

Statement on International Working Women's Day 2017

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Struggle for the liberation of women and non-men! Grasp revolution and firmly oppose formalism and tailism!

Patriarchy is a central issue in the development of proletarian political organization, and if a revolutionary line on the liberation of women and non-men is not correctly grasped errors relating to this question will be repeated. Many correctly uphold the need for proletarian feminism, a feminist orientation rooted in a Marxist analysis of class and capitalism, and identify the need for women and non-men to be involved in the leadership of organizations. This is absolutely necessary, but it is not sufficient for a revolutionary proletarian feminist orientation overall.

Patriarchy is a central contradiction under the capitalist mode of production. Patriarchal relations are reproduced at every level of bourgeois society, from the family form, to the workplace, to the ideological spheres of media, education, and politics. Proletarian women and non-men are constantly pressured and expected to recreate aspects of bourgeois family relations, which are neither liberatory nor often realistically possible given their class position. This results in ongoing conflict and oppression, as the family reproduces the class struggle at a cellular level, a microcosm where patriarchy reigns and abuse and degradation fester. In the workplace sexual harassment, wage inequality, transphobia, lack of childcare, rape apologism and male chauvinism run rampant. The US state wages imperialist wars supposedly in the name of oppressed women elsewhere, revealing in its patronizing concern the patriarchal nature of bourgeois society at all levels. But patriarchy is not just an external force which is imposed on the oppressed and exploited masses of women and non-men by the bourgeoisie – patriarchal ideas are also reproduced internally to the proletariat itself. This internal reproduction of male chauvinism, abuse, transphobia, queerphobia, etc is a major barrier to building proletarian power, and we will not be able to challenge the patriarchal society in which we live unless we build up our ability to struggle against patriarchy internal to the proletarian camp.

Relatedly, our engagement with the struggle for the liberation of women and

non-men must be a principled engagement, seeing this struggle as a key front of the struggle against oppression and exploitation (and, hence, for communism) overall. We need to grasp revolution and recognize the link between the struggle against patriarchy and the class struggle more broadly. This entails struggling in the proletarian organization against patriarchal ideas, using the method of discussion and debate where appropriate, and the method of expulsion and isolation otherwise, and struggling amongst the masses to develop their political unity and capacity to fight for and win the liberation of women and non-men. This is opposed to a formalistic conception, that sees the struggle against patriarchy as a box to check and perhaps a way to recruit a few women and non-men to the proletarian political organization. It is also opposed to a tailist approach, which relates to the mass movements against patriarchy but does not correctly understand the need for proletarian leadership in these struggles (and therefore negates the need for proletarian politics).

On the question of leadership, Mao said that:

“The cardinal responsibility of leadership is to identify the dominant contradiction at each point of the historical process and to work out a central line to resolve it.”

Only if we firmly grasp this point can we correctly say that we are providing leadership to the mass movement. Mao is clearly opposing a tendency that reduces leadership to ‘those in charge’ or ‘those who already have the correct ideas’. Instead of these formalisms we should see proletarian leadership as the means by which we can identify the primary contradiction in a situation and work out a line to resolve it. This is an active process and a constant one - not a matter of mechanically upholding past ‘correct verdicts’ but of creatively applying MLM to concrete situations. Proletarian organization itself is only a means by which to further this process, not an end in and of itself. An organization that cannot engage in this process will be unable to put forward a proletarian feminist line, and will only be able to put forward a line that reproduces patriarchy in the name of proletarian politics.

We cannot simply affirm the centrality of patriarchy under capitalism and then call it a day. We all need to take an active role in the struggle against patriarchy, including by bringing revolutionary ideology to the mass movement. A proletarian feminist orientation cannot be reduced to internal struggles (women and non-men in leadership, struggling solely against the internal reproduction of patriarchy within an organization) or to a formalistic relationship to the mass movement. Patriarchy is a central aspect of the oppression the masses are facing daily, and we need to see the struggle against patriarchy therefore as a key front in the struggle for communism overall. We need at all times to have a proletarian feminist orientation and outlook, but we also need to understand that at times patriarchy can become a primary contradiction, and at other times it can become secondary. Firmly grasping revolution means always seeking the primary contradiction, the primary aspect of that contradiction, and placing the utmost importance on working out a line to handle it.

Build up the revolutionary camp! Dare to struggle against patriarchy, revisionism, and mechanical thinking, and dare to win!