of productivity to keep growing would benefit workers tremendously, affording more leisure time and more time to spend in creative pursuits. But this is not that world. Instead, bosses use increased productivity to force workers to compete — nationally and internationally — for a dwindling supply of jobs. This is the importance of the transitional demand of 30 hours' work for 40 hours' pay, which increases job openings while maintaining workers' income — eminently rational from a worker's point of view.

Without such reforms, layoff notices mount up alongside heaps of consumer goods. The eventual result is recession. The ruling class tries to safeguard its profits during the slowdown on the backs of workers and the poor by slashing funds for education and public services. This further dampens workers' ability to spend, sharpens the system's fundamental and long-term contradictions, and guarantees deeper and longer recessions to come.

An apparently recent phenomenon is the “jobless recovery” after a recession. Less remarked upon is the fact that the “normal” rate of unemployment under capitalism has been rising for decades. Both the acute unemployment of a recession/depression and the permanently higher unemployment rate mean that a demand to reduce the workweek from 40 to 30 hours with no less in take-home pay is an important one to fight for.

Socialists traditionally raise this eminently logical demand, which would create jobs at management's expense, when jobs are scarce. In the early 20th century, the labor movement was strong enough to achieve something similar by winning the 8-hour day and time-and-a-half for overtime.

The situation is much different now. The possibility of *lasting* progressive reform — anything that threatens ruling-class bank accounts, anyway — is long exhausted, in all but the most special and limited circumstances. The profit system is in decline — global, irreversible, long and slow, but punctuated by periods of acute economic crisis and mounting disasters for people and the planet. It no longer offers workers the promise of rising standards of living, even in highly developed countries like the U.S.

The capitalist nations and individual capitalists, wedded to winner-take-all competition and fixated on their own profits, are themselves deeply divided in their conceptions of the system's underlying problems and how to solve them. Neoliberalism succeeded in preserving the top economic status of the U.S. through intensified exploitation, but failed as a strategy to steadily expand global growth and avert crisis. The U.S. and world economies remain propped up by military spending and the prison-industrial complex, which grow obscenely year after year, and by national, corporate, and personal debt.

The causes and effects of the current crisis are not new. What is new, at least since the Great Depression, is their extremity. Their progressive options closed, the capitalists worldwide are resorting to anti-worker mea-

Save the date! Freedom Socialist Party & Radical Women events

FEBRUARY Celebrate Black History Month

10, 26 San Francisco. Salute to Black Feminists, Feb. 10, 7pm. At the *River I Stand* film, Feb. 26, 7:30pm. New Valencia Hall, 625 Larkin St. #202 • 415-864-1278, baradicalwomen@earthlink.net

19 New York City. The Resistance of Mumia Abu-Jamal and Political Prisoners. 7:30pm. Freedom Hall, 113 W. 128th St. • 212-222-0633, nycradicalwomen.org

20 Los Angeles. The Unfinished Battle for Quality Public Schools. 2pm. Solidarity Hall, 2170 W. Washington Blvd. • 323-732-6416, fspla@earthlink.net

19 Portland, Ore. Black Youth and the Fight for Jobs. 7pm. Bread and Roses Center, 6834 NE Glisan St. • 503-240-4462, fsp@igc.org

MARCH

6 Melbourne. Sydney Road Brunswick Street Party. Campaign for equal pay and an end to Aboriginal deaths in custody. 12-7pm. • 9388-0062, radicalwomen@optusnet.com.au

12 Seattle. Celebrate the centennial of International Women's Day. 7pm. New Freeway Hall, 5018 Rainier Ave. S. • 206-722-6057, RVseattle@mindspring.com

sures that represent an appalling historic regression. And this *does* present a qualitatively new situation. Whether it is for better or for worse depends on the reaction of the working class.

The phony solutions of the ruling class and middle caste

Whatever the reality, the *appearance* that improvement is possible for hard-pressed working people remains key to the system's survival.

In 2008, U.S. voters elected their first Black president. Many had turned against the Republican candidates early in the election cycle because of their disgust with George W. Bush and especially with the endless war in Iraq. Then, in the immediate lead-up to the election, the news broke that huge financial institutions teetered on the edge of disaster thanks to corrupt and devious speculation in real estate and the derivatives market, the cause of so many home foreclosures and so much distress for working-class and low-income households. The depth of the economic crisis became clear, recession was officially acknowledged, and the electoral outcome was sealed. People hungered for change.

In order to head off a huge rebellion that might threaten them, the giant corporations who sponsor candidates pushed Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton to the front of the Democratic pack. This was a bold and savvy emergency measure by Goldman Sachs, Citigroup Inc., JP Morgan Chase & Co., and cohorts to achieve a false front of change by appealing to the mystique of the Democratic Party as the champion of unionists, women, and people of color — the party of working people and “minorities” against the corporations.

This reputation, wholly undeserved by the second party of U.S. capitalism, survives due to the relentless efforts, and at times chicanery, of labor and social movement misleaders. These middle-casters use all the resources at their disposal to uphold this myth to their constituencies. In a longstanding and threadbare refrain, they claim that the Democrats will bring the reforms that people urgently require in healthcare, civil rights, immigration and labor law, job security, reproductive rights, and so on. This is the traditional Pied Piper role of the middle caste: to persuade the exploited and oppressed, whom they represent and on whom they rely for their more or less exalted existence, that there is hope for better days and no need for an all-out fight to overturn and replace the system.

To be president of the United States is to be president of the headquarters of global imperialism, and Obama's first obligation is the same as every other president's: to maintain the status quo no matter the cost. In a time of severe economic downturn, as the ruling classes attempt to claw their way out of crisis, the cost to poor and working people all over the world is exorbitant.

The deep fissures and contradictions of the profit system, and their tremendous toll on workers and the oppressed, are today evident for all to see. The current situation has brought one tremendous advance: consciousness is growing of the need for a radical road out of the impasse into which capitalism has led humanity. Imagine the chagrin of Republican presidential candidate John McCain when his charge that Obama is a socialist actually increased Obama's popularity!

Young people especially are recognizing that they have been betrayed by reformism and the empty promise of abstract “change.” From Greece and Great Britain to Puerto Rico and the University of California, they are demonstrating that they are ready and willing to fight.

At the same time, every social crisis presents an opportunity not only for rapid movement to the left but also for a swing to the right. Capitalists will spur on the reactionary forces in the media, courts, and legislatures if the middle caste is unable to sufficiently rein in the workers' anger. The billionaire Koch brothers are funding the Tea Party, for example, and billionaire media mogul Rupert Murdoch uses Fox News and other outlets to unleash anti-communist vitriol.

The far right is strenuously trying to use the present upheaval to spread its vicious agenda. It bashes unions. It uses anti-government demagoguery to target those who need help from society: the poor, the sick, the elderly, single mothers and their children. As always,

it scapegoats the most vulnerable and abused of the working class, beginning with immigrants, Black youth and other young people of color, and women and queers who assert their rights. And it is gaining ground among the electorate, as shown in the 2010 midterm elections in the U.S.

Since a crisis can resolve in either direction, it is imperative that the FSP and other revolutionaries seize the enhanced opportunity to inspire and support working-class upsurge, thereby advancing the cause of the real and lasting solution: socialism.

III Theory and program as the guide to action

In “The Post-Seattle Upsurge,” an analysis of the anti-corporate globalization movement a year after the 1999 explosion against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, U.S. FSP International Secretary Guerry Hoddersen wrote this in the *Freedom Socialist* (www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/?q=node/1130):

As is true in all movements, the anarchists face the problem of maintaining momentum. This is very hard to do when there are no clear goals or program, organization is handicapped by the principle of decentralization, and the state is cracking heads. To the chant “This is what democracy looks like” might now be replied: “Yes, but what does *victory* look like?”



Walkout: LA students take downtown, March 2010.

To know what victory looks like, one has to know precisely what is being fought and why, who one's enemies are, who one's friends are, and the strengths and weaknesses of the contending parties. One has to know oneself! One has to start with a *theory* and a *program* — and the bigger the fight and the more at stake, the more important this foundation. Theory provides a general and as far as possible comprehensive understanding of something, based on experience and analysis. In the case of a fight against the system, it offers an understanding of the nature of the system, including its origin, development, and decline, as well as its component parts and how they interact. In politics, as in cooking or sports competition, from theory flows the program — a set of principles and a broad plan of action shaped by given conditions.

In December 1847, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels began working on a proposed document for the Communist League, an international workers' association, setting out its ideology and practical orientation. It was published in February 1848 as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (known as *The Communist Manifesto*). In it, guided by dialectical materialist methodology, Marx and Engels elaborated the theory of capitalist class society and the program of communism, or socialism. No other theory and program have had Marxism's transformative power, a power that is still far from spent. This is because Marxism correctly illuminates the real world of Marx and Engels' time *and ours*: a world of irreconcilable antagonism between the interests of the capitalist class and those of the working class, increasing the misery of the latter over

time, and capable of being resolved only by workers taking power and creating a new society.

“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity.” In *What Is To Be Done?* V.I. Lenin follows this assertion with an 1874 quote from Engels, who explained that the workers' movement has three sides: “the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic.” By these three aspects Engels meant the struggle of ideas, the creation of a political voice for workers through a party, and resistance to capitalism through labor activism.

According to Engels, the German workers' movement at the time had become particularly strong because it was attending to all three of these “concentric” aspects of the fight in harmony and in their interconnections. The leadership position of the German workers internationally, Engels wrote, demanded “redoubled efforts in every field of struggle and agitation. In particular, it will be the duty of the leaders to gain an ever clearer insight into all theoretical questions, to free themselves more and more from the influence of traditional phrases inherited from the old world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind that socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e., that it be studied. The task will be to spread with increased zeal among the masses of the workers the ever more clarified understanding thus acquired.”

Many activists today disdain the significance of theory and program. But what they fail to recognize — or, in some cases, refuse to admit — is that every person is guided by some political perspective, consciously or not.

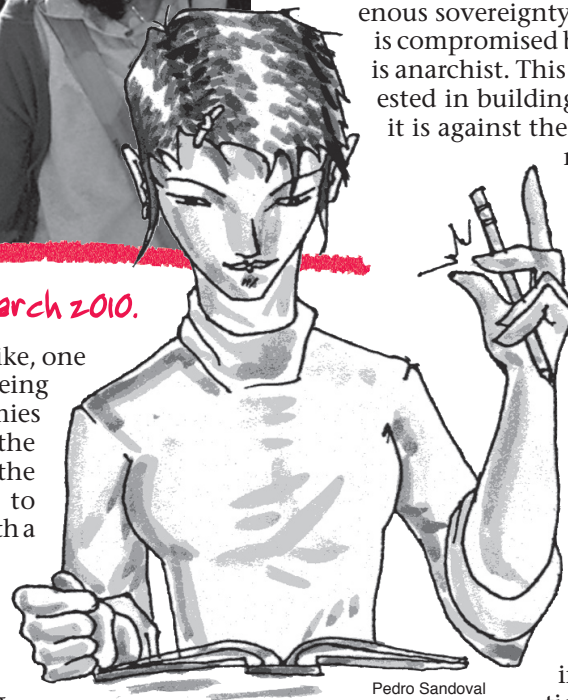
Consider the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) of Mexico. In 1994, five years before the anti-WTO “Battle of Seattle,” the boldness of the Zapatistas in confronting neoliberalism, their passionate defense of the rights of indigenous people and poor peasants, and the prominence of women in their ranks roused sympathies and gave them stature across the globe. This was especially true among youth. In 2005, the Zapatistas mobilized to “go to the people” for instruction as to what they should be fighting for, and how — a “national program of struggle.” In reality, however, the EZLN already had a program. It contains

many good elements, including support for indigenous sovereignty rights and gay equality, but is compromised by an overall perspective that is anarchist. This means the EZLN is not interested in building a fight to take state power; it is against the very idea of state power, no matter in whose hands. Thus, the campaign of “going to the people” was not so much ultra-democratic as it was an abdication of necessary leadership just at a time when great events, opening up great opportunities, were shaking Mexico.

Anarchism was in fact the main theoretical challenge for Marxism as the latter came to maturity in the second half of the 1800s. Anarchism's leading proponent was Mikhail Bakunin, an outstanding insurrectionist but nefarious intriguer within the International Workingmen's Association, or First International.

In a letter in 1872, Engels characterized Bakunin's philosophy: “Bakunin maintains that it is the *state* which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital *only by the grace of the state*. As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state which must be done away with, and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself.” This theory stands on its head the actual historical relationship of the state and the profit system, which Engels explained in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. In fact, it was the growth of exchange of goods for profit — the first steps in the evolution of capitalism — that required the state to come into existence to protect the developing system of private wealth.

One natural programmatic result of Bakunin's wrong theory was that he rejected any participation in bourgeois elections. More broadly, he rejected “politics.” He did not see the First International as a vehicle for taking on the system — in other words, as a revolutionary political party. He saw it instead as a propaganda society for revolution and as the anti-authoritarian replacement-in-waiting for the state once it was overthrown by the enlightened masses.



Anarchism reached its peak of influence within the working-class movement during the Spanish Civil War, in which anti-authoritarian groups and individuals showed glorious commitment and sustained heroism. Nevertheless, the false anarchist conception of the state led to confusion, contradictions, and mistaken decisions that contributed to the fascist defeat of the democratic and revolutionary forces.

One of the grandest examples of the positive role a correct political perspective can play is the 1917 October revolution in Russia. Lenin realized after the February revolution that events had eclipsed the Bolsheviks' original idea of the revolution's course. This was that the Russian workers and peasants, after overthrowing the czar and feudalism (making a bourgeois-democratic revolution), would have to suffer a whole period of capitalist development before their time came to claim the state and begin to build socialism. Lenin came to

believe that a workers' state was both necessary and possible. This brought him into close alignment with Trotsky on this question (one element of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution). Once Lenin won the Bolshevik Party to this program — with his first support coming from the worker rank and file — it led to the triumphant creation of the first workers' state.

On a smaller scale, the FSP's own experience provides many examples of the impact of a correct program.

One notable case is our emphasis on the right wing and its role in dividing and suppressing workers and the oppressed. It is hard to credit now, in the era of Pat Robertson, Glenn Beck, and Michelle Malkin, but during the 1970s many socialists dismissed this emphasis, even derided it. Our socialist feminism, and our study of the lessons of history, allowed us to understand the nature and scope of the threat while it was still most visibly directed at women, lesbians, and gay men, and before it was widely understood. This readied us to be the vanguard in a conscious and coordinated campaign against the white-supremacist latter-day fascists as they crashed to prominence in the late 1980s. The FSP made an essential contribution to quashing plans for turning the Pacific Northwest into an Aryan stronghold, and all the U.S. branches, as well as the Australian section, have scored successes in the ongoing fight against the far right, while gaining increased recognition and respect for the party.

Additionally, the FSP founders' programmatic recognition of the importance of an autonomous women's movement was a key element of the historic birth of Radical Women in 1967. And the party's insistence on the foremost role of the most oppressed as *part of the working class* has won greater acceptance within the labor movement for gay rights, secured union support for concepts such as affirmative action and comparable worth, and much more. Our program determines everything from the nature of the demands we raise in our election campaigns to how we defend ourselves as radicals when attacked in court or by employers. Whether defending Native fishing rights, free speech, public ownership of industry, or the rights of immigrants, the party's program is the

thread that weaves it all together. And FSP members, grounded in theory, program, and the study of history, are the weavers. Together with the program, they are the party's biggest strength.

As the crisis of capitalism drags on, more and more people, especially youth, will seek a deeper

understanding of society out of a passionate desire to change it. As James P. Cannon, founder of U.S. Trotskyism, said in another context in 1942, recorded in *The History of American Trotskyism*: "It frequently happens, you know, that after people get a bad blow they begin to wonder about the cause of it."

unions and placed huge numbers of infiltrators into radical organizations. Under these circumstances, the party's "primary and imperative practical task" was to "establish *an organization of revolutionaries* capable of lending energy, stability, and continuity to the political struggle," wrote Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* The RSDLP had to become a centralized, disciplined group of theoretically educated, politically trained professional revolutionaries. Lenin's position put him at odds with those of his colleagues who were comfortable with the casual, opportunist-friendly nature of the highly localized and disjointed party.

Unfolding events showed that the dispute between Lenin and the Bolsheviks on one side and their Menshevik opponents on the other went much deeper than a question of organization. The Mensheviks turned out to be conciliators with the liberal bourgeoisie. In *Socialism and War*, written with Gregory Zinoviev, Lenin said of Menshevism: "Adaptation of the working-class struggle to liberalism — such was its substance." During the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Mensheviks were the bourgeoisie's main prop against the workers and peasants. As discussed above, Lenin realized that the time had come for the working class to seize power, keep it, and use it to move rapidly toward socialism. This was necessary if the workers and peasants were to win and retain any meaningful democratic gains. But the Mensheviks clung to the outmoded "stages" theory — first the bourgeois-democratic revolution and then, much later, the socialist revolution — in defiance of what was actually happening all around them.

As Trotsky puts it in *The History of the Russian Revolution*:

Only on the basis of a study of political processes in the masses themselves, can we understand the role of parties and leaders. ... They constitute not an independent, but nevertheless a very important, element in the process. Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.

So it was the combination of a correct appreciation of the type of organization needed with a correct theoretical and programmatic orientation that made the October revolution possible — a revolution that led to advances for humanity not only in Russia, but all over the world! History demonstrated that Lenin's fight for a democratic centralist, professional party of committed revolutionaries guarded the party against a hostile takeover by compromisers and sellouts.

As Cannon wrote in *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*:

Organization questions and organizational methods are not independent of political lines, but subordinate to them. As a rule, the organizational methods flow from the political line. Indeed, the whole significance of organization is to realize a political program. In the final analysis there are no exceptions to this rule. It is not the organization — the party or group — which creates the program; rather it is the program that creates the organization, or conquers and utilizes an existing one.

As Cannon wrote in *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*:

Organization questions and organizational methods are not independent of political lines, but subordinate to them. As a rule, the organizational methods flow from the political line. Indeed, the whole significance of organization is to realize a political program. In the final analysis there are no exceptions to this rule. It is not the organization — the party or group — which creates the program; rather it is the program that creates the organization, or conquers and utilizes an existing one.



Beatriz Páez addresses comrades and friends at the July 2010 FSP convention.

“The best socialist leaders have stressed that the party's survival is dependent on the free flow of discussion and debate, the mutual accountability of leaders and members, and the power of the membership to exercise control.”

History of American Trotskyism: "It frequently happens, you know, that after people get a bad blow they begin to wonder about the cause of it."

IV The vanguard party: Leadership for revolutionary change

A political program for the collective emancipation of working people can come alive only by means of an organization for collective action. The type of organization suited for this monumental task is the vanguard party.

A feat of imagination may help to bring home the enormous significance of the vanguard, or Leninist or Bolshevik, party. At the time of the anti-WTO upsurge of 1999, what if there had existed a Leninist party with wide influence in the unions and other movements and among young people? What prospects would this have opened up for the anti-"free trade" movement, much of whose awe-inspiring energy dissipated over the next few years in mass street battles with cops around the world?

Origin of the vanguard party concept

Lenin began formulating the concept of the democratic centralist vanguard party at the start of the 1900s. His analysis of what kind of organization the Russian socialist movement needed was rooted in the prevailing conditions. Russia was alive with revolutionary ferment and Marxist ideas were widely popular, but the horribly repressive czarist autocracy made socialist activity illegal, forcing it underground. The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) was eclectic and primitive in its politics and amateurish in its practice. (At the time, "social democracy" was the term for the socialist movement, in recognition of the workers' movement as a fight both for democratic demands and for socialism.) The police controlled the

FREEDOM SOCIALIST PARTY

www.socialism.com

United States

FSP National Office: 4710 University Way NE, Ste. 100, Seattle, WA 98105. Tel 206-985-4621. Email fspnatl@igc.org

Albany, NY: Tel 518-433-1388.

Baltimore, MD: Email fspbaltimore@hotmail.com

Los Angeles: Solidarity Hall, 2170 W. Washington Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90018. Tel 323-732-6416. Email fspla@earthlink.net

Newark, NJ: Tel 973-643-0499.

New York City: Freedom Hall, 113 W. 128th St., New York City, NY 10027. Tel 212-222-0633. Email fsp@nyct.net

Port Angeles, WA: Tel 360-452-7534. Email lfidanks@yahoo.com

Portland, OR: Bread & Roses Center, 6834 NE Glisan St., Portland, OR 97213. Tel 503-240-4462. Email fsp@igc.org

San Francisco: 625 Larkin St., Ste. 202, San Francisco, CA 94109. Tel 415-864-1278. Email bafsp@earthlink.net

Seattle: New Freeway Hall, 5018 Rainier Ave. S., Seattle, WA 98118. Tel 206-722-2453. Email FSPseattle@mindspring.com

International

Melbourne, Australia, FSP International Office: Solidarity Salon, 580 Sydney Rd., Brunswick, VIC 3056. Tel 03-9388-0062. Email freedom.socialist.party@ozemail.com.au

Vancouver, Canada: 916 W. Broadway, Ste. 568, Vancouver, BC V5Z 1K7

Call, write, or drop by your local branch

Therefore, the Marxist theory and program of the irreconcilability of classes and the need for working-class revolution to establish socialism requires an organization that takes itself seriously and is always scrupulously oriented to the working class and the oppressed, not to the capitalists and those who support them and make excuses for them: in short, a revolutionary vanguard party.

The Leninist party and democracy

Many anarchists and liberals charge all vanguard parties with being undemocratic and elitist.

Anarchists object in principle to the idea that individuals, even in the context of a voluntary association, must submit themselves to authority — as, for example, the authority of a majority vote, a basic democratic process.

Liberals may belong to some of the most undemocratic organizations around, such as churches run on a feudal hierarchy, the Democratic Party, grant-funded service organizations, and bureaucratically run social-change and peace groups. Still, for many of them, it is the Leninist party that provokes contempt.

Critics with some knowledge of Lenin's works love to take aim at *What Is To Be Done?* The book is in part a polemic against calls for "broad democracy" in the RSDLP. Lenin scorned these calls as "playing at" democracy in the dangerous situation of the czarist police state. He pointed out that they issued mainly from members of the social democracy outside Russia. Conditions at that moment in Russia, which forced the party to operate in secret, pushed the need for centralism to the fore and made expressions of democracy such as full publicity for RSDLP operations and elections of the party's officers impossible. Wrote Lenin, "Broad democracy" in Party organisation, amidst the gloom of the autocracy and the domination of gendarmerie, is nothing more than a *useless and harmful toy.*"

But, despite the severe restrictions imposed from the outside on formal democracy, Lenin wrote, another kind of democracy was still a feature of the RSDLP. It was a democracy of comrades: complete, mutual confidence among revolutionaries imbued with "a lively sense of their *responsibility*" to the working-class movement.

Perhaps most key to real democracy in an organization is free debate — full, vigorous, and unrestrained discussion of every important issue. And this the RSDLP had, despite the watchful eye of the czarist censor and the scattering of much of the party's membership through exiles and jailings. Lenin certainly contributed his part!

Although the means available to implement democracy within the vanguard party change, the recognition of its crucial importance does not. From Lenin to Clara Fraser, the best socialist leaders have stressed that the party's survival is dependent on the free flow of discussion and debate, the mutual accountability of leaders and members, and the power of the membership to exercise control.

Development of the party in changing circumstances

As has been said, Lenin's thinking about what form the party should take was determined by his ideas about its tasks, which flow from the program and the specific conditions of time and place. Above all, he believed it necessary to create "a revolutionary organisation, capable of uniting all forces and guiding the movement in actual practice and *not in name alone*, that is, *an organisation ready at any time to support every protest and every outbreak* and use it to build up and consolidate the fighting forces suitable for the decisive struggle" (*What Is To Be Done?*). This perspective he put forward against "economism," an opportunist, workerist tendency in social democracy focused solely on improving pay and working conditions and adapted to prejudices of the most conservative Russians. He polemicized instead for what the FSP today calls a multi-issue movement, involved in every democratic fight against oppression. The party's mandate was not to accommodate to backwardness, but to rouse, educate, and *lead*.

The way for the party to strengthen itself for this job, Lenin said, was to establish an all-Russian newspaper — a countrywide rather than local organ for the

party. The newspaper would give the far-flung Russian revolutionaries a means of communicating with each other, of reporting on and analyzing mobilizations in different locations. It would give them new ideas for campaigns in which to become involved. It would provide guidance for RSDLP members in their attempts to develop and expand the party. It would also bring comrades together and educate them through its actual production.

This plan met with vociferous opposition from the Mensheviks and others and caused a split in the movement. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks were able to carry it out. And they succeeded in achieving their goal for the party: the creation of a core group of revolutionaries who were disciplined, tightly knit, politically educated, broad in outlook, and battle-tested.

When circumstances change, the party must change, if it is to answer rightly the question of "What next?" Different times require different approaches. In 1905 an enormous upsurge swept Russia, battering at the castle of czarist absolutism. Because the necessary strong foundation had been laid, the Bolsheviks were able to shift gears drastically and

orient to becoming a truly mass revolutionary party by recruiting from tens of thousands of newly radicalized fighters — without compromising or diluting the party's program.

To open up the party, Lenin had to overcome quite a bit of resistance. In February 1905, he argued:

We must considerably increase the membership of all Party and Party-connected organizations in order to be able to keep up to some extent with the stream of popular revolutionary energy which has been a hundredfold strengthened.

... Young fighters should be recruited more boldly, widely and rapidly into the ranks of all and every kind of our organizations. Hundreds of new organizations should be set up for the purpose without a moment's delay. Yes, hundreds; this is no hyperbole. ... We must use the freedom we are getting by law and the freedom we are taking despite the law.

Although the 1905 revolution was defeated, it marked a huge leap forward for the workers and peasants, who had gained new freedoms and learned invaluable lessons. For a while, the Bolsheviks were able to function legally. By 1907, before a renewal of extreme czarist reaction forced them underground again, they had become a mass organization of about 45,000 people.

After the 1917 revolution, the party's tasks changed dramatically. The founding of the Third or Communist International in 1919 reflected this. The Russian Communist Party (CP) was now "first among equals" in a democratic centralist *world* party — the acknowledged leader of the global socialist movement. It had fully earned its authority.

In the period before the rise of Stalinism, parties from all over the world took their problems and disputes to the Comintern, knowing that they would receive fair and informed advice of a high caliber. In *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, Cannon describes one such request for help from the U.S. CP in 1922. The U.S. party, founded in 1919, was an underground party at birth, thanks to fierce persecution of all U.S. radicals during and after World War I. By 1922, Cannon and others thought that the climate had changed enough for the CP to operate in the open so that it could broaden its influence. But the party was deeply divided over this question.

During the Comintern's Fourth Congress in Moscow, representatives of both sides were able to discuss the issue in meetings with leading Comintern representatives, including Trotsky and Zinoviev, and to make their case in a formal session.

In the end, after careful and thorough consideration, all the Russian leaders strongly supported the Cannon faction's proposal to legalize the party. The opposing faction had argued that staying underground was a question of *principle*. The Soviet leaders completely rejected this position, with Zinoviev calling illegal underground work a cruel necessity in certain conditions, far from anything to be made a fetish of. The Comintern's help in resolving this debate laid the basis for the U.S. party to turn outward and grow. Without it, the infant party may not have survived.

In "The Revolutionary Party: Its Role in the Struggle for Socialism" (originally published as "The Vanguard Party and the World Revolution"), Cannon writes: "The history of American communism since its inception in 1919 has been a record of struggle for the right kind of party. All the other problems have been related to this central issue."

The popular front as criminal substitute for the Bolshevik party

One of the morals of Cannon's story about the Fourth Congress of the Third International is the incalculable, irreplaceable value of a healthy International that enjoys the allegiance of socialist parties around the world. Although currently many groups purport or aspire to be an International, none has the combination of political integrity and wide following that marked earlier Internationals in their prime. It follows that one of the tasks of today's parties must be to do everything possible to recreate such an International.

As socialist parties in different corners of the globe grapple with this problem, into the vacuum of world revolutionary leadership comes "help" from an unlikely direction: the head of a capitalist state. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has called for a Fifth International to "fight against imperialism and capitalism."

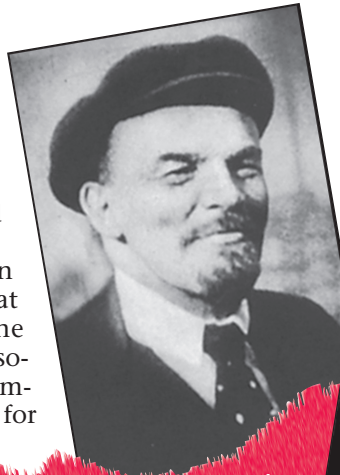
Chávez has done some good things for the working and indigenous people of Venezuela and he has done some bad things. But neither Chávez' good deeds nor his bad ones enter into the equation when it comes to the question of an International that supposedly follows in the tradition of the first four. Chávez' proposal fails to conform to the first principle of Marxism: the liberation of the working class will be achieved only by the workers themselves, organized into their own party.

In contrast, this imagined Fifth International is nothing other than the latest variant of an old "alternative" to workers' self-emancipation and the vanguard party: the popular or people's front. The design of this Fifth International would delegate working-class emancipation to a heterogeneous and unsavory mix of government representatives (Iran is on the invitation list) and capitalist, Stalinist, Stalinist-capitalist, reformist, and politically confused organizations, including the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of Mexico, Justicialista Party of Argentina, Liberal Party of Colombia, Chinese Communist Party, Vietnamese Communist Party,

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador, Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) of Nicaragua, Socialist Alliance of Australia, and Chávez' own United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

The people's front is an alliance to achieve democratic aims that is made up of workers and their representatives together with the capitalists, under capitalist leadership and around a capitalist program. It is a debasement of the united front, which is an alliance for democratic aims, open to everyone who shares its goals, *but with working-class leadership and a working-class program.*

Hugo Chávez uses socialist rhetoric, but in practice he heads a capitalist state and defends the system from radical change. As Guerry Hoddersen wrote in the 2006 FSP political resolution, *One Hemisphere,*



V. I. Lenin



Leon Trotsky



Anarchist poster of the Spanish Revolution

Indivisible: Permanent Revolution and Neoliberalism in the Americas, “The [Venezuelan] constitution upholds private property rights and, in the past, Chávez has said he will not go beyond it. Thus far, his government only approves land or factory seizures if the property is abandoned or under-utilized.” The Fifth International Chávez calls for shows absolutely no promise of becoming a revolutionary organization.

The popular front that Chávez’ International exemplifies today is perhaps best known among its critics as Joseph Stalin’s tool for murdering the Spanish Revolution and allowing fascism to gain the bloody upper hand in Spain. The Spanish Communist Party, anarchists, and reformist socialists (who inherited the term “social democracy” after the split between revolutionaries and reformists on the eve of World War I) all supported and participated in the bourgeois government. They did this with more or less sincerity in order to guard the young Spanish republic against the monarchists and fascists. The outcome was a debacle still reverberating today against European workers, especially immigrants and others most vulnerable to fascist scapegoating.

In the U.S., a broad, diffuse, and longstanding popular front is practiced by labor officials in alliance with Democratic politicians who are at the beck and call of corporate America. Healthcare “reform” is one of the latest excrescences of this alliance.

The popular front is only one of numerous “alternatives” to the vanguard party offered to dissatisfied workers and students. These options, often interlocking, include but are not limited to: immersion in single-issuism of one kind or another; absorption into “pure and simple trade unionism”; support for third-party electoral vehicles that critique capitalism but still defend it as the only choice; direct action as the beginning and end of political activism; and escape into lifestyle pursuits, the contemporary opiate of choice. But the people’s front is one of the first and most pernicious substitutes. As fascism threatened Europe, Trotsky in *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)* drew the connections to the original people’s front:

The question of questions at present is the Popular Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the Popular Front. In reality, the Popular Front is the **main question of proletarian class strategy** for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism. For it is often forgotten that the greatest historical example of the Popular Front is the February 1917 revolution. From February to October, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries ... were in the closest alliance and in a permanent coalition with the bourgeois party of the Cadets, together with whom they formed a series of coalition governments. Under the sign of this Popular Front stood the whole mass of the people, including the workers’, peasants’, and soldiers’ councils. To be sure, the Bolsheviks participated in the councils. But they did not make the slightest concession to the Popular Front. Their demand was to **break** this Popular Front, to destroy the alliance with the Cadets, and to create a genuine workers’ and peasants’ government.

As Les Evans writes in his introduction to *The Spanish Revolution*, “Every condition for socialist victory had existed in Spain — save one. And that one, the existence of a mass revolutionary party that aimed at the establishment of a workers’ government, proved to be indispensable.”

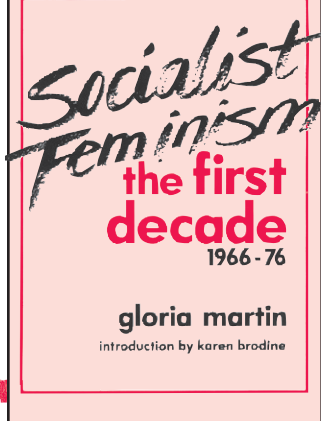
V Marxism for our time

Lenin, Trotsky, and the other Bolsheviks could not have foreseen that the kind of mass revolutionary party that Evans mentions, which existed in many countries at points during the first half of the 20th century, would be virtually extinct nearly 100 years after the 1917 revolution. Still, this is a **temporary condition**, even if protracted, with reasons that can be explained. These include the artificial life given to capitalism by the permanent war economy and the counterrevolu-

tionary effect of the Stalinized Soviet Union on radical workers, peasants, and young people around the world. To socialists of the moment Trotsky might say what he said to socialists in 1938, who confronted rising fascism and the approach of a second world war (recorded in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*): “It would of course be impermissible to fall into hysteria.” Timeless advice!

U.S. revolutionaries face particular difficulties. The very freedoms and material resources that make life easier for many people here, including radicals, also dampen class consciousness and reinforce illusions about reformist and individual solutions to social problems. The combination of the anti-communist McCarthy era, a suffocating middle caste, media disinformation, and a distraction-saturated culture has made honest-to-Marx socialists, in many people’s minds, exotic anomalies of a time past.

What does it take to survive in these circumstances, to avoid falling into either sectarianism or opportunism, or just dropping out? What does it take to **advance**? It takes heart and commitment, certainly, but above all it takes a long view of history, a strong political compass, and the building of solidarity among oppressed people. And this is exactly what the theory and program of socialist feminism provide.



Gloria Martin (at right) chronicled FSP’s early years, during which Clara Fraser (above) and she brought old Left, New Left, and feminist radicals together.



Clara Fraser and Susan Williams describe this in the 1978 essay “Socialist Feminism: Where the Battle of the Sexes Resolves Itself” in *Revolution, She Wrote*:

Throughout the late 1940s and the ‘50s, when women were herded back to *kinder, kirche and küche*, the woman question was kept alive by a handful of Trotskyist women in the SWP. ... These are the women who coined the term “socialist feminism” to distinguish their advanced politics from single-issue, civil rights feminism, and from the anti-communist sector of the “radical feminists.” And these are the women who sparked not only revolutionary feminism but contemporary revolutionary **socialism** as well.

In *Socialist Feminism: The First Decade, 1966-76*, Gloria Martin continues the story:

The rise of a mass movement for women’s liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s caught all the left parties offguard except one. The founders of the FSP had long anticipated this inevitability. Our women theoreticians, trained in the Marxist method of analyzing the material reality of American life, could see the political handwriting on the wall. They studied the statistics on women in the work force. They learned from personal experience and objective data that the most educated sector of the working class was female.

... We [future FSP members] were still in the SWP when our theoretical work on the woman question began, and the major distinction between us and other SWP women was that we did not consider our feminist anger, resentment and strong sense of injustice to be atypical or exceptional among women in general. We knew our advanced consciousness and knowledge of super-exploitation were not far ahead of the mass, and in 1950 we were already urging the SWP to gear up programmatically and strategically for the coming massive eruption of women into the arena of social protest.

When the Seattle branches of SWP and its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance, split and formed the Freedom Socialist Party in 1966, they did so under the banner of both revolutionary integration and women’s emancipation. But the first male members of the FSP found it hard to live the feminist program they had adopted, leading to an early split within the new party. Over the next few years, the remaining original male party members also defected. For six months in 1971, women made up the entire membership of the FSP — almost certainly a unique circumstance for a Leninist party! Nearly 40 years later, of course, many male comrades have been socialist feminist role models and leaders in the organization for decades.

The creation of the first socialist feminist party is a testament to the fact that as times change, Marxist theory changes. It grows, deepens, and catches up to developments in life. How could it be otherwise? The ideology of Marx and Engels has expanded over time to include Lenin’s elaboration of imperialism, Trotsky’s concept of the permanent revolution, the key role of the U.S. revolution to world revolution expressed in Cannon’s “Theses on the American Revolution,” and more. Marxist feminism is an expansion of the revolutionary arsenal based on unfolding history. It builds on the thinking of early socialist leaders about both class exploitation and women’s subordination.

Early Marxists on women’s oppression

Engels, who is under-recognized as the original Marxist theorist of patriarchy and women’s liberation, laid the basis for all the socialist feminist theory that would follow in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Published in 1884, his work was based on pioneering anthropological evidence of the day. Engels explained how the patriarchy emerged from the matriarchy and the system of private property from the system of communal ownership, famously asserting, “The overthrow of mother right was the **world-historic defeat of the female sex.**”

Of the status of men and women, Engels wrote:

The inequality of the two before the law, which is a legacy of previous social conditions, is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of women. In the old communistic household, which embraced numerous couples and their children, the

administration of the household, entrusted to the women, was just as much a public, a socially necessary industry as the providing of food by the men. This situation changed with the patriarchal family, and even more with the monogamian individual family. The administration of the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of society. It became a *private service*. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production.

Engels was the first to systematically trace the rise of female oppression relative to the rise of the profit system. But an understanding of the relationship of women's status to overall social progress goes back to the earliest utopian socialists. In 1808, Charles Fourier wrote: "Social advances and changes of periods are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty, and the decadences of the social order are brought about by virtue of the decrease of liberty of women. ... The *extension of privileges to women* is the general principle of all social progress."

The special importance of women's oppression and battle for liberation was commonly recognized by socialists around the world in the 1800s and first years of the 1900s, from James Connolly in Ireland to Daniel De Leon in the United States. In 1903, in his translator's preface to August Bebel's *Woman under Socialism*, De Leon struck a note very similar to Fourier's, asserting that the "Woman Question is the weakest link" in the capitalist armor. "The shot that rips up the wrongs done to her [woman] touches a nerve that aches from end to end in the capitalist world," he wrote.

As with so many questions, the Russian Revolution enormously validated and enriched socialist theory about women. The role of women entered the spotlight, from Trotsky's description in *The History of the Russian Revolution* of how female workers sparked the February uprising to the lively conversations between Lenin and Clara Zetkin about the obligation of communists to fight for women's special demands and to work to form an international women's movement.

The legal and practical initiatives undertaken in the first years of the revolution to raise women's position, and to recognize the rights of homosexuals, have never yet been equaled, let alone surpassed.

In a talk at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women in 1918, recorded in a collection of Lenin's writings and speeches, *The Emancipation of Women*, Lenin took note of the legal advances. These included instituting complete freedom of divorce and abolishing divorce proceedings, "that source of bourgeois degradation, repression and humiliation." However, he added, "The important thing is not the law" but enabling women "to carry on independent proletarian socialist work."

Lenin believed that, as he said in this speech, "The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it." With the Soviet Union fighting for its life against imperialism, it was essential to mobilize the revolutionary potential of women internationally. In the USSR, where the majority of people still toiled on the land, this meant getting rid of the isolating small peasant farms and creating a cooperative agriculture, with the result that women could become part of social production.

Socialism and feminism: the synthesis

Engels dealt in *Origin of the Family* with this question of the relationship between women's oppression in general and female exclusion from the workforce: "The first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry." At the time he wrote this, however, Engels believed this reentry would take place *after* the individual, patriarchal family was replaced as society's basic economic unit. But, because capitalism has so long overstayed its welcome, the majority of women have become workers while the family, even though its forms have multiplied, is still the economic nucleus responsible for the care, feeding, nursing, and socialization of the next generation of workers.

The brilliance of the early FSP leaders, as shown in the earlier quote from Gloria Martin, is that they anticipated this development, because they themselves were part of the breaking wave of women workers — and because they were armed with the Marxist analytical tools to understand its meaning. The large-scale transformation of women into wage slaves gave a

whole new dimension of meaning to Trotsky's famous injunction in *The Transitional Program*: "*Turn to the woman worker!*"

It may not be easy for today's younger generations to realize how drastically the situation of women has altered. A 1965 document by the founders-to-be of the FSP (now part of the book *Crisis and Leadership*) discussed the reality for women at that time:

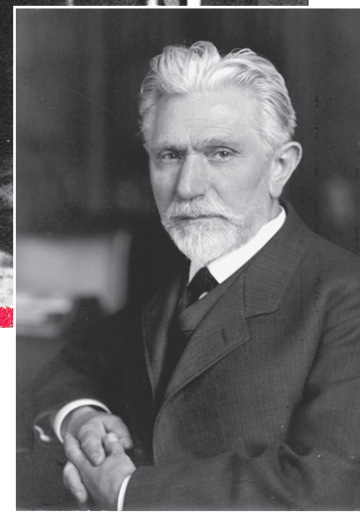
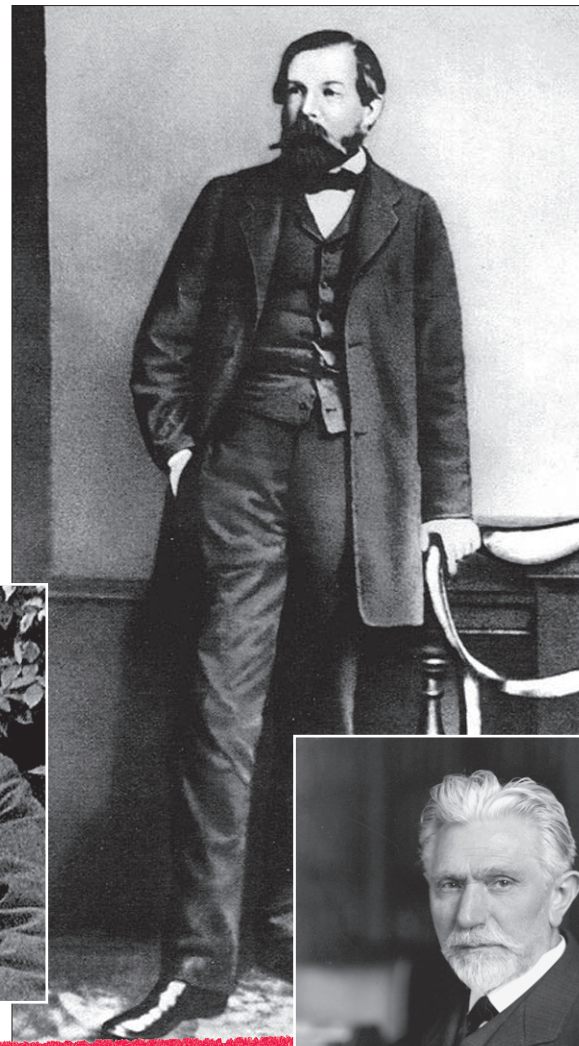
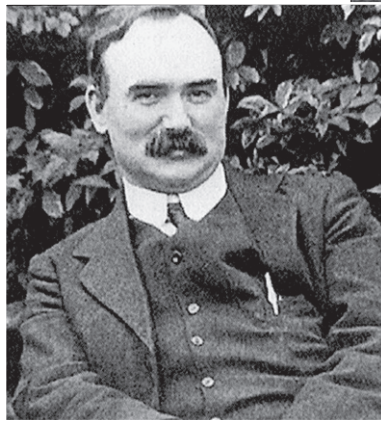
Women's "inferiority" derives from the condition of the *majority* of women, who are excluded by economics and tradition from participating in public social production and are confined to private domestic labor, leading lives of personal service to isolated families.

A man engages in social production, and thereby serves society; a woman essentially serves her man. Since the majority of women are peripheral to public industry and objectively dependent, all women are stereotyped as secondary. All come to represent an undifferentiated domestic function as a sex.

The unpaid labor of women in the home still provides the basis for the underpaid labor of women on the job. But how much has changed! Once women had a productive existence outside the home, the subversion of their age-old second-class status was well and truly underway — as predicted. Their skills and confidence rose, they stood in a new relationship of solidarity beside male workers against the bosses, and they brought home their own paychecks. Socialist feminism could come into its own.

Socialist feminism is the recognition that the oppression of women, the "original sin" of the system of private property and private profit, is a *revolutionary* question, the oldest and most profound of all subjugations. Just as women's inequality was a necessary precondition for capitalism's rise, it remains

Left to right:
James Connolly,
Frederick Engels,
August Bebel.



In *The Emancipation of Women*, Clara Zetkin quotes Lenin as telling her in 1920:

It is ... perfectly right for us to put forward demands for the benefit of women. ... Our demands are no more than practical conclusions, drawn by us from the crying needs and disgraceful humiliations that weak and underprivileged woman must bear under the bourgeois system. We demonstrate thereby that we are aware of these needs and of the oppression of women, that we are conscious of the privileged position of the men, and that we hate — yes, hate — and want to remove whatever oppresses and harasses the working woman, the wife of the worker, the peasant woman, the wife of the little man, and even



Clara Zetkin

concerned only about the first, the most tangible result; and then surprise is even expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be of quite a different, mainly even of an opposite, character." The vibrant and unstoppable leadership of the most oppressed, from the slaves of Haiti in 1791 to young Arab immigrants in France and U.S. nurses today, is a working-class blow of unintended consequences to the ruling class. And the leadership of women of color, maximally exploited and doubly oppressed, is the most powerful blow of all.

Marx and Engels famously wrote that through the growth of the working class, capitalism creates its own gravediggers. Through the super-exploitation and social persecution of specially oppressed groups of workers, it has created the gravediggers who are the quickest to hear this calling.

Litmus test for the Left

In the early years of the FSP, the party's multi-issue, socialist feminist program and the leadership of women, people of color, and queers within it drew outright scorn from other revolutionary socialists both in the U.S. and internationally. This was a time when wide sections of the Left, notably the Stalinist Communist Party and the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party, still believed that homosexuality was an aberration caused by capitalism's distortion of the relations between women and men.

The Left didn't much approve of the women's liberation movement either. Since women were not being drafted to serve in Vietnam and the AFL-CIO opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism was considered a diversion from "real" concerns — that is, men's concerns.

Today overt sexism on the Left is much reduced. Resistance to female *leadership* is still a fact, however, and the FSP's union of socialism and feminism remains controversial.

In the U.S., groups as disparate as the Spartacist League and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) are linked by their disapproval of feminism as bourgeois, although they find "women's rights" or "women's liberation" acceptable. The notion still endures, disguised or open, that feminism is a distraction and detraction from the main event, the class struggle, rather than a *neglected but essential component of it*.

Often, as with the ISO, the objection is to feminism as a "movement of one's own" — an autonomous movement. ISO also denies the existence of privilege based on sex or race. Party and Radical Women members have talked themselves blue in the face arguing these points: explaining that autonomy does not mean *separation* from union battles and the many other manifestations of class struggle; providing carefully reasoned examples of the operation of male and white privilege. Perhaps it is time to let Lenin take the field.

in many respects the woman of the propertied classes.

... Our national sections still lack the proper understanding of this question. They adopt a passive, wait-and-see attitude when it comes to creating a mass movement of working women under communist leadership. They do not realize that developing and leading such a mass movement is an important part of all Party activity, as much as half of all the Party work. Their occasional recognition of the need and value of a purposeful, strong and numerous communist women's movement is but a platonic lip-service rather than a steady concern and task of the Party.

Objection might be made that Lenin here is talking about a working women's movement "under communist leadership." But, at the time, there was no mass women's movement; he was urging that communists create one. Lenin would be the last revolutionary in the world to condemn the awe-inspiring upheaval of the "second sex" in recent decades as "bourgeois." He would see it for what it has been and is: a tremendous opening for revolutionary agitation and education, and a powerful instrument for the amelioration of women's "crying needs and disgraceful humiliations."

On the global scene, the FSP plays an important role in providing theoretical knowledge and practical experience in forming a socialist feminist party and a mass women's organization like Radical Women. Interest in socialist feminism, especially in Latin America, where the recent international work of the U.S. section has been concentrated, is high. Undoubtedly, this is because of the combination of militant upsurge in the southern Americas of late and the region's tradition of class-conscious feminism.

Although the FSP has not yet found a vehicle for international regroupment, some of the relationships we have explored with Morenoists in Latin America over the past few years may still prove to be steps along the way. In any case, the experiences have increased our understanding of the Morenoist tradition, of events in Latin America and the state of world Trotskyism today, and even of our own socialist feminist program. We have every confidence that the unifying power of revolutionary feminism will be a key ingredient in eventual regroupment.

Bourgeois feminism and bourgeois racial integration

Of course bourgeois feminism does exist, as does bourgeois integration. The world saw them both on full display during the 2008 election for U.S. president. When economic crisis means that the vast majority of people of color and women will be made to suffer more than ever, that is the time for window-dressing at the top.

The ruling-class success of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Condoleezza Rice, Janet Reno, et al. gives ammunition to the civil-rights reformists, who peddle the notion that, hiccups aside, capitalism provides a steady path to the promised land of equality and opportunity. The glitter of these figureheads is meant to draw attention away from the mountain range of evidence that disproves this myth.

Above all, the bourgeois hope is to channel the desire for change among women, people of color, immigrants, and lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people — those who should be leading militant resistance — into safe (because ineffective) reformist channels. In a November 2009 speech, Glen Ford of the Black Agenda Report decried the pacifying effect of Obama's election among many Blacks, saying, "When Black people collapse there can be no progressive movement in the United States."

Fortunately, it is quite clear that, under the pressure of reality, the glitter of the current occupant of the White House is fading. Unfortunately, his noisiest opponents are on the right.

The task of radicals now is to provide an alternative opposition: to link this current ruling-class con job to all the ones that have preceded it, to explain the workings of the *system* that regularly produces representatives who meet the capitalist needs of the hour. The task of radicals now is to persuade working people, especially the most oppressed workers, that only their own uncompromising action can bring a better day. The task of the FSP now is to proudly offer socialist feminism and the vanguard party as the answer to the working-class needs of the hour.

VI Confidence and tenacity in advancing toward socialism

The period ahead promises increasing outbreaks, and increasing militancy, against the hardship of capitalism. Our party has a special role to play.

A crucial area of work is the labor movement, broadly defined. This means not only the unions, but also unemployed and unorganized workers. The party's history of launching labor-community coalitions to defend the most oppressed and exploited is a rich source of lessons for today's battles. Our role is to continue advocating and building these united fronts to bring together unions, educators, service providers, and the people hurt worst by the crisis. Where Radical Women takes the lead in initiating grassroots campaigns like this, such as Sisters Organize for Survival, FSP should be a partner in the effort.

To these united fronts we can bring a radical program and a multi-issue perspective. It will be our job in them to recognize and promote the leadership of immigrants, workers

of color, women, and queers and to push for the issues that affect these groups, such as defense against the right wing, quality public education, childcare, affirmative action, healthcare reform, and passage of ENDA, the gay-focused Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

unions! It's time to take a cue from workers in Europe and elsewhere around the world and begin to fight fire with fire.

Among socialists, the FSP believes in working together on issues and electoral campaigns and, beyond this, regroupment of Trotskyist forces. We advocate cooperation among left groups to defend workers, radicals, GI resisters, whistleblowers, and political prisoners in these perilous, new-McCarthyite times. We need to keep it up!

Our international work will also remain important. The crisis of world Trotskyism and the absence of a revolutionary socialist international holds back world revolution terribly. While FSP has made new allies and magnified our understanding of Trotskyism in this hemisphere, it sometimes appears that if we want an international we will have to create it! Our engagement in the international arena is critical.

In order to meet all these responsibilities, the FSP must grow, both politically and numerically.

This means we must strengthen our muscles in the area of theory. By turning to the classics, comrades will find basic principles and methodology of inestimable value in their work. And we can't neglect the riches in our own publications! Using and financially supporting the *Freedom Socialist* and our other weapons of mass education are indispensable priorities.

Hand in hand with "book learning" goes learning through practical activity — the political training we get through involvement in the mass movements. Comrades should not be afraid to take risks or be paralyzed by fear of mistakes. Errors can be learned from if local branches follow them up with careful assessment and make good use of the lessons learned.

And, of course, we want and need to attract new members to the party. We have a great program: to make it come fully alive, we need more people! This is especially true for Blacks, other people of color, and youth.

Revolutionary integration and a recognition of the vanguard role of people oppressed on the basis of skin color are bedrocks of our program. Without Black leadership, particularly, the U.S. revolution will

not be made — and we need that same leadership within our party.

As to young people, the FSP, like the future itself, belongs to the generations who have come to maturity since the last big radical upsurge in the 1960s. Cannon writes in "The Revolutionary Party" that the party's vitality "is certified by the capacity to extend and replenish its cadres and reproduce qualified leaders from one generation to another." That is our challenge, and we have something special and precious

to offer: a multigenerational feminist party that gives every comrade the chance to learn to excel.

The party gives young people a long view of history and a steadiness that is otherwise hard to come by, and young people help the party keep its edge. Radicals need to cultivate deep reservoirs of patience and tenacity, and they also need to stay sharp and alert to opportunity. There is no better way to do this than by taking part in every democratic struggle.

In the times between revolutions, the socialist camp can be led to fear that the next one will never come — while the capitalists hope that it will not!

But social laws move to the tune neither of hopes nor fears. The world socialist revolution is still needed, it is still indicated, it is still coming. And the FSP will play our part.

Just as deep and sharp as is the crisis we now find ourselves in, that is how high and sweet our victory will be when we overcome it — only to face new challenges as socialist feminism works not to destroy a social system, but to bring a new one into existence. □

Andrea Bauer, a feminist radical since the New Left era, is the *Freedom Socialist* managing editor. Email her at fsnews@mindspring.com.

Readers can find a version of "Socialist Feminism and the Revolutionary Party" with a chronology of political continuity, a glossary of people, and footnotes by visiting www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/?q=node/1577.



Left, demonstrating to save public education; below, to save libraries, services, and jobs. Together, labor, students and community will be the winning combination for a brighter future.



It will also be our job within the labor movement and coalitions fighting the crisis to help people create an alternative to the Democratic Party. We must work to persuade rank-and-file unionists and sympathetic officials to run independent labor candidates on an anti-capitalist program — as a step toward building a serious, genuine workers' party.

The guiding political line for our work should be putting the blame for the crisis where it belongs: squarely on the capitalists. Using the party's 10-point program will enable us to do this while addressing people's immediate needs. The demand for "30 for 40," for example, is a very logical and powerful answer to disastrous unemployment. Forcing corporations to reduce the workweek from 40 hours to 30 with no loss in pay would create plenty of new jobs and thereby alleviate a tremendous amount of suffering.

When asked how workers can possibly win such demands, we answer: With labor unity and strikes for political demands, supported across the board by all