

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

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February 13, 1979

Mary Alice Waters
New York

Dear Mary Alice:

I have been meaning to send you a copy of this article for the past five months. I am just now getting around to it... sorry for the delay.



Byron Ackerman

A SINKING SUBCULTURE

I read your article, "Poetry at the Waterfront" (*Seven Days*, August), and found it very interesting.

I worked on a dry dock crew docking ships in a Virginian shipyard for five years before coming to New York City and I am in agreement: There is a subculture of waterfront workers that is disappearing as the use of container-ships becomes more widespread.

Rudd Simmons
New York, N.Y.

Letters

THANKS TO JUNE JORDAN

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for the article (*Seven Days*, August) by June Jordan, on the beating sustained by my son Victor Rhodes at the hands—no, no, forgive my kind error, at and by the feet of the Hassidim.

Never will I understand the savagery of such an act on a human being, let alone my son. No one can explain and make me understand that this act is one meant for a human. For even in this day and age we contribute to the welfare and prevention of cruelty to animals! How then are we wrong in crying out at rallies, in demonstrations on television, in the press or through an article, for the rights denied us but so freely given to those who see fit to trample on our inalienable rights?

I have become an angry yet proud human being when I involve myself at meetings or demonstrations. Though I know I don't have the power to overcome our oppression at the hands of our tormentors, I want to know that at least I was there at the beginning of the awakening of our true worth, to live as human beings and lift our proud Black heads up high.

I've always felt I walked hand in hand with God, for I have overcome many trials and tribulations. Perhaps this is what kept me going when Victor was stomped so viciously. I'm deeply sorry my son suffered such a beating, but I'm so happy that the outcome is fruitful. My son is alive—the only visible scars are slight; he's lost his jaunty walk, his gift of gab, his sense of humor, but he has his life. God in his wisdom felt free to use him as a symbol of the iniquities befalling our Black people, to open our eyes, to gather together and collect our just dues. Though they may beat us physically, the mind still lives on.

We're going to stop being the stepping stones of our oppressors to seats of power. It's time for Blacks to come alive, not merely exist in a vacuum controlled by modern day executioners who not only kill our men, women and children but our very right to live as human beings.

Yes, I thank you as I thank Rev. Daughtry, Minister Michael, Jitu Weusi,

Dr. Vernal Cave, Leon Modeste, Sam Pinn, just naming a few of the great Black leaders who have come to aid me. Never forgetting also the less famous who came out of the night as strangers to aid and pray for my son. I thank my man Hymie for standing by when I ran from home to hospital to rally and just stood by me and my other children before he thought of his comforts. We all stood together as a family.

Keep up your good work for there is nothing more rewarding than the truth. You are a magazine to be commended.

Arlene Rhodes
Queens, N.Y.

JOBS VS. GENOCIDE

The article "Seabrook, a view from the Inside" (*Seven Days*, July), the subtitle "Anti-nuke Worker Speaks Out" misleads us about Joe Paquette's true nature. He is not anti-nuke. "We aren't in a position to choose the projects we want to work on," Joe says. "Do you think the German workers liked building the ovens to roast Jews? We work because we need the money and enjoy that kind of work."

Well, with that level of awareness, it won't be hard for the corporations to encourage weapons production and even wars in the midst of rising unemployment and economic depression. After all, that was the starting point of fascism in Germany: Building a war economy always solved the economic crisis.

As long as there are elements in the working class only concerned with jobs and wage-rises, there is little hope of saving our skins from the nuclear holocaust. The excuse of "having several mouths to feed" is irrelevant in a "corporate welfare system" (Joe's words). One can tolerate any job, even collaborating in genocide when it comes to maintaining a standard of life. In countries often victimized by the corporations and their army, there are kids who go to work at the age of 10 (or younger) to help their parents.

No objective conditions of poverty justify cooperation with enterprises or activities that endanger humanity. Joe must evaluate what's better: to see your kids in a certain kind of economic deprivation today, or with beta particle burns on their skin tomorrow. Then cynicism won't help much.

Mario y Tania Yoruba
British Columbia, Canada

A SALUTE FROM SWEDEN

I really enjoy reading the magazine—a great change from the bourgeois press. Keep up the good work! And thanks for the women's health section in the May 5 issue—it's great to see the women's movement and the left working together, learning from each other. We've come a long way since the tensions and splits of the 1960s.

Lucy Altenberg
Sweden

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Au Revoir to the Kitchen

Feminism Has Surfaced in the Major Left Parties in France; Party Leaders Aren't Happy About It

BY JUDITH EZEKIEL

Paris. Following their loss in the March legislative elections after years when nearly everyone had thought victory was in reach, the Communist and Socialist parties and the small Movement of the Radical Left lost no time in continuing and even intensifying their pre-election squabbles. The leaders of each party blamed the others for the conservative victory. Within the parties, however, old assumptions were reexamined; rank and file members began to make their views known in a fashion unheard of in France—and, it should be added, impossible in the amorphous, top-down structure of the major American parties.

At first the criticisms came from predictable political positions. Then a new voice was raised on May 11, when Cecile Goldet, Francoise Gaspard and Edith Lhuiler announced that they and other women were forming a third faction outside the left and right groups within the Socialist Party. Before the shock within and outside the SP had died down, the entire country was stunned exactly a month later when the Communist Party was "stripped bare by its women," as the essay which appeared in the French daily *Le Monde* put it somewhat indelicately.

The women involved in these actions have made it clear that the roots of their dissent lie much deeper than any current political situation. "The autonomous women's movement has become so important that it now represents a major force," explained the Socialist Goldet, a 62-year-old with years of experience in party and feminist activity. "Without it we could never have done what we did."

In the last two years the French women's movement has grown rapidly from a small core of highly politicized, predominantly far-left activists to a mass movement whose ideas are beginning to influence all French women and create a force which no political party or trade union will be able to ignore. Currently the

emphasis is on building grass roots structures such as workplace and neighborhood women's groups and rape crisis centers. In the past year at least eight national feminist publications were launched. They illustrate the richness and diversity as well as the lack of coordination, which have emerged as part of the movement's commitment to non-hierarchical political forms.

In response to pressure from its own women activists, the Socialist Party granted minor concessions: 15 percent of officials at all party levels must now be women—this in a party where they comprise 25 percent of the membership. Only one of the 104 Socialist deputies in the legislature is a woman.

"I have been working to make men understand the importance of our problems with practically no success, either in the SP or in society in general," comments Goldet. "In SP congresses, when a man speaks, everyone listens. When a woman speaks, they all go out and smoke a cigarette."

The men may soon be taking their cigarette breaks less frequently. By the end of June, the Socialist feminist caucus had received nearly 2,000 offers of adherence from party members and 1,000 people who are not in the SP pledged to join the party as members of their caucus. If it receives more than 5 percent of the vote at the party congress scheduled for May 1979, it will be officially recognized and guaranteed a place in party deliberations.

Goldet finds confirmation of her charges of Socialist sexism in the widespread suspicion among members of the two existing factions that the women were being manipulated to alter the party's balance of forces. "A woman is always supposed to have a man behind her as far as they're concerned," she observed. "But now that they have realized that nobody is manipulating us and that we are likely to have real strength, they want to coopt us. Some have come with threats, while others say that they agree with us entirely and always have."

The new group hasn't yet developed a detailed political platform, but Goldet promises it will be within the Socialist Party spectrum. In the words of its first manifesto, "As women we refuse to sepa-

rate our struggles against exploitation and those of men; as Socialists we refuse to forget that we are women. . . . We would like to show that it is possible to create a different relationship to politics." Men will be allowed to join—although some women jokingly suggest that they be limited to 10 percent of the membership and Francoise Gaspard has promised that "our statutes will ensure that we remain mistresses of the situation."

Unlike the Socialist women, the feminists in the Communist Party have no desire to found a caucus—which is not permitted by the party statutes in any case. They are demanding only open discussion of women's issues. As it has on other issues the CP leadership refused to allow a forum in *l'Humanite*, the party daily. In addition, members were offered the customary assurances of party leader Georges Marchais that they belong to "the party of women's liberation." In fact, the CP does have the best record of any of the major parties in the participation of women. Its 86-member parliamentary group elected last March has 12 and 35 percent of the party's 630,000 members are women.

Many Communist women are not satisfied. While acknowledging the Party's work "in defense of women's working and living conditions," the position paper which circulated widely within the party before surfacing in *Le Monde* demands "a much more considerable contribution to women's liberation than a thousand speeches by those who would lecture to us on the subject"—an oblique reference to the party's April 1978 Central Committee report.

Although *l'Humanite* had refused to publish the document, all but five of the signers preferred to remove their names from it rather than endorse its appearance in a "bourgeois" paper such as *Le Monde*. The five stalwarts are sticking by their pens, and have announced their intention to launch a journal this fall "addressing itself to all women with the aim of creating a new relationship between Communist and non-Communist women."

"In the party, it is said that the working class doesn't exploit anyone," explained two of the five co-signers, Edith Thevinin and Peggy Sultan in an interview. "We

Judith Ezekiel is an American living in Paris, where she is a member of the collective publishing the feminist journal la revue d'en face.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

say that even in the working class, sexist ideology is reproduced and divides the workers' movement. The struggle against this oppression, far from dividing the revolutionary movement, can only help it progress."

The two added that women in the Communist Party are cut off from the feminist movement. "We thought that a publication could develop a dialogue and aid the circulation of information." Only three weeks after their announcement, they had already received over 50 responses from women in the Communist Party and an encouraging reaction from outside as well. "All feminists want to work with us," said Sultan. "They say that this is something that they have long waited for and hoped for, to work in solidarity with Communist women."

While these women are focusing their attention on others within the Communist Party, another group organized a meeting of Communist, far left and other feminists held eight days after the appearance of the "Stripped Bare" document in *Le*

Monde. "This group believes that it has an important role to play in the women's movement by posing the question of the relationship between women's struggle and class struggle in a comprehensive way," says Daniele Ohayon, a journalist from the independent feminist journal *le Temps des Femmes* who attended the gathering. "During the meeting many activists wanted to know specifically what the Communist women hoped to contribute to the movement." Non-Communist women appear to have been less impressed by the originality of the ideas presented than by the fact that Communist Party members were expressing them, and ready to follow through: Working groups organized around specific themes at the meeting are already functioning.

The Communist leadership has responded in several ways. Although Georges Marchais repeated that "women are at ease in our party," a report of the Communist Party political bureau published in the June 12 issue of *l'Humanite* contains an unprecedented critique of the

party's traditional backwardness on the questions of abortion and contraception — firm opposition to any birth control for demographic reasons and in the name of national interest. In the same article, however, the leadership stated its determination to "firmly repulse certain attempts to form women's groups in the Party."

The violence of the official attack indicates that the Communist leadership believes that the groundwork laid by the autonomous women's movement over the past 10 years poses a potential, if not immediate, threat to their own positions. "Perhaps we are witnessing the birth of something which already exists in Spain and Italy," suggested Daniele Ohayon, "a current within the movement consisting of CP women."

Communist Party feminist Edith Thevenin clearly expressed what is worrying the Socialist and Communist headquarters: "The combination of a revolutionary position and a feminist position can transform the traditional view of politics... it can be a new force!" □

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