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# UPRISING

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## Towards Women's Leadership in Revolutionary Struggle

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\*Front Image: A fighter of the People's Liberation Army in Nepal.



# The necessity of women's leadership for communist struggle

## R.I. CENTRAL COMMITTEE

### Self-criticism: women's liberation and party-building

That Issue #5 of our theoretical journal *Uprising* should foreground an analysis of women in the imperialist world system is long overdue and much needed in RI.

Comrade Stella B's article, "The super-exploitation of women and developing a revolutionary mass line" (pp. 5-21), has sparked in RI a period of intensive and extensive study and exchange over questions of how women's place in capitalism has been conceptualized and the necessity of women's leadership in revolutionary organization. This process has been aimed at arriving at a correct line on women's economic and social exploitation under capitalism, the centrality of women's liberation to revolutionary struggle, and the practical work of organizing women through the praxis of mass line. Naturally revolutionary feminist struggle is a continual practice, but advancing the feminist theory of RI is central to the encouragement of women's revolutionary leadership and class struggle. But this study has also served to correct the misguided line previously held in Revolutionary Initiative and put forward in earlier ideological documents.

First of all, women receive barely a mention in our founding documents (see RI's Volume I: 2006–2009 Ideological Documents). The exception is a section of the piece, "Thoughts on the RCP Program." (RCP refers to the Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada).

In this commentary on the RCP Program – which we believe still has merits in relation to our points of unity and difference with the RCP – RI effectively reduced the patriarchal character of capitalist imperialism's structure to

an outmoded property relation that excluded women from ownership rights of property: "Patriarchy is a specific form of property and social relationship that has been destroyed by the development of capitalism."<sup>1</sup> In this commentary on the RCP Program – which we believe still has merits in relation to our points of unity and difference with the RCP – RI effectively reduced the patriarchal character of capitalist imperialism's structure to an outmoded property relation that excluded women from ownership rights of property: "Patriarchy is a specific form of property and social relationship that has been destroyed by the development of capitalism." Feudal and pre-capitalist forms of patriarchy were deemed to be the universal form of patriarchy. This was a wrong position to take. Certainly, some revolutionary feminists advance the notion that it, in fact, was only with the slow transition to capitalism that women's work increasingly became segregated as purely unproductive (unvalued) labour and women were excluded from social production, or production for profits. This is not to valorize feudalism, but rather to illustrate how capitalism is an exploitative system which was, in part, founded on and continually supported on the backs of women's unpaid labour, as well as exploited and slave and slave-like labour in the colonies.

The comrade who originally formulated and defended the position of patriarchy as an antiquated social relation was attempting to resist the conception of patriarchy as a "stand-alone" system, independent of capitalism, imperialism or semi-feudalism. The argument was that:

To maintain that there is a contradiction between all women and 'the patriarchy' creates incorrect lines of struggle and will only hold back proletarian women from their genuine liberation. This is mainly put forward by bourgeois or petit

bourgeois elements in the women's movement, diverting women's struggles away from the fight against capitalism and diverting them towards the dead end of identity politics.<sup>2</sup>

In a weak attempt to challenge an identity politics conception of patriarchy, this line, collectively adopted, simply wrote patriarchy out of the structure of capitalism.

Stella also rejects viewing patriarchy independently of capitalism, but from a very different perspective, one that analyzes gender as a constitutive factor of political economy in general and capitalism in particular.

For the record, RI's initial phrasing was a point of contention within the organization not long after the publication of this document, and was identified as a point of struggle by the earliest women members. Yet none among us were theoretically equipped or able to challenge such formulations and replace them with a correct historical materialist conception of women's place in society and economy. This reflects an indefensible blind spot toward generations of debates among historical materialists and revolutionary feminists. To be fair, these points of analysis were not constituted as part of a coherent line document on women's liberation, but were formulated in passing, sloppily and inadequately, in a position paper on the RCP. Ever since this piece was written, we have

"While dedicated to building a properly proletarian communist organization, our early members failed to see how central women's revolutionary leadership was to making it truly proletarian."

1 "Thoughts on the RCP Program," Volume 1: 2006-2009 Ideological Documents of Revolutionary Initiative, p. 23.

recognized the need in our organization

2 Ibid, p.23.

"Women not only urgently need revolution, the revolution urgently needs women. And it needs them in the drivers' seats."

to formulate a position better reflecting our practice and reflecting the most advanced experiences and thoughts from women in the international communist movement. But the capacity to provide that direction and orientation on the relationship between women's liberation and communist struggle has only now emerged with Comrade Stella's intervention.

Despite recognizing the disproportionality of women (as well as youth, national minorities and Indigenous people) in the lower sections of the proletariat elsewhere in our founding documents,<sup>3</sup> nowhere was this generalized subordinate location of women actually theorized... until Stella's piece.

Our position, having written patriarchy out of the structure of capitalism, viewed women as "still" facing "systemic oppression," as if the treatment of women was a holdover of the past and not a central aspect of current social relations. By reducing women's treatment to oppression, the question of exploitation was written out of the equation.

True, we argued that "proletarian women still need feminism to liberate them from gender oppression, [and] it must be feminism of a new type, a revolutionary feminism that organizes proletarian women to fight their sectoral oppression as a component of the general struggle against imperialism and for revolution."<sup>4</sup> Yet, here women became another "sector" of

3 "Theses on the Party Building Movement in Canada," Volume 1: 2006-2009 Ideological Documents of Revolutionary Initiative, p.6.

4 "Thoughts on the RCP Program," Volume 1: 2006-2009 Ideological Documents of Revolutionary Initiative, p. 23.



**Image | A woman fighter in the New People's Army of the Philippines.** The revolutionary communist movement in recent decades, from Nepal to India, Philippines to Latin America, has seen women play an expanding role in revolutionary struggle, from their leadership in people's armies to mass organization to revolutionary communist leadership. While barriers remain in many places, as Comrade Parvati of Nepal outlined in her significant 2003 piece "Women's Leadership and Revolution in Nepal," these organizational gains for women can and must be expanded upon, especially in light of resurgent forms of reactionary organization of the masses, from religious fundamentalism and fascism to growing armies of mercenaries and paramilitary forces creating their own bases of power throughout many parts of the world.



the revolution, which obscures the feminization of the proletariat and how the super-exploitation of women's labour, particularly of the Third World and internally-colonized women, constitutes a critical labour force for the capitalist imperialist system. Rather than viewing women's problems as general problems, we viewed them as particular problems.

In spite of an incorrect and inadequate line, in practice, a large part of our mass work has been with proletarian women and engaging women in class consciousness raising and class struggle.. It is not as if debates and the development of perspectives in our organization have been completely lacking in content around questions of women's liberation and revolutionary feminist positions. Indeed, various comrades have in mass work arrived at such positions. But these have not been reflected back into RI's positions. As a result, the "lack of visible theorizing" on women's liberation that Stella observes has compromised the development of our mass work with women, since we had virtually no conscious policy or orientation for our membership on addressing women's liberation and patriarchy in the course of our day-to-day work.

Our incorrect positions on women's liberation were undoubtedly the result, at least in part, of a mostly male founding leadership, distanced from the realities women face. While dedicated to building a properly proletarian communist organization, our early members failed to see the how central women's revolutionary leadership was to making it truly *proletarian*.

The problem should not be misrepresented, however. In nearly every year of assessment and planning, we have earnestly committed to recruiting more proletarian women, to encouraging women to take up leadership positions, and to prioritizing women's concerns in mass work. The disproportions in membership have been rectified, with a

significant proportion of women in the organization. This is tied into a process of cultivating working-class women's leadership and better confronting male chauvinism. But it is only with the debate and process opened up by Stella's theoretical contributions that we see the question of women's liberation and patriarchy being addressed with the attention that it requires, and with it, women taking stronger lead and initiative in the organization. In the final analysis, these have been - we do not fear saying with all due humility to the tasks we confront - ideological limitations that we are now addressing.

To paraphrase the Chinese revolutionary Hsu Kwang, who Stella quotes in her article, women not only urgently need revolution, the revolution urgently needs women. And it needs them in the drivers' seats.

Next month, RI will be publishing a draft line document on women's liberation and women's leadership for open circulation, debate, and feedback. We welcome an online discussion on questions of women's oppression and super-exploitation in relation to Canadian imperialism and questions of women's leadership ranging from mass organization to revolutionary organization.

### **Some other urgent tasks we face in party-building**

After eight years of working and growing our organization, we have reached a point where we recognize the need to consolidate our forces organizationally and ideologically. Such consolidation is necessary for more effective party-building and expansion.

Comrades have been engaged in a wide variety of fields of mass work, collectively building up a rich body of experience. Yet, we have not sufficiently summed up our own practical work and derived lessons for future praxis, nor have we sufficiently located our theoretical growth in our practical work.

We must "orientate [our] thinking correctly, become good at investigation and study and at summing up experience, overcome difficulties, commit fewer mistakes, do [our] work better, and struggle hard so as to build" ourselves into a good revolutionary socialist movement, to riff on Mao. In one of the subsequent issues of *Uprising*, we will explore our past practice with a journal on Communist Praxis.

Additionally, we believe that our major ideological tasks as a pre-party formation will consist of the following:

- To be to produce a line document on dual power, our developing conception of which has been added to with comrade Kenny Lake's contribution on 'Gramsci and Gonzalo' in this issue of *Uprising* (pp.22-31).
- A journal themed on the national questions in Canada i.e. the relationship between Indigenous liberation and the struggle for socialism, which is ultimately aimed at a definite line of march for our organization;
- Publish our historical materialist analysis of Canadian history and society (well underway); and
- Finally, move towards a draft Party programme.

We must also reiterate that as we build our organization and work toward a founding congress to launch a Party, we remain as open as we always have been to revolutionary unity with all genuine revolutionary communist and revolutionary anti-imperialist forces. To our friends in the RCP in particular, we reiterate that upholding a line on Protracted People's War is not a substitute for a clear and comprehensive strategy for accumulating revolutionary forces in Canada, which we have yet to produce but which we see as our task.

Central Committee, R.I.  
June 2014

# The super-exploitation of women and developing a revolutionary mass line



This article is the first in a two-part series from Comrade Stella B., exploring women's gendered role in the capitalist economy and the development of the revolutionary mass line. This first instalment explores class, value, production, and reproduction. The second instalment will more deeply explore the question of the revolutionary feminist mass line. All authors and their works cited in this article are linked within a Bibliography that appears at the end of the online version of this article at <http://ri-ir.org>.

*Uprising Editorial Note*

BY  
**COMRADE STELLA B.**

## Introduction

The oppression of women, after all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women as women and the possibility at last of their liberation.

*-Marianrosa Dalla Costa,  
"The power of women and the  
subversion of the community"*

The difficulty I've had in expressing to revolutionary women how participation in Revolutionary

Initiative can sharpen their mass work has precipitated this articulation of my revolutionary feminist analysis. My intention is to take a step towards addressing the lack of visible theorizing on the contradictions and challenges women face under capitalism taking place within our organization.

It is imperative that we explode the practice where "women's issues" are narrowed to reproduction and sexuality; this happens when revolutionaries study the economics of capitalism one day and the oppression of women the next; when we praise the ability of prostituted women to organize



as workers without analyzing the historical, political, and ideological role of the sexual commodification and exploitation of women and the impacts on women's super-exploitation on a global level. The theoretical separation of production and reproduction perpetuates the tired position that they constitute two discrete entities and pushes our organizational theoretical development back to the 1970s, negating the struggles and contributions of feminists in recent decades that we should be building from. The exploitation of women under capitalism as a transnational system of a flexible, cheap, and deskilled labour force is exacerbated by the ongoing reliance of capitalists (and capitalism) on the un-valued and concealed exploitation of women in homes, in communities, and in micro-production across the globe. This double-burden of exploitation has been termed **super-exploitation**; it is a concept that by definition links direct exploitation and concealed exploitation into a unified whole.

The mystification of women's special role within the capitalist economy has led women's struggles for liberation down blind alleys where cultural and political critiques of amorphous patriarchy have truncated our leadership in class struggle. When we identify the economic roots of women's exploitation and acknowledge the interweaving of economic exploitation and our material, cultural, and ideological oppression under patriarchy it crystallizes the unavoidable fact that women's liberation is bound to total social transformation right down to the very mode of production. Developing

women's leadership with the theoretical and organizational weight to address patriarchy, national oppression, and class exploitation is critical to the success of revolutionary movements. With concerted effort our organization has the potential to make a significant contribution to revolutionary Marxist theory, and in turn take a qualitative political and organizational leap in mass organizing and class struggle relevant to super-exploited working class women.

### **I. Is Patriarchy a Stand-Alone System? Locating the Contradictions Women Face**

Feminists have long confronted the question of what constitutes the primary contradiction for working class women. What is the greatest source of oppression and exploitation for women, and what is the best approach to achieve women's genuine liberation? There are three trends in feminist struggles: liberal (bourgeois), radical, and socialist. Protagonists of these schools of feminist theory struggle over the question of whether we find women's primary contradiction within patriarchy or capitalism, or both. For proletarian revolutionaries this must be a central ideological struggle because women play an integral role – perhaps the decisive role – in liberation struggles. Revolutionary communist women have in many ways moved beyond the confines of socialist feminism, discussing how women straddle the social and the interpersonal, the productive and reproductive realms, and made significant contributions towards



synthesizing production, reproduction, mode of production, and super-structure. Further, our own analysis of patriarchy and our class analysis relevant to women can make or break our ability to organize women, in particular revolutionary women.

#### ***Is patriarchy a stand alone system?***

Liberal and radical feminists identify their primary contradiction within patriarchy: rooted in social and economic inequities in wages and access to bourgeois privilege; sexual domination, exploitation, and patriarchal male violence; and the isolation and drudgery of reproductive labour. The corollary of this is that liberation of women lies in smashing patriarchy. Feminist demands to end patriarchy include significant alterations to the legal, political, and social infrastructure, the redistribution of public resources, and significant changes in interpersonal relations in the community and the family; demands which arguably could be accom-

plished within the existing capitalist mode of production. The demands of liberal and radical feminists do not fundamentally alter the basic mechanisms of capitalism or the control of the political, legal, and ideological superstructure.

Although it is true that women have been oppressed in many societies prior to the development of capitalism, the form their oppression takes is deeply interconnected with current mode of production. The long transition from feudalism to capitalism gradually increased the divide between social production and alienated reproductive labour, drove women further away from the social and political infrastructure of society and into the home, and guaranteed that political and ideological power would be wielded by those who ultimately held economic control over social production (i.e. capital).

Drilling down through the ideological and political superstructures of society to the root mechanisms of women's subjugation will always strike the base of the economic mode of production. Patriarchy today contains no distinct material base independent from the current economic mode of production in the imperialist world system. Ultimately it is the private ownership of productive property, the subsequent division of society into social classes of capitalists and workers, and the consolidation of political and ideological control in the hands of the bourgeoisie, that form the material basis of the subjugation of women under capitalism.

Two positions distinguish socialist feminists from bourgeois and radical feminists: (1) the mode

of production must be transformed from exploitative social relations to reciprocal relations of collaboration under socialism in order to address the liberation of oppressed nations and women; (2) the nature of how we view production must change to consolidate use and exchange values so that productive labour and reproductive labour are no longer separated into two discreet economic spheres: one public and one private. Different 'camps' of feminists have approached these issues from differing perspectives (see below for discussions on value and production). Yet all socialist feminists agree that capitalism and its constituent elements form a primary mechanism of women's oppression and exploitation and that women's liberation can only be genuinely achieved through the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production, public ownership of the means of production, and working class control of the legal, political, and public economic superstructure.

This is not to say that the struggle for women's liberation ends with the introduction of reciprocal economic relations under socialism; we are dialectical in our understanding of the interconnection of base and superstructure. Genuine liberation requires changes in ideas, culture, interpersonal relations between men and women, and within women themselves. This dialectical process is beautifully illustrated by Hsu Kwang<sup>1</sup> and Comrade Parvati<sup>2</sup> in their contributions on the role of women in the proletarian revolution. Yet, in the final analysis

1 Hsu Kwang, "Women's Liberation is a Component Part of the Proletarian Revolution."

2 Comrade Parvati, "Women's Leadership and Revolution in Nepal"

seizing state control and re-appropriating private property from the bourgeoisie is a necessary step that cannot be bypassed on the road to genuine liberation for all oppressed and exploited women. If this reality is not palatable to some feminists, then the class line will be drawn, and our friends sorted from our enemies.

### ***The concept of women as a caste***

Placing patriarchy as the primary contradiction in which all women are caught unites all women into a caste. This conceals the exploitation of one class of women by another. It is true that all women are impacted in some form by the exploitation and oppression of women under capitalism, just as interpersonal racism exists in a symbiotic relationship with national oppression and structural racism within capitalism.

Ultimately, however, women do not form a caste, and many women directly benefit from the global capitalist exploitation of millions of women. As revolutionaries guided by Marxist, particularly Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM), thought and practice we necessarily organize on the basis of class in order to achieve genuine liberation for women. This means being exacting in our class analysis in order to ensure that our mass line reflects the highest expression of a liberatory vision for all women. Three central features of the capitalist mode of production privilege some women over others: i) the ownership of private property; ii) exploitative social relations between classes; and iii) control of the political, le-

gal, and ideological infrastructure and social economic resources.

### ***A more nuanced class analysis***

As MLM revolutionaries we must tackle the myth of women as a caste, yet we can and must also simultaneously develop a more gender-nuanced analysis of class.

### ***Bourgeois & petty-bourgeois women***

Those who own the means of production (factories, technology, land) or control sums of 'capital' that can be invested to control means of production, or are in some managerial position such that they are living off the profits extracted from workers – live directly off of the exploitation of the working class. This means that bourgeois women exploit both working class men and women. Women who live in legal family relationships with bourgeois men might not own or control the means of production in appearance, but in essence live in a parasitic relationship with the working class. Many bourgeois women have legal and social access to and control over private property. Many bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women directly control the working conditions of domestic and other personal servants within the home. Finally, historically bourgeois women have exerted great political and ideological influences under capitalism.

Despite the above, as an organization, we must pay considerable attention to the unequal gendered nature of the ownership of the means of production. In

Canada 79.5% of the top 1% of income earners are men, and the very wealthiest ("the billionaires club") are all men.<sup>3</sup> This gives us a glimpse into the patriarchal nature of capitalism and who benefits from and who pays the price for the super-exploitation of women in the workplace and in private homes. This division of wealth places staggering economic, political, and ideological control in the hands of men. Further, with the growing neoliberal retrenchment – the dismantling of the 'welfare state' – many women who had achieved a comfortable 'middle class' existence, particularly within the public service, face increasing economic insecurity. This growing pool of downwardly mobile and mostly white 'middle class' women poses a challenge to mass organizing, as a large number of recently proletarianized women carry 'middle class' consciousness. But this is also an opportunity if we can organize such women into organizations that uphold the primacy of working-class women's struggles, that is, where proletarian interests are hegemonic (and in Canada, that would certainly have to entail the struggles of women from the Third World and Indigenous women).

Another critical nuance to a proper class analysis is the inter-relationships of patriarchy and national oppression internationally. In many places in the world women have fundamentally different relationships to private property than do men; this includes patriarchal marriage and property laws. The result is many petty-bourgeois women have precarious class sta-

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/who-are-canada-s-top-1-1.1703321>

tus, reliant on men in patriarchal relationships for their access to the material necessities of life. National oppression and structural racism play integral roles in drawing the class line and in maintaining white supremacy and national chauvinism. Migration to the imperialist countries is a declassing process for many women as they lose professional status and access to control over private property abroad by the racist nature of immigration laws and the gate-keeping nature of access to professional associations in Canada and other imperialist countries.

### ***Working class women***

Historically, women's liberation struggles have criticized 'the Left' for defining a woman's class by whether or not she is waged, and if not, by that of her husband. This patriarchal assumption of a lack of economic independence for married and unwaged working class women was, and remains, a narrow view and an obfuscation of women's exploitation under capitalism.

What questions do we ask to determine *class status*, as opposed to income or material comfort?

- i. Does she have ownership or significant legal or economic access to means of social production or private property?
- ii. Does she have specialized professional skill sets and access to self-regulating professional status (i.e. legal, medical) and economic or ideological resources (i.e. tenured academia) that locate her among the petty-bourgeoisie as a 'lieutenant



of capital'?

iii. Does she sell her labour power in exchange for a wage?

iv. Does she exploit others for her living? Or is she exploited?

The slow transition from feudalism to capitalism was an international process; a process of trade that deeply connected colonization, slavery, national oppression, and the development of, and accumulation for, the European bourgeoisie. The imposition of the capitalist mode of production and subsequent class restructuring on colonized nations was a process of both national oppression and economic exploitation. This historical process must be seriously studied and accurately reflected in our current class analysis.

This means that racialized women from historically-oppressed and still oppressed nations are both disproportionately overrepresented in the working class, and simultaneously have a relationship to capital that is fundamentally different from working class women of European ancestry, especially African women. Further, while exploited Indigenous women might not identify as *working class*, we must seek common ground in our mutual exploitation and oppression under capitalism, and seriously consider how to connect struggles for decolonization with struggles to overthrow capitalism and build together a mode of production based on reciprocal relations of collaboration for our common good.

## II. Women and the Capitalist

### **Economy: Value, Exploitation, and Super-Exploitation**

Improving our organizing efforts towards women's liberation requires significantly deeper discussion of the historical and current role of women within the capitalist mode of production. I propose to start this discussion by examining what has become known as Marx's labour theory of value and historical feminist responses to shortcomings in Marx's theory. I make an attempt to synthesize this critique into a coherent overview of the process of super-exploitation which reveals the concealed and double-nature of women's exploitation under capitalism and facilitates the sharpening revolutionary feminist theory as a weapon in the class struggle and our mass line.

#### ***Value, production, and exploitation***

In writing his theories of value (value, surplus value, use value, and exchange value) Marx adapted existing bourgeois theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo to argue that the value of commodities is determined by the total value of the **abstract labour power** contained within each commodity.

When workers sell their labour power they engage in productive work producing commodities for capitalists. Productive work is defined as that which produces commodities that have exchange value on the market and generate profit for capitalists. 'Commodities' are distinct from 'goods' in that they have **exchange value**, as opposed to just **use**

**value**. Productive work is a *social relation* meaning that by necessity it is a relation between *classes*. Workers sell their labour power to capitalists in exchange for a wage. Following this, the exchange value of labour power (wage) consists of what the capitalists determine is the base economic rate that workers require to reproduce themselves on a daily basis. Concealed within this wage form are the multitudes of tasks which comprise the work required to reproduce the working class as a class.

Marx's most significant contribution to existing theories of value was to illuminate the nature of a worker's *exploitation* through the extraction of surplus value in the differential between the value given to his labour power (in the form of the wage) and the total exchange value of the commodities produced. Exploitation results from unequal exchange in social relations under capitalism. Workers sell their labour power for an hourly wage, yet the exchange value of commodities produced is greater than the sum total of wages paid to the worker; exploitation is that surplus value that is extracted by the bourgeoisie in the form of profits. This is a parasitic process writ large whereby the ruling class maintains their opulent and conspicuous consumption off of surplus produced by workers.

An equation for the determination of **total commodity value** would look like this:

$$c + v + s$$

The *c* represents *constant capital*,

the term used to describe “raw material, auxiliary material and the instruments of labour”; inputs to the productive process whose value remains stable. The *v* represents the *variable capital* which refers to labour power whose value is determined by the exchange value of labour, or wages: this represents paid labour. It is through the contributions of the labour of the working class that the constant capital is increased in value. The *s* represents *surplus value*, the value of the commodity which is unpaid – extracted from the labour power of the working class and not remunerated, but rather *appropriated* by the capitalists as profits (see Marx’s *Capital* Volume 1, Chapter 8).

Marx made important theoretical departures from bourgeois economic theory. First, Marx theorized that it is only the contribution of worker’s labour that allows the capitalist to add surplus value onto a commodity through the productive process; workers take constant capital inputs and transform them into commodities whose exchange value includes an added surplus, also called profits. Further, Marx extrapolated the additive nature of exploitation under capitalism. Each of the constant capital inputs (raw materials, tools, machines) required for production also require and contain appropriated surplus, as workers have transformed them to some degree into productive inputs. Ultimately the additive nature of surplus value means that the further up the production chain a commodity moves, the greater the exploitation contained within it.<sup>4</sup>

4 For a much more coherent explanation of this point, see Chapter 4 of Peter Custers (2012), *Capital Accumulation and Women’s Labour in*

While recognizing the additive nature of exploitation was important, arguably the most significant contribution Marx makes to the labour theory of value is that of the social nature of production under capitalism and how this very process of socialization exacerbates the contradiction between the ruling class and the exploited working class. Marx’s theorizing on the *social nature of labour power* was the key to unlocking the need for *class struggle* in order to liberate workers from exploitative social relations under the capitalist mode of production.

But Marx adopts several male chauvinist theoretical errors from his bourgeois predecessors, and despite making an attempt to theorize women as an important component of class struggle, fails to provide the theoretical impetus for this unique form of class struggle.

Issues with Marx’s labour theory of value lie in:

1. By failing to adapt a theory of value that included use-values, Marx’s ideas left concealed the nature of women’s *exploitation in the home and the community*. According to classical Marxist theory what women provide through their work (as opposed to labour) in the home are use-values, with no exchange value. Accordingly no exploitation occurs in the production either of use-values or in the process of ‘domestic’ labour.
2. By failing to adapt a theory of exploitation that includes the production of use-values, Marx left concealed the nature of women’s *class struggle*. Classical Marxism

*Asian Economies* (2nd edition). New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

dictates that commodities for exchange are produced by workers and surplus is extracted by the ruling class; this is an unequal social relation. But goods with use-value are produced in private domiciles, and are an interpersonal relation between man and wife, within families, or communities. This locates the oppression of the majority of women in an interpersonal as opposed to a social relation: this is a process which mystifies women’s exploitation and results in feminists pointing to patriarchy rather than class as the primary contradiction facing women. *This distinction between social relations and interpersonal relations has waylaid women’s struggle for genuine liberation.*

3. The final shortcoming follows from the first two and results in the appearance of *contradiction between employed and unemployed workers*. Marx inadequately theorized the centrality of use-values for the functioning of capitalism and the ability of the workers to sell their labour power. The failure to expand on a theory of use-values is a major oversight which has led to decades of tension between workers and unemployed female surplus labour, including women in the home, considered by many feminists as the ultimate *reserve army of labour; unpaid but still greatly contributing unrecognized value to capitalism*. Major working class struggles have occurred over state funding for the production of use values in the home and in the community through economically redistributive measures through state social programs. Battles over the social wage and cutbacks under neoliberalism have been



critical sites of struggle over the last three decades. These types of ‘community-based’ struggles require constant class struggle; due to the ‘personal’ nature of the demands for services such as childcare women are disproportionately represented in these types of ‘community-based’ struggles, multiplying the burden borne by women. Further, our defeats on these fronts are placing an ever-increasing burden on working class families.

***Socialist feminist attempts to resolve these weaknesses***

Various socialist feminists have tried to resolve this apparent contradiction either through economic or ideological-political theory.

In the early 20th century, Rosa Luxemburg<sup>5</sup> articulated an expansion of the labour theory of value to include the mystification of use-value in the production of commodities. Luxemburg’s contribution was theoretically significant in that she argued that both within the constant capital (c) and within the variable capital (v) there existed concealed exploitation of women through the production of use values necessary as a precursor to social production of commodities for exchange. So her equation could look something like this:

$$c (+ uv) + v (+ uv) + s$$

Where *uv* equals the sum total of all unpaid use-value inputs required for production.

5 ROSA LUXEMBURG (1871 – 1919): A Marxist theorist and revolutionary socialist of Polish Jewish descent murdered by the German state. Luxemburg was active in, amongst others, the Social Democratic and then the Communist Party of Germany.

The two most obvious shortcomings of Luxemburg’s theory are: (a) it puts too great a focus on women’s contribution to labour power and production and not nearly enough emphasis on the actual lived conditions and experiences of women at home and in the community; and (b) as an extension of Luxemburg’s over-emphasis on production, the decisive role that women can play in class struggle is lost. In general, although the German socialist feminists achieved a historically significant qualitative leap in women’s participation in socialist parties, Luxemburg and the first wave socialist feminists over-emphasized women as a labour force in socialized production, and missed the opportunity to expand women’s decisive role in class struggle overall; decisive particularly because it is women who straddle the realms of public and private, production and reproduction, base and superstructure.

The next major theoretical leap occurred during second wave feminism.<sup>6</sup> Patriarchy as a con-

6 I do not address third-wave feminism, post-modernism, or cultural theories in this article. I do, however, wish to say that we should not shy away from ‘meta-theory’ or fear the ‘single story’ as post-modern theorists do, and we should not adopt an additive approach to ‘oppressions’ as do the identity-based schools of ‘intersectionality’. Third wave feminism has descended into cultural critiques devoid of any class analysis or economic struggle. As Anuradha Ghandy puts it:

“They believe that no fixed category exists, in this case, woman. The self is fragmented by various identities – by sex, class, caste, ethnic community and race. These various identities have value in themselves. Thus, this becomes one form of cultural relativism. Hence, for example, in reality, no such category of ‘women’ exists. Women can be one of the identities of the self, but there are others, too. There will be a Dalit woman, a Dalit woman prostitute, an upper caste woman, and such like. Since each identity has a value in itself, no significance is given to values towards which all can strive. Looked at in

cept was theorized in the lead up to second wave of feminism, and as a response to shortcomings of previous struggles. During second wave feminism, ‘dual-systems’ theorists among the socialist feminists maintained that patriarchy constitutes its own ‘system’ of oppression and requires ‘special’ demands in order to break down. Dual systems theorists responded to the criticisms of radical feminists that (a) we can’t wait until after a socialist revolution in order to address the grave oppression (and special exploitation) of women under capitalism and (b) Marxism has serious theoretical limitations in addressing the material realities of women under capitalism, in particular how Marxists conceive of value, exploitation, and the position of women within the mode of production. Single system theorists have since swung the other way and demanded full focus on the role of economic production in maintaining the subjugation of women, perhaps in reaction to an imagined attack on the power of the Marxist analysis, the incredible successes for working class women achieved through socialist revolutions, and the very real threat of watering down class struggle into liberal, cultural and interpersonal critiques which have and continue to way-lay women’s struggles in the imperialist countries or direct them into dead-end reformist channels.

Two very strong positions which contribute to resolving some

this way there is no scope to find common ground for collective political activity. The concept of woman helped to bring together and active collectively. But this kind of identity politics divides more than it unites. The unity is on the narrowest basis.”

See “Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement,” p. 195.

of the aforementioned tensions have been put forward by socialist feminists that deserve serious study and advancement through the *social investigation and class analysis* (SICA) and further theoretical development by us Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolutionaries.

***Reproductive labour is in essence productive labour***

In her 1972 seminal work *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* Italian socialist feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa advanced the position that Marxists have failed to see the socially productive component of women's supposedly 'private / interpersonal' reproductive labour. Dalla Costa argued that capitalists rely on a steady source of commodified labour in order to extract surplus value in the form of profits. Workers are commodified as they must sell their labour power in order to receive sustenance in the form of wages: their *labour power* is exchanged in the market

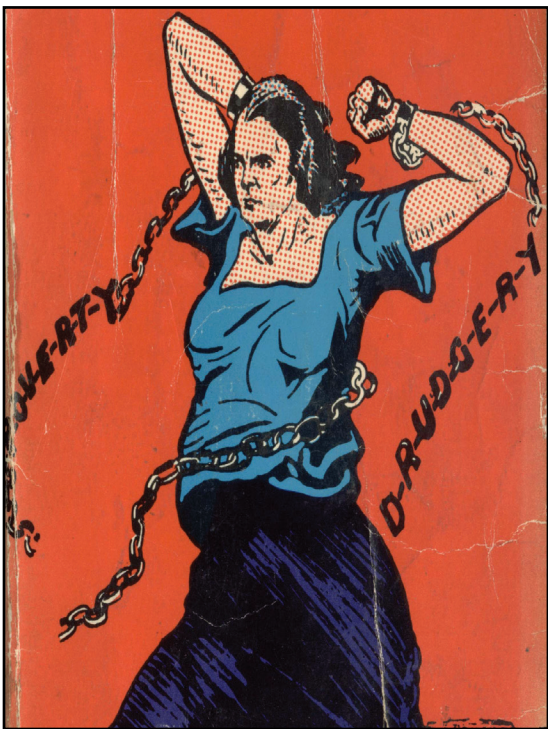
as is any other commodity. The unique nature of labour power is, however, that it relies on the un-waged and un-valued work of women in private households in order for its reproduction. Following this logic Dalla Costa argued that what is viewed by Marxists as non-productive labour (reproductive labour) actually does produce exchange-values, and women are therefore (a) providing unwaged labour power and experiencing *concealed exploitation* in the fact that their labour power is (b) ultimately *productive* labour and yet not recognized by the capitalists nor remunerated. It is from this sharp critique of and contribution to the Marxist labour theory of value and the demand that elements of reproductive labour be viewed as socially productive that gives rise to the 'wages for housework' demand.

Dalla Costa also discussed the nature of women's labour power as alienated labour through the process of "*profound estrangement*" (Dalla Costa, p. 22) in that although women's labour power produces exchange value and is socially productive, this labour is provided in isolated homes separated from the socialization that Marx and Engels argued would contribute to the development of working class consciousness and ultimately result in *class struggle*. This is a major weakness of the 'wages for housework' demand; it alienates women in the home and maintains their separation from public life. This is a key point which revolutionary communist / Maoist women have

identified.<sup>7</sup> However, the revelation of this *profound estrangement* identifies a site where revolutionary communists can intervene within and organize women in the class struggle (discussed in the next section).

Other shortcomings in Dalla Costa's analysis stem from the lack of attention to the fact that since the transition from the feudal mode of production to capitalism, many working class women actually engaged in productive labour out of financial necessity, and that it was only a subset of predominantly white working class women whose husbands earned enough to have a wife not working for wages. Criticisms of 'wages for housework' included the fact that this demand was blind to the close interplay of national oppression and class oppression and the fact that women of colour were grossly disproportionately located in the working class. Dalla Costa also failed to account for the fact that the reproductive labour necessary for productive labour is not self-perpetuating in the way that productive labour is; the contradictions contained within reproductive labour are directly connected to the contradiction between classes, and therefore the inner-drive of reproductive labour is the capitalist mode of production.<sup>8</sup> Finally,

7 Both Comrade Parvati (a leading figure in Nepal's people's war) and Hsu Kwang discuss the inner-struggle that revolutionary women face.  
8 Because there is no direct surplus extracted from reproductive labour, and no private property involved, there exists no drive to expand in the same way there is with capital. Unless exchanged as a commodity on the market, as in privately-owned childcare or nursing corporations, there is no capital invested in reproductive labour. The money put towards reproductive labour is all public tax dollars, and not capital, because it isn't seen as an input into the value of commodities or as necessary to the production of surplus.





'wages for housework' lacked an international perspective on the forced migration of Third World women from periphery to centre as a source of commodified reproductive labour: that capitalism had already socialized most aspects of reproductive labour for women of the upper classes in the form of migrant women providing cheap labour in slave-like conditions within upper class households.

### ***Socialize reproductive labour***

Angela Davis takes another tack, and argues that we should bring women's isolated and non-productive labour into the productive realm and transform what are currently interpersonal relations into social relations. She articulates a strong position that working class women have always had to work and therefore bear a double burden: in particular women of colour are facing an additional burden of working for free doing their own reproductive labour in the home and then their paid work is flexible, cheap, domestic drudgery for privileged majority white women. Davis advances a fantastic anti-racist response to the 'wages for housework' demand that addresses some of the inherent shortcomings of the demand and poses an alternative that includes the socialization of reproductive labour.

Yet, complete socialization of all reproductive labour is neither possible nor desirable. Reproductive labour crosses the boundary of family and community life and intimate human connections; many women experience profound love

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Reproductive labour is, according to capitalism, voluntary. As such, it is by necessity dependant on the economic base.

and deep satisfaction bearing and birthing children and caring for the young. Many families experience human connection and important cultural continuity caring for the elderly. Not all of this work may be appropriate for socialization; the extent of desirable socialization is contextual and dependent upon broader social relations and the organization of community and the economy. Davis also fails to tackle the inherent weakness in Marxism of ignoring the fundamental role of the use-value: we cannot simply give exchange value to all use-values and bring all of reproduction into the marketplace. We need a significantly sharper analysis of the practicalities of reproductive labour.

Reproductive labour borne onto women can generally be divided into five categories: i) the management of the household including financial, culinary, janitorial, and maintenance duties; ii) the care of the young, the disabled, the sick, and the elderly; iii) the sexual satisfaction of men; iv) the preparation of materials as inputs into production and unwaged family labour; and v) the reproduction of the human species and the future generation of workers. Reproductive labour is partially socialized in our society, but only for bourgeois and petty-bourgeois families who employ reproductive workers within the home; and for working class families where subsidized state services exist in the form of childcare, community kitchens, and the like. Yet the vast majority of reproductive labour remains an interpersonal relationship within families and communities. While some gains have been made in re-distribution

of reproductive labour between men and women within the family, as men are increasing their share of category 'i' above the management of the household, Stats Canada analysis reveals that women are still vastly disproportionality represented in unpaid childcare and elder care and in unpaid 'community service'.

### ***Super-exploitation: merging productive and reproductive labour***

The concept of **super-exploitation** prompts us to synthesize our thinking about productive and reproductive labour under capitalism, facilitates a more nuanced gendered class analysis, and creates the ideological basis for advancing the revolutionary leadership of women in the class struggle. It is super-exploited working class women who most keenly know the need for transforming the capitalist mode of production.

Many Marxists define super-exploitation as that which is over and above the general rate of exploitation of labour power. In 1977 Marlene Dixon<sup>9</sup> advanced an analysis of women's super-exploitation which took account of the unpaid production of use-values within the family as a necessary precursor to social production and the extraction of surplus value under capitalism. Dixon contributed to a leap in our comprehension of the role of the unpaid production of necessary use-values as imperative to capitalism, and the role of women as a reserve army of labour. However, Dixon's account, as with

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9 Marlene Dixon, "On the Super-Exploitation of Women".

‘wages for housework’, placed far too great an emphasis of the concealment of women’s exploitation within the wage system as unwaged workers within the home; a view readily criticized for its focus on predominantly white women married to working class men in secure jobs within the imperialist countries.

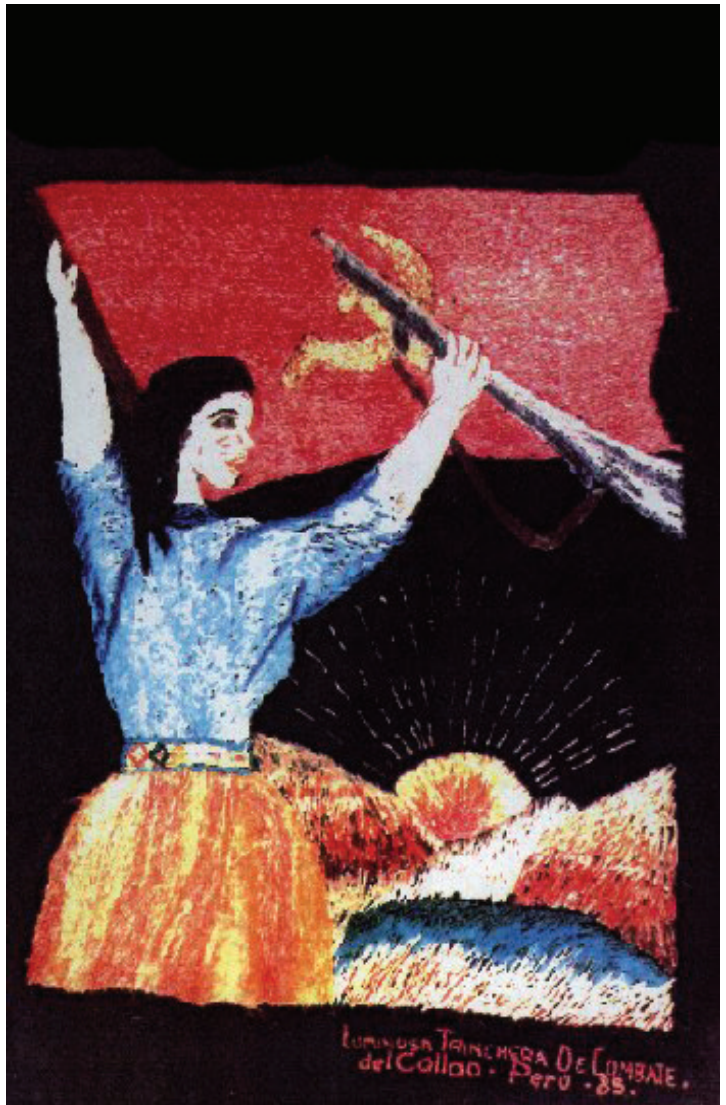
A more accurate and comprehensive definition of super-exploitation starts from the understanding that women are exploited as workers within production, and in addition experience concealed exploitation in that we produce necessary goods and services for free (use-values). *Super-exploitation isn’t just a rate of exploitation<sup>10</sup> over and above the usual rate; super-exploitation occurs because a sizeable portion of women’s labour is not considered by capitalism to have any value at all (use-values), is not compensated in the form of wages, and is therefore concealed and not recognized as exploitation despite the fact that capitalism could not function without it. Capitalism is constantly driving to extract more unpaid use-values as a means of expanding its own exchange-values.*

For example, encouraging the expansion of the Live-in Caregiver Program to ‘import’ more and more Live-in Caregivers in Canada every year. These are predominantly super-exploited Filipinas living and working in modern-day slavery conditions, often paid less than \$2/hour, forced to live in their employers home, subject to physical and sexual abuse. This gross form of super-exploitation assists with the reproduction of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois families and frees up

<sup>10</sup> The differential between wages and the total value of commodities produced.

the need for the state to provide state-subsidized programming. The lack of state-subsidized programs translates into greater exploitation for working-class women who bear even more of the burden of reproducing their own families. Another example is how the retrenchment of social programming in the current phase of capitalism is placing greater burden on women in their homes and communities by withdrawing resources that alleviate some of women’s reproductive labour. *These resources, among other things, free up resources for state for subsidizing monopoly capital, either directly or by cutting corporate taxes. Therefore, women’s unpaid labour does indeed translate into the production of exchange value for capitalists.*

The vast majority of working class women globally are super-exploited to some degree in this way. This occurs in several ways. To start with, women’s general rate of exploitation as labour power is already greater than that of our male counterparts in that we earn less than 75% of what men earn for similar work. Furthermore, women,



in particular migrant and racialized women, are segregated into cheap, flexible, and deskilled domestic and caregiving work, often working both waged and unwaged hours at work; super-exploitation occurs in the development of labour categories for women: precarious, cheap, deskilled, mobile, and ‘flexible’. Further, women perform a ‘double-duty’ in waged labour and reproductive labour. As the production of use-values goes unrecognized by capitalism the vast majority of the time, there exists a **grand mystification** surrounding women’s unpaid work. Finally, women are responsible for reproducing capitalist social relations on a grand scale.



In analyzing super-exploitation we must draw attention to two potential misconceptions. Firstly, not all use-values are produced in the home. In fact, in Canada, many use-values are produced in the form of volunteerism and community service. Increasingly neoliberal reforms and roll-backs in the social wage force communities to take up the slack so that women in the communities pick up unwaged work as a contribution to the overall well-being of their communities. Secondly, super-exploitation is a global process of extraction of maximum surplus values. It is predominantly women who pay the price of the extraction of Third World and Indigenous resources both in the loss of land and in the contributions to the processing and preparation of raw goods and materials as inputs into capitalist production internationally.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, this economic and social synthesis of production and reproduction into a coherent whole as super-exploitation unites waged and unwaged women as a significant force in the class struggle, and for the transformation of exploitative social relations into reciprocal relations of collaboration under a socialist mode of production. Hsu Kwang, a Chinese revolutionary feminist leader

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<sup>11</sup> Silvia Federici poses a different conception of the expropriation of women's reproductive labour and capacities as a process of primitive accumulation which is an ongoing requirement of capitalist expansion. This is quite a different approach which I'm still considering. This approach does have a distinctly international perspective, and an appeal in linking body and property, sexual and economic domination. However, I can also see potential shortcomings in engaging in class struggle and contributing to a socialist vision of transformation.

and Vice-Director of the Peking Women's Federation, concisely paraphrases Mao's position on women and class struggle:

"The economic status of working women and the fact of their being specially oppressed prove not only that women urgently need revolution but also that they are a decisive force in the success or failure of the revolution"

### ***Developing a more accurate theory of value and a deeper understanding of reproductive labour***

Fundamentally transforming the mode of production from capitalism (exploitative social relations) to socialism (reciprocal relations of collaboration and collective ownership over production by a socialist state) will allow us to *both* fundamentally transform both our social relations *and* the way we allocate value as a society. We can and must unite use-value and exchange-value in a process of social (re)production that eliminates useless, wasteful, environmentally and socially-destructive production for exchange and gives significant priority to useful, socially beneficial production which advances human health and the realization of full human potential.

As revolutionary communists we must both deeply consider how we understand what has social value, and what demands we develop regarding the socialization of reproductive labour. We must both analyze the content of reproductive labour, and what form we would want this labour to take under reciprocal

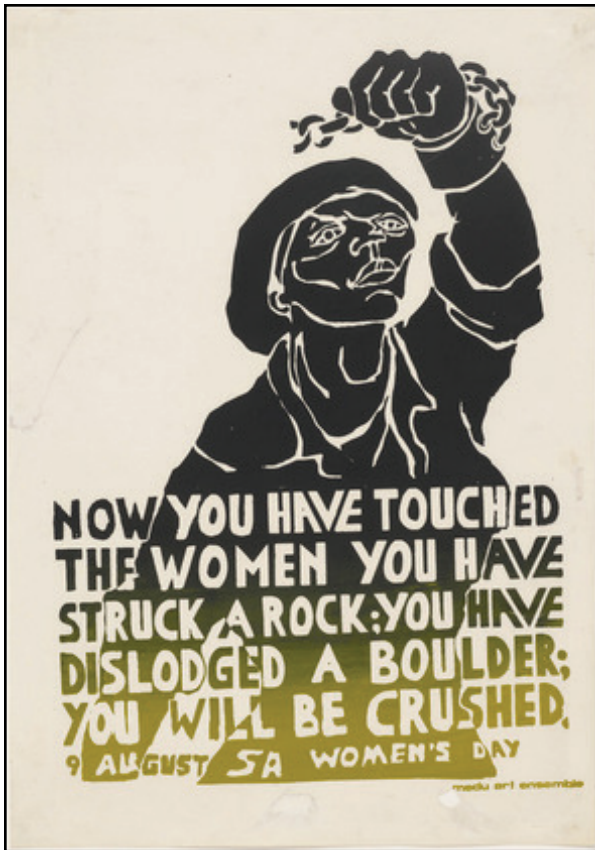
relations of collaboration. Beyond demanding 'wages for housework' or the complete socialization of reproductive labour, we must carry out substantial social investigation and class analysis. Where does reproductive labour occur, and who is doing it? What aspects are drudgery and what provide pleasure and fulfillment for families? What aspects of reproductive labour have been, or could be, socialized, and how would working class women want this socialization process to look? How we understand reproductive labour now will profoundly impact the programmes we put forward. Our collective theorizing on reproductive labour and super-exploitation currently directs how we develop our revolutionary mass work.

### ***Base and Superstructure***

The process of super-exploitation encompasses exploitation and oppression in both the economic base of the mode of production and in the political, ideological, and social superstructure of capitalist society. It's not all about the economics! The revolutionary process of social transformation occurs at all levels of society, within classes, in interpersonal relations, and within us as revolutionaries seeking to build a new society, new social relations, new interpersonal relations, and new human beings liberated from the yoke of oppression and exploitation.

### **III. The Way Forward**

We cannot say in precise terms what our future social relations under socialism will look like. We can, however, commit ourselves to shaping what those look like



through a unified approach where the *material (base)* and *ideological (superstructure)* and *production (social)* and *reproduction (interpersonal)* form a coherent whole.

***How do we engage in organizing revolutionary women?***

***Separate organization or committee within the party? Who participates?***

The lessons contained within the writings of the women revolutionaries of the First Communist International are instructive; there exists a fine line between autonomous women's organizing and bourgeois or radical feminism. Yet, when the Party (which we are not yet) emphasizes the advancement of women's leadership and puts resources, both political and economic, towards developing unique methods of communist work which correspond well with the particular

material conditions of working class women, then the Party (which we'd like to become) has the potential to grow by leaps and bounds.

This is neither an argument for or against autonomous women's organizing; it would be more accurate to say that, in this case, 'one divides into two' applies very well. We must work to unite the working class as whole and overcome internal contradictions, including the super-exploitation of women. In order to do that, we must, as revolutionary women have forums to discuss issues that pertain

to the devastating impacts of capitalism and patriarchy on women, as well as to strategize how to deal with the subsequent impacts we experience within the revolutionary Left and in interpersonal relationships with working class men who are our comrades. We must do our revolutionary feminist work supported by the organization, in a dialectical fashion that facilitates revolutionary feminist theory that advances the interests of the entire working class, that pushes ahead not only the development of women cadres, but of all cadres.

We must have no illusions that patriarchy is simply cultural or ideological, as patriarchy is interconnected with the economic mode of production; but that said, we must struggle as a revolutionary communist organization to overcome challenges in our interper-

sonal relations as we struggle to ultimately destroy the exploitative social relation of capitalism.

**IV. How do MLM Revolutionaries approach liberal and radical feminists?**

***We interplay with each other***

The grounded working-class articulation of suffrage demands by Clara Zetkin<sup>12</sup> and Rosa Luxemburg form an important and engaging historical perspective on the interplay of bourgeois and socialist feminist demands. Women's liberation movements articulate issues of relevance to women, and it is up to revolutionary communists guided by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to filter these expressions of oppression through class analysis and articulate a mass line which addresses women's super-exploitation under capitalism and directs women into confrontation with capitalism.

We must also pay attention to the important role that liberal and radical feminists play in women's consciousness-raising which has moved many working class women into collective struggle. Stemming from this process, growing class consciousness and working class allegiance has led many *déclassé* women into revolutionary struggle throughout history.

***Yet radical and liberal feminists are uneasy allies***

Revolutionary communist women do not rely on moral argu-

<sup>12</sup> Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) German socialist, contemporary of Rosa Luxemburg. Zetkin was a leader in the social-democratic women's movement, an important anti-war activist, and a representative to the Communist International. Following the Nazi rise to power in Germany Zetkin was exiled to the Soviet Union.



ments of oppression to dictate the course of our revolutionary future. But those who adopt these positions may be swayed to become class allies rather than class enemies – we see this in the united fronts of revolutionary movements globally. Church movements and other groups that contain seeds of both progressive and reactionary ideologies are being challenged to take up the mantle of social transformation and to correct their political and ideological orientation. There are class allies among liberal and radical feminists, as Rosa Luxemburg describes in her passionate and renowned polemic on bourgeois vs working class struggles for suffrage:

Injustice itself is certainly not an argument with which to overthrow reactionary institutions. If, however, there is a feeling of injustice in large segments of society... it is always a sure sign that the economic bases of the society have shifted considerably, that the present conditions contradict the march of development.

While radical and liberal feminists might be uneasy allies, in the final analysis we must clarify our friends from our enemies, and

seek to build relationships with those who fundamentally oppose the exploitation of the masses. In engaging our allies where mass line conflicts exist, seek to educate; engage in tireless debate and criticism and self-criticism; and seek opportunities to plant the seeds of ideological change.

## V. Revolutionary feminist mass work

It is our responsibility as revolutionaries to advance a mass line which reflects deep and meaningful social investigation amongst all sectors of working class women, represents the highest articulation of our shared class analysis, and moves women into class struggle. The best mass lines tackle the private ownership of the means of production, exploitative social relations between classes and the super-exploitation of women, and working class control over ideological, political and economic resources. We must ensure that our mass line does not contribute harm towards the working class or reflect a patriarchal or narrow male-chauvinist interest, just as we would insist on struggling over racist or national-chauvinist lines.

Our mass line should seek to socialize elements of reproductive labour and allocate social and economic value to that labour which produces use-values for our communities. Our demands must unite the reproductive and productive realms through our mass line by meeting the needs of women as a super-exploited work force providing both cheap labour and free labour within the home and the community. Finally, our conception of struggle must reunite the social and the interpersonal; we can look to examples from revolutionary struggles historically and globally, from China to Venezuela. With women at the forefront of leadership, there is no end to what we can achieve. In the words of Selma James:<sup>13</sup>

***“Power to the sisters, and therefore to the class...”***

13 Born in Brooklyn Selma James (1930; née Deitch) is a co-founder of the international Wages for Housework campaign which was launched in 1972. James is an important working class women's liberation theorist. In 1955 James married CLR James who had been deported from the US during the McCarthy period. Currently James lives in the UK, is active in Jewish anti-Zionism and solidarity with Venezuela among other issues.

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# A day in the life of a proletarian woman

## An illustration of basic marxist economics with a glossary of terms

BY  
**COMRADE STELLA B.**



Maria is a 37 year old woman living in Winnipeg with her 2 children, Mario age 14 and Maricella age 12, and her husband Rey. Nine years ago Maria moved to Winnipeg as a domestic worker through the live-in caregiver program. For the first three years Maria worked for a professional couple caring for their young children, living in their basement and working long hours, suffering through loneliness and family separation. Over the course of the following four years Maria was able to obtain her permanent residency, to pick up extra evening work at Tim Horton's, rent an apartment in a shared house. After 7 years of separation, Maria was finally able to bring her children and her husband to live with her. Now, Rey works nights as a delivery driver and Maria continues to work as a nanny and a server at Tim Horton's.

From 7:00 am until 4:00 pm from Monday to Friday Maria works as a nanny for a middle-class professional family who have three children ages one, four, and seven years old. It is Maria's job to get the three children out of bed in the mornings, to dress them, and prepare their breakfast and pack a lunch for oldest child. Maria walks the older child to class, drops the middle child at pre-school, and takes the baby to the park or the library. Maria then picks the middle child up from pre-school, prepares lunch for the smaller children, and puts them down for nap. During nap Maria does laundry and tidies the house. After nap, she takes the two small ones to school to pick up the older child, bringing them all home again for snack. While the children have their snack, Maria starts dinner preparations based on the recipes her employers have left her, and ensures that everything is ready for when her employers arrive home between 4:00 and 4:30.

This type of domestic and caregiving work is called reproductive labour. It is the work that is mostly done by women in individual households within the family, or within the community. When women do this work for free for their families and communities, it is considered to have no value in the

market economy, since no products or services are bought and sold. In this type of interpersonal relation only use-values are produced, food for the family to consume and domestic chores that ensure the ability of the family to function, such as shopping, laundry, and caring for children. Reproductive labour becomes commodified when middle and upper class families can afford to pay a domestic worker or a nanny to do this work in exchange for a wage or in slave-like conditions such as those required by the live-in caregiver program, or can pay the high daycare fees to send their children to a licenced daycare centre or family-run daycare. When reproductive labour is commodified it is considered unskilled and the workers are paid very low wages.

From 5:00 – 9:00 pm Maria then goes to her evening shift at Tim Horton's where she earns minimum wage preparing sandwiches and pouring coffees. Maria works alongside other working class folks in a process of social





production, meaning that working class folk work together making products which are then sold for profits by the owners of the company. Under the capitalist mode of production, the two major classes, the working class and the bourgeoisie, engage in social relations; capitalists own the means of production and hire workers to produce commodities for exchange or sale. The workers are exploited in that they earn far less than what the exchange value of the commodities they produce is really worth. The working class has no way of making money except to sell their labour power for wages. Exploitation is robbery of the working class on an individual and on a grand scale, as surplus value (profit margin) is added to all commodities produced by the working class, and the bourgeoisie just outright takes this profit margin without having to do any of the actual work!

Workers are paid a wage which is barely sufficient to meet their basic needs in a capitalist society. Constant capital is the term used to describe the physical things that are needed to produce commodities. Physical things are called constant capital because they remain at their original value until transformed by workers into commodities. At Tim Horton's this would include coffee beans, flour, sugar, ovens, coffee urns, etc.; they don't increase in value until made into things to sell for profits. Variable capital refers to the wages paid to workers, and it called variable because this is where capital adds new value; it is Maria's labour that turns coffee beans into coffee, which is sold

for a profit – the actual cost of making the coffee is far less than the price that the consumer pays because surplus value is added to make up the exchange value. Maria and her co-workers at Tim Horton's are exploited when they are forced to sell their labour power for a wage which is a pittance compared to the profits pocketed by those who own the company.

Maria's family back home was pushed off their traditional lands as mining companies stole indigenous lands and displaced people. Maria's family moved into the city to find work as labourers. Unable to sustain their family, Maria sought work abroad in order to send money back to her family. Now in Canada, Maria remains an exploited worker, sending what money she can back home to her parents and siblings. In Canada, Maria and her co-workers are forced to live under social relations of exploitation; their lives are structured around being subject to the control of the bourgeoisie.

When Maria gets home from her very long day at two jobs, her work is not done! Maria has her own children to care for, and a husband who must work nights. This means that after working all day for minimum wage, Maria comes home and works in her home for free. She prepares meals, washes clothes, helps her children with their homework, and does her best to provide a loving environment despite the many challenges her family faces. This type of work is considered to



have no value for capitalists, despite the fact that it is women like Maria who provide the most profits for capitalists, migrating as a cheap and deskilled labour force, working long hours for minimum wage, and working for free at home raising a new generation of workers. Maria's story is a typical illustration of super-exploitation.

But who cares for Maria? How does capitalism repay her for her endless efforts and sacrifices? Maria is able to access a few state-run programs and services to help her family get by, such as the child tax benefit which gives Maria and Rey an extra \$236/month, and the community centre afterschool program where Maria's children can do their homework and play games with



other kids while Rey sleeps before going to work. But overall Maria's relationship to the state and ideological superstructure is oppressive. The government and state structures in the imperialist countries are infused with structural racism and patriarchal ideology, from initial colonial contact to today.

State-run temporary foreign worker programs import cheap labour from Third World countries under strict and oppressive conditions. Legal structures of citizenship and immigration



are designed to help those who have capital, wealth, and privilege; the gates of immigration open for the bourgeoisie and shut for the working class. Access to

financial institutions for loans and mortgages increases as wealth and privilege increase; the poor are stuck in shoddy rental housing without security. The dominant culture and ideology of society is that of the ruling classes and their legal, media, professional and academic allies. The exploitation of the working class and the super exploitation of working class women are structural and can only

be overcome by revolution and social transformation!



## A BASIC GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### ABSTRACT LABOUR POWER

The sum total of previous social labour power contained within a commodity for exchange.

### BASE

Economic structure of society equated with the mode of production.

### COMMODITIES

Socially produced for the purpose of exchange for other commodities or for money, and as such have an 'exchange value'; as opposed to goods, which are produced for personal consumption and have only use value.

### CONSTANT CAPITAL

The physical things needed for workers to produce commodities,

including capital assets, land, raw materials, machines, tools, etc.

### EXCHANGE VALUE

Represents the economic value of a commodity realized through trade, either for other commodities or for money (price). Exchange value (or price) includes the total cost of production of the commodity plus an added surplus; it is through the exchange of commodities that capitalists gain the surplus value as profits. Exchange value can also take the form of building more capital to produce more commodities – therefore exchange of commodities on the market expands future capital and hence capitalism's drive to ever expand markets and exchange (sell) more and more commodities.

### EXPLOITATION

The difference between the amount of wealth created by the labour of the working class and the amount returned to them in the form of wages. All workers are exploited to some degree, some far more than others (see super-exploitation). Capitalism divides people into classes, and exploitation results from the unequal social relations of exploitation between the bourgeoisie and the working class. The more workers are exploited, the more profits for the capitalists!

### FORCES OF PRODUCTION

Consist of all of the elements necessary to generate wealth in society; under the capitalist mode of production, the forces of production are what are necessary to produce profits



(or surplus value):

a. Labour Power: the working class who must sell their labour power to survive

b. Means of Production: capital assets, machinery, tools, factories, land, etc.

### **INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND PRODUCTION OF USE VALUES**

Interpersonal relations are intra-class relationships, usually between family or community members, where only use values are produced.

### **MODE OF PRODUCTION**

The totality of the forces and the relations of production. The mode of production is the economic base of society “which determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual (ideological) processes of life” (Marx). Marx stated that ... “history exists as a succession of modes of production” from primitive communism to feudalism, to capitalism, and through class struggle, finally to communism.

### **RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION**

Relations of production are “the way people are formally and informally associated within the economic sphere of production, including as social classes” (Wikipedia). Under capitalism the relations of production refers to the relationship between the bourgeoisie who own the means of production and the workers who must sell their labour power.

Marx defined two forms of the social relations of production:

1. Relations of exploitation: a) slavery, b) servitude, and c) capitalist relationships; this is a very important point! Exploitation is a relationship! Where workers are exploited, the bourgeoisie prosper!

2. Relations of reciprocal collaboration: relationships developing under socialism and realized under the communist mode of production characterized by the lack of domination and exploitation.

### **SOCIAL PRODUCTION**

Refers to production of commodities by labour power, which is social production in that it requires the working class sell their labour and produce commodities for the capitalists to get rich. Social production is very different from the type of individual reproductive labour that happens in individual homes and for free in the community.

### **SUPER-EXPLOITATION**

The concept of super-exploitation is a useful one to clarify that not all workers are exploited at the same rate. The super-exploitation of women occurs because women are exploited as workers within production, and in addition experience concealed exploitation in that we produce necessary goods and services for free (use-values). Super-exploitation isn't just a rate of exploitation over and above the usual rate; super-exploitation occurs because a sizeable portion of women's labour is not considered by capitalism to have any value at all (use-values), is not compensated in the form of wages, and is therefore concealed and not recognized as exploitation despite the fact that capitalism could not function without it.

Both national oppression and patriarchy work within capitalism to force groups of people into working for low wages or in slave-like conditions. As the Program Demand Group describes it: “exploitation takes the form of oppression of whole countries and the super-exploitation of colonial and female labor in an internationalization of a shadow

economy comprised of cheap labor, slave labor, and “free” labor.

### **SUPERSTRUCTURE**

The state (politics), the institutions that determine the structure of our society (organization), and popular social consciousness (ideology). The superstructure is “the social organization evolving directly out of production and commerce, which in all ages forms the basis of the state and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure” (Marx & Engels); “The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life processes in general” (Marx). Use value

The non-economic value of goods; use-value refers to the aspect of goods that are useful for people, as opposed to profitable for capitalists. Goods that are produced for personal consumption and have no exchange value within the capitalist market only have use-value for people and no economic value for capitalism.

### **SURPLUS VALUE**

An additional sum of money added to the exchange value so that the capitalists earn profits. I.e. if it costs \$2.00 of materials and \$0.50 in wages to build a cell phone in a factory, and the factory owner gets \$10 for each phone from the phone company, then the owner of that factory has a \$7.50 surplus on each phone, which is more than the total cost of both the materials and the wages paid to the worker!

### **VARIABLE CAPITAL**

The cost of paying workers, i.e. wages. What is a ‘fair wage’ or a ‘living wage’ under capitalism? The whole idea that capitalists can live off of the sweat and blood of the working class is injustice.

# Gramsci and Gonzalo

## Considerations on conquering combat positions within the inner wall of hegemony



Apparently these guys had more in common than bad eye sight, dapper formal wear, and a good head of hair. They both led and built communist parties through dynamic periods of growth and upsurge, and as Kenny Lake argues, we find in each similar strategic conceptions.

BY  
**KENNY LAKE**

The following article was submitted to *Uprising* by a comrade out of the U.S., Kenny Lake, who here advances the discussion commenced by Comrade Amil in his pieces on Gramsci and Mao on questions of building popular hegemony and moving towards a situation of dual power. (Comrades should read Amil's piece to find explanations of terms like "hegemony.") Kenny Lake's contribution opens up entirely new realms in our ongoing debate by posing the question of the possibility or necessity of carving out 'combat positions' within the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) of the bourgeois state apparatus as a necessary aspect of accumulating revolutionary forces. As Kenny Lake's recounting of the origins of Sendero Luminoso (Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path) demonstrates, such 'combat positions' can be decisive even in the early accumulation of revolutionary forces. It should be noted that the pictures accompanying this article and the captions are from R.I.

*Uprising* Editorial Note

With his article "Towards the War of Position: Gramsci in Continuity and Rupture with Marxism-Leninism," Amil has begun the process—long overdue in the international communist movement—of rescuing Gramsci from the stranglehold of liberal academia and putting his theoretical developments in service of strategizing for revolution.<sup>1</sup> That it has taken so long for Gramsci to be considered in this light is testament to two problems. First is the truth of Gramsci's theory of hegemony—in this case expressed in liberal academia's seemingly endless ability to misinterpret and distort revolutionary ideas to fit its narrow visions and paltry reformism, aided here by Gramsci's necessary self-censorship when writing from a prison cell.

1 Amil, "Towards the War of Position: Gramsci in Continuity and Rupture with Marxism-Leninism," *Uprising: Journal of Revolutionary Initiative* 4 (September 2013): 19–31.

Second is the rather doctrinaire, closed intellectual circuit that has defined pretty much the whole international communist movement (ICM) for the last several decades.<sup>2</sup>

In the interest of addressing the second problem and positing strategic considerations for revolution, in this essay I will examine Gramsci's notion of the *war of position* in light of recent experiences in launching people's wars. While in the ICM there has been much energy and little intellect spent defending the necessity for and strategy of protracted people's war, attempts at understanding how people's wars of the last several decades came to be launched in the first place have been lack-

2 This intellectual dearth is a worthy topic in its own right, but, for purposes of this essay, it is useful to consider Althusser's observation that "every descriptive theory runs the risk of 'blocking' the development of the theory" in Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 94.





“Those busy pontificating platitudes to people’s war have failed to launch any of their own.” Recent years have seen an upsurge of this “pontificating” about people’s war by various groups, especially in the imperialist countries. But what goes into developing the “subjective factor” to actually launch a people’s war? Where is the theory for an accumulation of revolutionary forces? The experience of Sendero Luminoso offers important insights, Kenny Lake argues.

ing.<sup>3</sup> The result has been that those busy pontificating platitudes to people’s war have failed to launch any of their own.

Gramsci, like Mao, emphasized the decisive role of the subjective factor in making revolution. He called attention to the need for long-term build-up of a communist force, consisting of intellectually astute cadres

3 To this we can add that given the massive urbanization that has taken place in the oppressed nations since the Chinese Revolution as well as transformations in the class configurations of these societies, substantial changes in revolutionary strategy are necessary. Such changes would involve a lot more attention to the urban sphere, especially the shantytowns, and the newly proletarianized and urbanized sections of masses, as well as strategic and tactical considerations to deal with the decreased isolation of much of the countryside and greater technical, military, and hegemonic capabilities of the state. For accounts of the recent wave of urbanization and changes in class configuration, see, for example, Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006); and Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: New Press, 1998).

and a large organized mass base, “which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favorable.” Rather than seeing the possibility of revolution as emerging, for the most part, from developments in the objective situation, Gramsci viewed the development of the subjective factor as key to creating a situation favorable for the seizure of power, which he wrote “can be favourable only in so far as such a force [i.e., the subjective factor] exists, and is full of fighting spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

The question that confronts us communists is how to develop the subjective factor in the way Gramsci argues is necessary. Doing so requires confronting

4 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Co. Inc., 1971), 185. There are larger epistemological questions inherent in this question of objective situation and subjective factor that are beyond the scope of this paper.

bourgeois rule not only in its repressive apparatuses, but also in its apparatuses for intellectual and cultural hegemony—what Althusser called *ideological state apparatuses*. This is a crucial aspect of the war of position, and has to do both with accumulating increasing numbers of revolutionary people and preparing those people to run society after the revolution. In systematizing Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Althusser notes that while there is virtually no room for struggle by the exploited classes within the repressive apparatuses, in the ideological state apparatuses “the resistance of the oppressed classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there, either by the utilization of their contradictions, or by conquering combat positions in them in struggle.”<sup>5</sup>

5 Althusser, 99. While Althusser was absolutely correct in his characterization of the repressive state apparatuses, it is worth noting that Sendero Luminoso kept sympathizers who were more useful in their positions of employment in those jobs rather than having them directly join its armed activities. According to Gabriela Tarazona-Sevillano, who was a prosecutor in Peru from 1984 to 1986, this included “court-system personnel” who could aid the people’s war by “furnishing confidential information about prosecution plans in progress, by causing delays within prosecution proceedings, or by misplacing important files.” “Electrical engineers who supply information about key sections of a region’s electrical grid” and “security officials who allow militants admittance to sensitive areas” would have been crucial to the people’s war overall and to the numerous shut-downs of Lima that involved cutting off electricity. Perhaps most damaging to the Peruvian state repressive apparatus among Sendero’s infiltrators was “Eva Gómez, a National Police Psychologist” who “worked in psychological evaluation of police officers who were to serve in emergency zones. In this post, she had access to extensive confidential records, including the backgrounds of police officers and their families, which she presumably passed on to key Sendero commanders.” Quotes from Gabriela Tarazona-Sevillano, “The Organization of Shining Path,” in *The Shining Path of Peru*, ed. David Scott Palmer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 178.



### Pre-Initiation Day in Peru

Much ignored in the ICM is Professor Abimael Gúzman's method of accumulating and organizing revolutionary forces prior to the 1980 launching of people's war in Peru. Gúzman (known to most of us as Chairman Gonzalo) was appointed professor of philosophy at the National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho in 1962. The newly established university was part of the Peruvian government's nationalist modernization program, which attached crucial importance to education. Both leftist electoral parties and the military dictatorships of 1968–80 viewed the creation of universities and education more generally as a way to deal with the instability and impoverishment of the periphery. In Peru, state power and economic development were concentrated in a few cities, especially Lima. The Ayacucho region was the

epitome of government neglect, and its Quechua-speaking Indian population could not be so easily integrated into the hegemonic structures of Peruvian society. For those at the center of power, the expansion of education in the periphery was a way of incorporating this population under bourgeois ideological hegemony. In this there was an element of the white and mestizo ruling class continuing where the Spanish conquistadores left off in their mission to "civilize" the Indians.<sup>6</sup>

The newly created university offered Gúzman and his comrades the chance to increasingly set the terms and use the university as a recruitment center for Sen-

dero Luminoso. The promise of education was to offer an opportunity for young peasants to raise themselves and their communities up, but upon graduation the vast majority found themselves in the same poverty with no means of improving the conditions of their communities. This inherent structural contradiction—what Gramsci would call organic rather than conjunctural—provided ample ground from which Sendero Luminoso could attract recruits whose hopes in the system had been dashed by the false promises of education. Gúzman's rousing philosophy lectures, which offered a historical materialist explanation of the contradictions the peasant students were confronting and fit these contradictions within the larger antagonisms of capitalism on a world scale, attracted the initial recruits who would carry out the ground work for the initiation of people's war.<sup>7</sup>

6 Ton de Wit and Vera Gianotten, "The Center's Multiple Failures," in *The Shining Path of Peru*, ed. David Scott Palmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 45–57; Carlos Iván Degregori, *El Surgimiento de Sendero Luminoso: Ayacucho, 1969–1979* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1990), 37–47; Gustavo Gorriti, "Shining Path's Stalin and Trotsky," in *The Shining Path of Peru*, ed. David Scott Palmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 152–55.

7 De Wit and Gianotten, 45–57; Gorriti, 161–63.



Gúzman organized these impassioned revolutionary students to carry out censuses of poor neighborhoods and organize their residents. Journalist Gustavo Gorriti described Gúzman's efforts at the University in these terms:

His objective was clear: to use the university to recruit, educate, organize, and subsidize the growth of Communist cadres. Guzmán had the university create a teacher training school that was staffed mostly by Communist Party members or sympathizers. Those students who became early recruits provided an ideal way to forge a relationship with their towns and communities. Many would return home to lay the groundwork for revolutionary work.<sup>8</sup>

Gúzman's efforts at the National University of San Cristóbol de Huamanga thus did not simply result in a general communist ideological influence. Within an ideological state apparatus (ISA) that was not yet fully formed and far from the centers of power, communists managed to gain a foothold and eventually, in Althusser's words, "conquer combat positions." Gorriti characterizes the University of Huamanga as being virtually under the control of Sendero Luminoso in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Sendero was involved in the daily routine of the students, including room and board and administrative control, and most of the Party leadership taught at the university. Thus a combination of organizational control and ideological influence brought Sendero its membership. Strategically and tactically, Gúzman's healthy dis-

respect for the procedures of bourgeois politics and organizations enabled Sendero to make the most of situations in which it gained the upper hand. Gorriti states that Sendero used its organizational control to purge its ideological opponents from the university, and quotes Gúzman that, "you either use power or they will use it against you."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Gúzman recognized the way in which the Peruvian bourgeois state's ambition to send increasing numbers of teachers to the periphery could be used against it. Those trained by Sendero at the University of Huamanga's teacher training school were sent into teaching positions in towns and villages throughout the countryside, providing Sendero with a crucial means of organizing peasants all around Ayacucho. Sendero recognized the importance of positions of authority in influencing and winning over people to its side, and thus took advantage of the respect that Ayacucho peasants had for the teachers coming to their communities. In addition, university students did the groundwork of social investigation and establishing ties with the masses. All this enabled Sendero to launch a people's war with trained cadres, a solid mass base, and underground organization.

Sendero's control of the University of Huamanga was, of course, tenuous, and came to an end in the mid-1970s in large part



due to rival leftist organizations gaining the upper hand. The aim of communists, however, is not to hold on to a few positions within the bourgeois ideological state apparatuses, but rather to use instances where these positions can be temporarily attained to accumulate forces for revolution. Doing the latter will, sooner or later, result in losing these positions but gaining in revolutionary organization, while doing the former will result in becoming a left appendage to bourgeois hegemony, of which there is an ample amount these days.

Nevertheless, even after launching a people's war Sendero continued to utilize opportunities to infiltrate ISAs and more generally to create a lasting ideological counter-hegemony. Journalist Michael Smith pointed out that "in just the last year of the García

8 Gorriti, 155.

9 Ibid., 158, 162.



### The “Subjective Factor”

The people don't *simply* take up the gun. They do so conscientiously, with a coherent explanation for why they have suffered for so long, with a sharpened awareness of their class enemies, with a plan to prevail over those enemies, and with a vision of the new society.

These are some of the components of the **subjective factor** and developing the subjective factor is necessary to launching and developing people's war.

administration [1989–1990], Sendero placed one hundred teachers in the isolated Central Highway shantytowns” of Lima. Former prosecutor Gabriela Tarazona-Sevillano noted that “children are a major focus of the insurgency's indoctrination efforts, which gives Sendero an opportunity to prepare the next generation of cadres and illustrates the organization's long-term perspective.”<sup>10</sup>

### Implications

Sendero's experience in the build-up prior to its initiation of people's war indicates the way in which proper infiltration and use of the bourgeoisie's ISAs is one crucial method through which to accumulate revolutionary forces. Furthermore, three of the four people's wars that garnered a substantial mass following and be-

came a significant threat to bourgeois state power in recent decades built at least some of their initial forces through positions in bourgeois educational institutions. Besides the Sendero example, Jose Maria Sison taught at the University of the Philippines in the 1960s and recruited much of the CPP's initial leadership core from among his students, and Prachanda and other leading members of the CPN(Maoist) were teachers in districts from which people's war in Nepal was initiated.

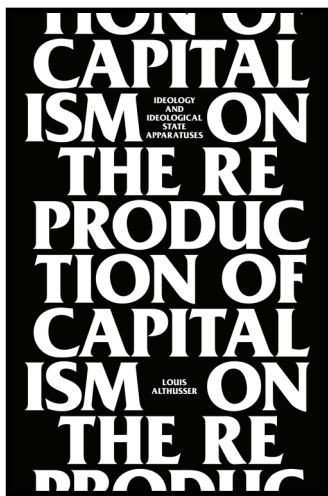
The situation at the University of Huamanga in the 1960s was perhaps a uniquely favorable one and cannot be duplicated, but it does provide us with several salient lessons. **First**, Althusser was entirely right to point out the more contradictory nature of the ISAs. One way in which this contradictory nature is expressed is when the ruling classes seek to create new institutions and

have not yet firmly established how those new institutions will be operated or trained the personnel to do so. The University of Huamanga in the 1960s was exactly such an institution, and thus Sendero could infiltrate and even control it for a time. Its distance from the power centers of Peru meant that the state as well as other leftist organizations, who tended to concentrate their efforts in Lima, were somewhat oblivious to and powerless in the face of Sendero's takeover of the University of Huamanga.

Althusser's description of the contradictory nature of the ISAs points to the fact that hegemony must be continually reshaped and re-established in the midst of capitalism's constant motion and development. While we can identify central tenets of bourgeois philosophy that have persisted over time, there is no unchanging ruling ideology that is frozen and dispensed to the masses through the

<sup>10</sup> Michael L. Smith, “Shining Path's Urban Strategy: Arte Vitarte,” in *The Shining Path of Peru*, ed. David Scott Palmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 141; Tarazona-Sevillano, 184.





On the Reproduction of Capitalism, the 1968 book from which Althusser's influential piece 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' originates, has only recently been translated and published in English.

ISAs, but rather constantly changing discourses that are forged and re-forged in relation to the necessities faced by the ruling class. This has increasingly included the ability to incorporate challenges to bourgeois rule into the very exercise of hegemony. For example, the 1960s cultural revolt in the US has largely been co-opted by and incorporated into capitalist culture. Moreover, in their impressive history of the Black Panther Party, Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin argue that concessions from the ruling class were in fact far more to blame for the Panthers' demise than repression. As Black Studies departments were created at universities across the US and affirmative action, government hiring, and the increase in Black elected officials gave the Black middle class greater access to positions of power in the early 1970s (under the Nixon administration, no less), the Panthers increasingly lost middle-class allies and broad support. Where repression had failed to destroy the Panthers and

in fact increased their stature and level of broad support, concessions and co-optation worked.<sup>11</sup>

Many have thus looked at capitalism's increasing ability to incorporate challenges to its rule into its hegemony as rendering opposition powerless. This one-sided view, generally focused exclusively on the middle classes, who are far more susceptible to concessions and co-optation, fails to recognize the other side of the contradiction. It is precisely because hegemony must be continually reshaped that openings exist for communists to conquer combat positions within the ISAs. Indeed, it is at those junctures in which the content and forms of hegemony are being re-established that the inner wall of hegemony is at its most penetrable. Here it is worth noting that Sendero Luminoso's period of preparation for, initiation, and expansion of people's war in the 1970s and early 1980s coincided with leftist governments in power enacting social reforms.

**Second**, and related to this last point: it is when the anarchy of capital and the ruling class's attempts at structural reconfigurations in society put sections of basic masses in transitory states in regards to their class and social position that conditions are often most ripe for these sections of basic masses to be receptive to communist ideological counter-hegemony. At the University of Huamanga, young peasants were being set up to expect a

11 Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 346–352.

brighter future through education, but the realities of capitalist relations meant these expectations would be dashed. Nevertheless, the university experience would significantly change their social, if not class position, and outlook, and offer an opportunity for communist ideology to gain a foothold. Furthermore, Sendero's strongest urban base of support was among the shanty-town dwellers, who were, for the most part, peasants from the periphery being proletarianized and undergoing the process of urbanization with all its poverty and squalor. It was exactly in these transitory states that Sendero found greatest receptivity to its efforts. Political scientist Cynthia McClintoch stated that:

Stereotypical Shining Path militants are the sons or daughters of highland-born peasants, one of the first members of their family to finish secondary school and perhaps even attend a university; subsequently, their expectations are blocked and they feel frustrated by the inequalities in Peruvian society and uncomfortable both in their parents' traditional Andean world and in the urban Western world.<sup>12</sup>

At times these two factors combine together, as was the case in Peru, to create an all the more volatile mix that the ruling classes do not have an easy time exercising control over. These are the kinds of situations communists should be actively looking for and seeking to do the long-term work to take advantage of. In the

12 Cynthia McClintoch, "Theories of Revolution and the Case of Peru," in *The Shining Path of Peru*, ed. David Scott Palmer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 234.



present-day US, a comprehensive immigration reform would likely involve a requirement that illegal immigrants take classes in English and citizenship (i.e., Americanization) to legalize their immigration status. Charter schools have taken off in oppressed neighborhoods, and though they have everything to do with privatizing education and leaving large sections of masses in the urban ghettos to attend worsening, decrepit public schools, they could potentially be used with finesse to finagle greater independence and funding from the state. Education programs inside prisons as well as job training and education programs for former prisoners are instances in which basic masses have a limited chance at institutionalized intellectual and educational activity. These are just examples of possibilities in which communists could infiltrate bourgeois educational institutions

and use them to train and recruit basic masses.

**Third**, attempts to make use of bourgeois ideological state apparatuses to accumulate revolutionary forces cannot be successfully carried out by disparate individuals but need to be part of an overall strategy under communist leadership that is strategically and tactically connected to the build-up of the subjective factor in order to seize state power. There have been a number of failed attempts by radical-minded intellectuals to use institutional positions at universities to create their conception of organic intellectuals out of working-class students.<sup>13</sup> The

<sup>13</sup> By organic intellectuals, Gramsci was clearly referring to basic masses trained and organized by the communist vanguard in Marxism, rather than some petit-bourgeois fantasy of oppressed people without leadership or independent organization being incorporated as oppositional elements within bourgeois institutions. Gramsci also advocated a more thorough intellectual training of communists, including those from the basic masses, in order to be able to navigate the

Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies was one such example, and while the scholarship and analysis it produced is of a high quality and it likely had some positive impact on university students, its disconnect from any revolutionary strategy or organization made its challenge to capitalist rule negligible. Furthermore, numerous radicals and revolutionary-minded activists in the US have turned, in recent decades, toward cultural and educational activity in oppressed communities. Were these treated as serving the build-up of revolutionary organization instead of as things-in-themselves and set in contention with the bourgeois state they could be qualitatively different endeavors, but as they stand at present they are a retreat into reformism.

Indeed, without being part of an overall revolutionary strategy and without those involved being

process of making revolution and transforming society in its wake.



connected to vanguard communist leadership and the basic masses that form the backbone of revolution, any attempt to penetrate the inner walls of hegemony is doomed to fail. Sendero's efforts at the University of Huamanga were always treated as a means to an end. The goal was never to hold on to teaching or administrative positions or uplift the oppressed within the confines of the present, but rather to use these positions to recruit the cadres and through them organize the mass base that would be necessary to launch people's war.

Infiltrating the bourgeoisie's ISAs will take a protracted approach and the adequate devotion of personnel that focuses on organic (structural) contradictions rather than only movement-building around, agitation and propaganda in relation to, or shifting limited forces from one conjunctural situation to the next. This would involve a reconfiguration in the strategy, tactics, and deployment of communists that is a substantial departure from the ICM's activities post-socialist China.

### Further Considerations

All this poses further questions for revolutionary strategy. Amil correctly points to the need to study the ideological and cultural defenses of the bourgeoisie. He further states that the war of position is necessary, and thus there is a need to look for the openings within civil society to entrench ourselves. When these openings are located, Amil argues "to rupture those institutions by building up a dual power of the popular

classes."<sup>14</sup>

Sendero's use of its temporary footholds in bourgeois institutions was far more pragmatic in nature, as grounds for recruitment and organizing efforts for the future initiation of people's war. This in itself was by no means incorrect, and in fact was quite ingenious, but perhaps there is a need to go further than this more pragmatic use.

Lenin's insistence in *What Is To Be Done?* on the need for class-consciousness to come from "without"—i.e., that it would not spontaneously develop from within the day-to-day struggles—has too often been narrowly, literally, and idiotically interpreted to mean that communists should stay outside of positions inside workplaces, universities, etc. This has gone hand in hand with attempts to maintain some sort of revolutionary purity by avoiding the dangers of entering into bourgeois institutions. To be sure, many a revolutionary with the best of intentions has sold out by becoming a college professor. But if we are to become a serious contender for power, we had better be ready to deal with all these dangers and cast off clinging to some pitiful sense of purity.

Communists will be much more able to contend against bourgeois ideological hegemony if they deploy some forces to conquer combat positions within the ruling class's ISAs. Such positions offer much wider audiences to speak to, greater proximity to the debates and contradictions within

the ideological state apparatuses, opportune circumstances within which to organize masses from a position of authority, and some limited legitimacy for their ideas and protection of their positions. This last advantage would come quickly under attack were those communists to make the most of their positions (which is exactly what they should do—otherwise they will become left appendages to the institutions of bourgeois ideological hegemony). We should, of course, welcome a situation in which the bourgeoisie has to resort to censoring and firing communists from institutional positions, as this could potentially be skillfully exploited to advance the revolution / counter-revolution / more revolution dialectic. In addition, attaining positions within the ISAs would offer much more favorable ground to wage struggle in the realm of ideas. For example, recent academic publications debunking the plethora of misinformation about the Chinese Revolution, such as *Was Mao Really a Monster? The Academic Response to Chang and Halliday's "Mao: The Unknown Story"*, Mobo Gao's *The Battle for China's Past*, or Dongping Han's *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village* have done more to refute the anti-communist propaganda campaign in the public arena than any of the efforts by communist organizations in recent decades.

Moreover, such attempts to bring class-consciousness from "within" (oh the heresy) the ISAs would put the proletariat in a much better position to run society after the revolution. Given

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14 Amil, 30.

that prior proletarian dictatorships have not done so well at living with and transforming the petit-bourgeoisie (to understate the matter), experience in close quarters with intellectuals, within their institutions, and gaining their respect would be crucial to not repeating the mistakes of the past. In this regard, abstract questions of “political line” can sometimes be less important than concrete experience. While Lenin had substantial political differences with Lunacharsky over the years, he nevertheless appointed Lunacharsky as Commissar of Enlightenment — significant given the importance Lenin attached to education. Lunacharsky proved exceptionally adept at working with intellectuals and artists during the 1920s based on his strong working relations inside and knowledge of the cultural arena prior to the revolution. He convinced and created the conditions for some of the most brilliant avant-garde artists of the time to work with the Soviet state in its early years.<sup>15</sup> The relative success in the 1920s of bringing numerous artists and intellectuals into the fold of the proletarian dictatorship is in stark contrast to later decades. For example, Zhdanov’s leadership of Soviet cultural policy after WWII was based on little knowledge of the cultural arena or working relations with artists, and resulted in substantial repression of artists, a stifling atmosphere in the cultural arena, and increasing alienation of artists from the Soviet state.

15 See, for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

The point here is that done correctly, waging ideological battle from within the bourgeoisie’s ISAs would put communists in a much stronger position to create fissures with the walls of bourgeois ideological hegemony. This should by no means be taken to imply that this ought to be the main work of communists in building the subjective factor for the seizure of power. The center of gravity of communist work prior to revolution should always be bringing forward sections of the basic masses as a revolutionary people organized under communist leadership. Nor should there be any confusion about the fact that, as the *RIM Declaration* made eloquently clear, the backbone of communist organization should always be outside the eyes, ears, and legal structures of the bourgeoisie, i.e., independent from whatever temporary positions communists are able to attain within the ISAs.<sup>16</sup> However, we should recognize where combat positions within the ISAs can help in accumulating revolutionary forces, and likewise recognize how these positions are crucial for winning over allies within the middle strata.

With respect to winning allies in the middle strata, it is worth noting the importance Gramsci attached to the shifting balance of forces and in particular the role of the subaltern classes. There has been much confusion about what Gramsci meant by the term subaltern, in part created by liberal academia’s own appropriation

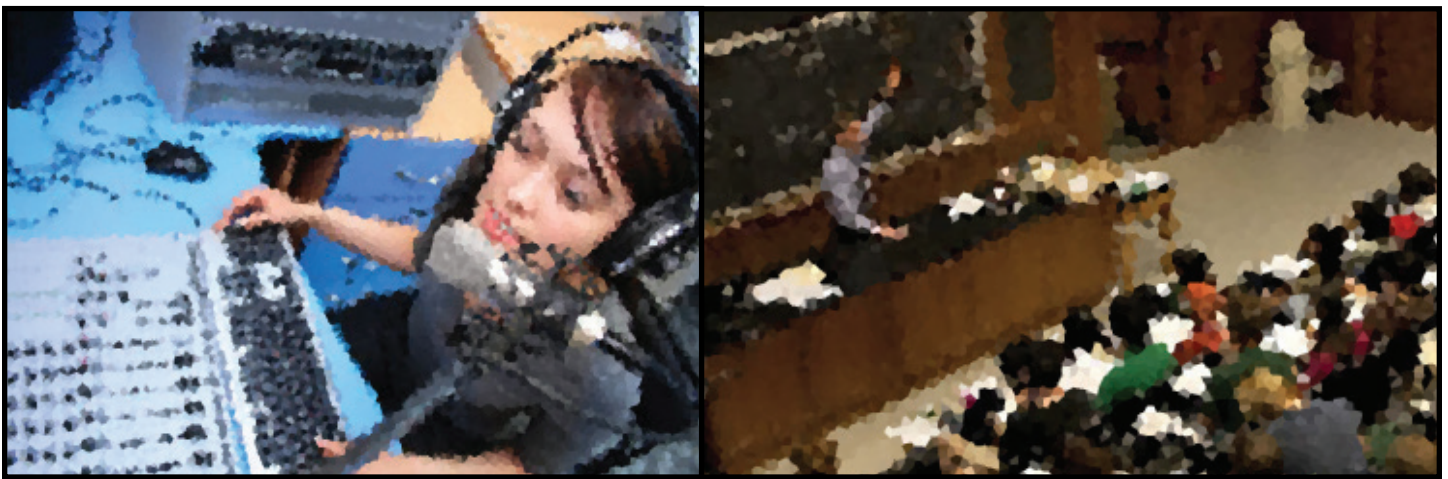
16 *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* (Kerala: Chithira Publishers, 1998), 32–33.

of the term.<sup>17</sup> Amil echoes some of this confusion in his essay.<sup>18</sup> Gramsci uses the term subaltern as an analogy to its dictionary definition: British junior military officers. This points to a more nuanced understanding of class dictatorship, in which the bourgeoisie forges an alliance with other classes to exercise its rule. Gramsci was referring to the vestiges of the feudal ruling classes, the emergence of the labor aristocracy and bourgeoisified workers in the imperialist nations, and the role of professional intellectuals and petit-bourgeois functionaries more generally as examples of these subaltern junior partners in the exercise of capitalist rule. Mao’s nuanced analysis of classes in China comprehended the particular alliance of classes that ruled semi-feudal nations oppressed by imperialism and broke with doctrinaire views that held back communist revolutionaries in such countries. Taking Lenin’s theory of imperialism and the split in the working class as his point of departure, Zak Cope has recently elucidated the ways in which the so-called working class

17 This is partially due to the popularity within liberal academia of the Foucaultian view of power as flowing through everything and everybody rather than being exercised by particular classes through particular class relations. Interpreted this way, hegemony becomes something every class buys into rather than a complex mechanism that is nevertheless exercised by a particular class alliance over the basic masses, who rarely if ever take part in determining what ideology they are indoctrinated with. (This is not to entirely write off Foucault, whose theorization of discourse and expertise as mechanisms of power holds tremendous import for the discussion in this essay.) In addition, the term subaltern has come to be used by many liberal academics, most notably the Subaltern Studies Collective, to refer to oppressed people generally.

18 Amil, 25.





What are the Ideological State Apparatuses that communists can build 'combat positions' in within Canada? What proportion of our forces should be allocated to accumulating forces and developing cadre within such institutions?

in imperialist countries has held a material stake in capitalism-imperialism and been active and enthusiastic junior partners of the monopoly capitalist class, including by its support for imperialist wars of aggression.<sup>19</sup> Through the ISAs, petit-bourgeois (professional) intellectuals are brought into the exercise of capitalist rule via their role in the construction of hegemony, including by institutionalizing their opposition to some of the outrages of capitalism and thus rendering it ineffectual and even helpful in maintaining bourgeois dictatorship. This makes it all the more important for communist revolutionaries to shift the balance of forces by subverting the ISAs to the degree possible and thereby challenge the allegiance of petit-bourgeois intellectuals. The more the latter are forced to make a conscious decision whether to be a junior partner of the bourgeoisie or not, the better.

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The approach outlined above

19 Zak Cope, *Divided World Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism* (Montreal: Kersplebe-deb, 2012).

offers a different dimension to revolutionary strategy that, while not in opposition to Revolutionary Initiative's discussion of dual power, does point to potential problems in any unitary focus on building proletarian counter-institutions. In particular, there has been a strong tendency among radicals and revolutionaries lately to view distance from the state as proof of revolutionary position. David Harvey critiques this tendency as the "termite theory of revolution," in which the ruling class is supposedly gradually overwhelmed by various autonomous groups such that the bourgeois state crumbles in on itself.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, mass organizations, political base areas, and Revolutionary Initiative's discussion of dual power are all crucial components of revolutionary strategy, and are not the same as the termite theory of revolution or the anarchist conception of autonomy.

But while the backbone of communist organization needs to be fundamentally independent from bourgeois structures

20 David Harvey, *Rebel Cities* (New York: Verso, 2013), 124–25.

and politics, distance from the state is not the main measure of revolutionary content. Rather, thoroughgoing opposition to a society predicated on commodity production and a strategy to rid the world of commodity production and all that it entails is. Thus, to the extent and in the instances where communists can make use of working within the bourgeoisie's ISAs to create a communist pole, a revolutionary people, and forms of organization that can build towards the seizure of power and the exercise of proletarian dictatorship thereafter, they should do so even though it will put them in greater proximity to the bourgeois state.

In this regard, it is worth considering what the equivalent of Mao's statement that Chiang Kai-Shek was the quartermaster of the PLA would be in the realm of hegemony. Considering how ideologically outgunned we communists are today, it seems appropriate and indeed necessary to make use of the bourgeoisie's weapons of hegemony against it wherever it is possible to do so.

## A salute to the New People's Army on its 45th anniversary



**March 29, 2014**

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**philippinerevolution.net**  
&  
**ri-ir.org**

Dear Comrades,

Revolutionary greetings from Revolutionary Initiative. From our humble place of struggle to develop a revolutionary communist movement that can stand alongside yours in the history of people's struggles against imperialism and for socialism, we join you in celebrating 45 years of people's war in the Philippines. We celebrate with you the courage, steadfastness and determination of the New People's Army over the last 45 years and in the face of continuous repression from reactionary feudal, capitalist and imperialist enemies.

In spite of the spate of extra-judicial killings of leading activists and civilians over these past three months, including the arrest and trumped up charges meted out to Comrades Wilma

Austria and Benito Tiamzon, who are protected peace negotiators for the National Democratic Front of the Philippines under the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG), we know that the reactionary servants to imperialism in the Philippines are merely revealing their growing desperation in the face of the surging people's war.

On the 45th anniversary of the New People's Army, we revolutionary communists who are agitating, organizing, and fighting within the borders set down by Canadian imperialism salute the great institution of the New People's Army as a blazing star to guide the people's struggles of the world. We recognize it as the decisive instrument of the oppressed and exploited masses of the Philippines in their struggle for liberation.

We salute the red martyrs who lost their lives over these past 45 years of revolutionary armed struggle. Their presence is stamped forever on the brighter

future we are struggling to create.

Most of all, we salute the current commanders and fighters of the New People's Army. These women and men make great sacrifices to advance the decisive revolutionary strategy of protracted people's war in the countryside of the Philippines. We know that fighting the enemy militarily is only part of their job. First and foremost these heroic revolutionaries serve the people and organize communities in the new democratic struggle along the road to socialism and communism. Their commitment, their willingness to learn from and serve the people, their courage in the face of the enemy, is a guide to revolutionaries everywhere!

Victory to the people's war in the Philippines!

Long live the New People's Army!

Long live International Solidarity!

From the Central Committee  
of Revolutionary Initiative