

The Women's Question — a Key Question for the Working Class

In this article, Siri Jensen — leader of AKP(m-l)'s Women's Committee — takes up the party's policy concerning «the women question». It is the communist party's duty, she says, to place itself in the vanguard of the struggle for women's liberation, and to avoid division of class according to sex. It is also important to fight repression of women within the communist party itself, she says, and points out the importance of criticizing the marxist-leninist tradition on this point.

In Norway today, women constitute a half of all employees and approximately half of the employed working class. Large groups of the working class's closest allies in the petit-bourgeoisie are women; nurses, teachers, social workers.

Employment amongst women has increased notably in the last 10 years. At the same time, this has meant that women have been drawn to a larger extent into class struggle, and «the woman question» has forced itself upon the political order of the day.

Women, however, are concentrated in relatively few professions. A third of all working women are to be found within education, health and the social sector, a fourth within trade, hotel and restaurant, an eighth in industry. 20% have office work, 13% nursing, 11% work in shops and 9% are cleaners.

Lower wages

Women earn less than men. Wages are lower and the fact that half of the employed women work part time, makes the difference greater.

More than two thirds of women are employed — the remaining third stay at home.

These figures show that women have a special position in working life.

We believe that it is important to understand women's dual position in our society: Women are in working life, constitute half of the employ-

ed working class, and are to be found in most professions.

At the same time, women have a special position which basically rises from the tasks society imposes upon women within the family, and the division of labour between sexes — which society decides. This duality is expressed in many forms. On the one hand, women are less economically dependent on men — marriage is not the only possibility. Women, with or without children, can manage, more or less, on their own income or with the help of social security. Women can divorce.

On the other hand, single women and single providers are the poorest members of society, with many economic problems. Economics is still an important factor in limiting the right to divorce: Women's low wages and working hours make many women dependent on their husbands.

In one way it is accepted that women have jobs, including traditionally male jobs, and women look upon themselves increasingly as employees with the right to work alongside men.

Private work

At the same time, women are dependent upon adapting their jobs to the needs of their families — husband's working hours, possibilities of child care etc. Society does not increase kindergarten fa-

cilities or care for old people according to necessity — for example, 90–95% of care for the elderly is private, that is to say the women's responsibility. It is, furthermore, still a fact that women are squeezed out of jobs to the advantage of men, when it comes to cut downs and reductions. Real unemployment is highest amongst women.

Women take an active, though much smaller, part in political life and mass organizations: Women organize themselves and demand greater influence. Women have fought to gain the right to self-determined abortion.

At the same time women's freedom is limited by the demands of the family and because they are still to a great extent regarded as men's property. Maltreatment of women within the family, rape, pornography and prostitution contribute to holding women down. Increased employment and increased consciousness as to one's own rights lead to a stronger will to struggle and women demand that working class organizations take up; to a greater extent, their situation and demands.

AKP(m-l) considers this to be a key question for the working class as a whole.

Today the trade unions do not give priority to cases of importance to working class women — wages for those who earn the least, shorter normal working day, possi-



The women are double working, both taking care of their families and contributing to the income of the family by wage labour.

bilities to combine full job with family, rights for part-time workers etc.

At the same time employers know exactly how to make use of women's situation to press wages down, increase wage differences and undermine the normal working day.

This is possible, not because women show less solidarity, but because they are crushed between the demands of work and family. The eight hour day is too long, in as much as women have a second job at home. Many women must ask for special contracts for shorter working hours, usually on the employer's terms with lower wages and fewer rights.

The only possible answer to this is a joint struggle for a 6 hour day with full wage compensation.

As long as the unions couldn't care less, employers can offer women lower wages because they are «provided for». In today's situation, women can become a lever to press down wages. Therefore, we believe that the struggle for women's rights is today necessary to strengthen working class unity and to meet the bourgeois offensive. It is of course, a condition for mobilising the female half of the working class, which has the worst circumstances and most to win through fighting. This struggle must be a cen-

tral task for a revolutionary marxist-leninist party.

Grounds for repression of women under capitalism

The grounds for repression of women under capitalism are women's position in the family and a society based on division of labour according to sex.

In addition to class repression, which affects women in the oppressed classes, women are repressed as a sex in two ways:

- the bourgeoisie represses women
- men represses women.

The bourgeois repression of women

The family is a part of society's basic organization and of capitalist relations of production. It carries forth bourgeois property through inheritance. The family and not society has the main responsibility for providing for those without income. In this way the bourgeoisie is spared enormous expenses.

Historically speaking, men have been the family providers. Women stand in a stronger economic position today, because they represent half of all employees. Yet women are still economically dependent on men. Many hundreds of thousands of women do not have income giving

jobs. The labour market is divided according to sex and women are concentrated in routine type jobs with low status and low pay. Half the number of working women have part time jobs. These conditions arise again because the family will always choose the «easiest» way to secure a necessary income. This means that the man has full time work and is the main provider, because his work has a higher value than the woman's. Capitalism will never give everyone full time work.

Capitalism secures women as a huge reserve army of labour power. The consequences of this family system affect all women, whether or not they live within a family, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. All women meet the market divided according to sex, and low wages.

Throughout the entire history of class society, the ruling class has oppressed women particularly, and given men privileges. This colours all institutions and relationships, careers, politics, school, the media, church, the unions etc.

The ruling ideology elevates men and represses women

Pornography and prostitution present women as objects



Women are dependent upon adapting their jobs to the needs of their families.

PHOTO: LEIF GABRIELSEN



The struggle for women's liberation has long traditions in Norway. The sign to the left says «We want the night back», and the one to the right: «Fight against all oppression of women».

PHOTO: KIRSTEN KARLSEN AND SAMFOTO

to be used by men. Pornography has developed into a powerful capitalist industry which scoops in enormous profits on sadism and contempt of women.

Under capitalism, the most important form of repression of women, is the bourgeoisie's repression of women. The bourgeoisie has the most powerful interest in defending the institution of the family and division of the labour market according to sexes, which repress women.

Men's repression of women

Men in all classes and areas of society repress women by force of their own privileges.

They are an active power against women's liberation.

In the family men repress women and have privileges at women's expense. This can be seen for example in the economic, social and sexual repression of women and children. Men allow their careers and interests go before their families. They greatly influence women's lives with their choices. Men have the right to decide what is important for the trade unions, political parties and all social life.

Men's repression of women in the working class and amongst working people, is one of the most important hindrances for increased unity and strength in the working class — both in the day to day struggle and in the struggle for revolution. Women must gain power in workers' organizations and these organizations must support women's struggle. Women must rebel against men's privileges and repression. Men of the working class must support women's struggle and fight repression of women, or they damage the whole working class and its allies. To fight against the repression of women amongst the people is a necessary prerequisite for the liberation of the whole workers' movement.

The women's movement

The increase in women's paid work activity is an important reason for the broad women's movement which takes up

their struggle in all areas. Women have strengthened their political power. Because repression of women touches all women no matter class, there is the basis for a broad alliance amongst women.

Women in the working class have a special historic rôle in this movement. Together with the other women of the working people (small farmers, women intellectuals etc.), they are all repressed as both class and sex. As well as this they must fight the repression of men from their own class. They must lead the women's struggle and be at the same time an especially important leading force in class struggle against the bourgeoisie. They must do away with capitalism both to free themselves as workers, and as women.

A women's organization is therefore also a necessary ground for women's liberation and thereby for revolution and socialism. Also here, women of the working class must play a leading role.

The women's movement cannot win if it is limited and steered by illusions that women can liberate themselves without changing the whole of society. More and more women understand this, through struggle.

In the same way, women in Norway cannot gain liberation isolated from the women of the rest of the world. Today imperialism is the most important hindrance to the bettering of women's situation. Women and women's movements must take their part in the fight to crush imperialism on a world wide scale. The women's movement must tie close bonds over the whole world to learn and to develop a common struggle.

Kvinnefronten («the women's front») in Norway

AKP(m-l) looks upon the building of a nation wide women's organisation as a strategic task. An organization for women in all types of jobs and life situations, of all ages, who can stake out a political line for the different areas of women's struggle, lead mass

struggle and fight for women's premisses in class struggle.

We have in Norway today the beginnings of such an organisation. «Kvinnefronten» (the women's front) has existed in Norway for 13 years. It has an anti-capitalist platform, and has always fought for ordinary women's interests, for work, kindergartens, self-determined abortion, against pornography and for international solidarity. «Kvinnefronten» has carried on the fight against all attempts to isolate women's struggle from the struggle against imperialism and the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union. Today «Kvinnefronten» is fighting especially for the six hour working day with full wage compensation, against women losing their jobs, against pornography and violence to women, and for active international solidarity work — including support of the freedom fighters in Afghanistan.

The front has groups in many places in Norway and shows influence outside of its own ranks. «Kvinnefronten» has led the 8th of March Movement in Norway. In recent years the 8th of March has been celebrated with demonstrations and meetings in 30—80 different places.

AKP(m-l) has many active members of «Kvinnefronten».

The struggle for socialism and communism

In the debate on AKP(m-l)'s newly adopted programme, the women question was a central factor. The struggle to make an end to the repression of women has for the first time been discussed as an absolutely necessary part of the struggle for socialism and communism.

The debate has also pointed out that a central task for the socialist economy must be to create the possibilities for full women's liberation.

This means a stop to division according to sex in all areas of society. Today's institution of the family, which suppresses women, must be abolished. The family must

be replaced by new basic groups which the people choose for themselves. These must have the following:

- equal relationship between men and women

- society (and not each separate little group of people) must have the responsibility to provide for and take care of its members.

- All members (also children, the aged, and those unable to work) are economically independent and self-sufficient. Such a group would not be therefore the economic basis of society, but a freely chosen social community.

To reach such a development, struggle is necessary throughout the whole period of socialism, during which women will be the motive force and will be opposed by men.

To reach their goal of full women's liberation, socialism must, from the word go, work to transfer tasks from the family to society, and to break down division of labour according to sex.

This demands the development of the forces of production, total rearranging of society and a change in way of thinking. This is absolutely necessary to liberate women as a force in production and in the ruling of society. Women must have economic self-reliance. Wages must increase and become equal to men's wages. Women must be secured entrance to jobs which earlier have been male dominated, especially in political and economic areas. Society must take over increasingly, responsibility for provision and care, create free kindergartens for all children, medical care centres for all who need them, build care facilities for the elderly, and give direct economic subsidies to all children.

If the economy is to develop in this way, women must have power. The women's movement and the working class must fight for the goal of women's liberation in all aspects of planning and production. An economic plan without such goal would freeze old repression of women and make the progression towards communism impossible.

The struggle for women's liberation and the progression of socialism

Socialism gives the possibility to create the material grounds for getting rid of the repression of women. But historical experience shows that socialism does not automatically lead to women's liberation. Formal equality for women is relatively easy to carry through. But this is easily paralleled with women's real repression. As long as the family exists, it will be the grounds for man's privileged position with women as man's servant, and idea of women as second grade members of society. There will also be deeply rooted reactionary habits and ways of thinking which will take a long time to get rid of.

The ideological fight must go hand in hand with the struggle to change the material basis for the suppression of women. It will also be extremely important to develop an independent and strong women's movement under socialism.

The struggle for women's liberation has a lot to say for the socialist democracy and the strength of the proletarian dictatorship. If women do not have the same real rights as men to take part in political work, then half of the working class and the people have only formal democratic rights. In this case women's energy cannot be mobilized for the building of socialism and class struggle against the bourgeoisie.

To get rid of the repression of women, is to abolish the family, division of labour according to sex, private property and the market. Women's struggle under socialism is therefore bound to the fight for communism. It is of course a duty for the communist party to lead the struggle for women's liberation.

The fight against the repression of women in AKP(m-l) itself

AKP(m-l) is a part of Norwegian society and is influenced by it. Therefore, women

are repressed in AKP(m-l) just as they are in all other parties and organizations. It is impossible to put a full stop to this without changing society. But it is absolutely necessary to take up the fight, and this is what women in AKP(m-l) have done.

Repression within the party can be seen, for example, in the fact that it is women who do most of the «invisible» organizational work — while men stake out the political line. Furthermore women wear themselves out on most house and family work.

Women's political and organizational experience is hardly noticed and women's condition in the working class and as part of the working people, is seldom treated as «important politics». This situation is aggravated by the fact that few women have taken leadership. The result being that women in and related to the working class, are not mobilized in the fight against the bourgeoisie.

The party emphasizes therefore active and particular work on the women problem, firstly taking up repression of women in society, but also giving importance to the struggle against repression within the party. The decision to include at least 50% women members of the central committee, has been adopted by voting. Experience so far show that there are enough qualified women, if one looks for them.

The party tries also to take up women's position as a part of its political line in several areas — for example the unions.

AKP(m-l) sees women's struggle for liberation over the whole world as an important revolutionary potential. Marxist-leninists must lead this struggle and fight for directing it against the bourgeoisie and imperialism and in this way create a united front against the world's suppressed peoples and nations. At the same time it is necessary to look critically at «the woman question's» place in the tradition of marxism-leninism.

We in AKP(m-l) believe we have taken important steps in this direction.