

# Imperialism, the Oppression of Women and the Struggle for Liberation

## *Political Guidelines for the Revolutionary Women's Work*

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**1. Women are the weaker sex, but only in the hierarchy of a class-based society.** Women's oppression is an organic part of capitalism as it was in earlier class-based societies. Each and every ruling class in human history has utilized the oppression of women to maintain its power and to weaken *all* of the oppressed classes. Women are not now nor were they ever in the past equal. We have been those who are exploited and oppressed in *all* fields of life. Like men, we suffer from racism, national oppression, and exploitation as workers. But, in addition to all of these existing forms of discrimination, we are automatically placed at a disadvantage in capitalist society due to our sex. This discrimination is not rooted in any biological or mental differences between men and women, but is the result of the emergence of private property as the means of production (dominated by men), the concomitant designation of women as being primarily responsible for domestic labor and child care, and the resulting class-based societies. Therefore, in contrast to the women of the ruling class we, as working class women along with our sisters from the rural and urban poor, don't desire to achieve equality with the men of the ruling class *within* the existing capitalist system. No, we want to *eradicate* class-based society as a whole and establish a socialist society, one without exploitation and oppression.

**2. Today's class-based society is capitalism, "the epoch of the bourgeoisie" as the famous revolutionary Karl Marx characterized it.** The current class system, capitalism, has two main camps – the ruling class (capitalists/bourgeoisie) and the oppressed class created by capitalism, the working class (proletariat). The latter is unique in the entire history of humanity, as it is the first class that can open the road towards a future society without exploitation and oppression. Why is this so? First, the working class is the source of the creation of all wealth. Second, the proletariat owns no means of production other than its own labor power. In this it is different from the capitalist class which creates no wealth but which owns and manages the means of production. In the current world order, it is the capitalists who control the governments and constitute the ruling class. Third, the working class is a collective class and its struggle will not lead to new society based on private property, but rather one based on socialized production. Hence, the struggle of the working class is *the* precondition for the creation of a classless society in which wealth will serve the interests of *all* people. But in contrast to capitalism, and by definition, a classless society will have no class or layer that lives off the labor of others. Work and wealth will be shared equally by all people thereby creating a society of freedom, peace and equality. Such a society is called socialism. We as women constitute half of the working class and we represent at least half of the rural and urban poor. Together we have the greatest interest in smashing the current world order. The liberation of our sex is intrinsically tied to the struggle for socialism.

**3. Under capitalism, there can be no authentic unity of all women, because the women of the ruling class oppress and exploit us just as the men do.** Our struggle is against the oppressors of *both* sexes. We must fight the ruling class *alongside* our class brothers. We must fight backwardness and sexism

*within* the ranks of our own class *together* with our progressive class brothers. And we must fight against the misconception of a cross-class unity of all women. Instead, we fight united with our class brothers *for* the liberation of women along with all other oppressed persons and for the future of the human race. All of these tasks are intrinsically tied to each other. As the great revolutionary Friedrich Engels formulated in 1888: “(...) nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles.”

**4. While the oppressed classes must be united in their historical task to smash capitalism irrespective of sex, age and nationality, admittedly there are differences in their respective personal and collective experiences of oppression and exploitation.** For example, migrants, in addition to capitalist oppression, also face racism; women encounter sexism; and the peoples of the semi-colonial countries (those of the African continent, Latin America, Asia with the exclusion of China, Japan and South Korea, as well as Eastern Europe) must contend with imperialist exploitation. The world is split in two great camps – proletariat and bourgeoisie (oppressed and oppressors) – but it is also divided into two camps related to nation states: the oppressed countries and oppressor countries. The poor countries of the world are economically plundered by the rich countries, regardless of the nominal political independence of the former. This exploitation is an integral, organic part of the last stage of decaying capitalism, Imperialism. During the imperialist stage capitalism, it is crucial that we learn from all experiences of oppression as well as from all struggles of resistance against it. The experiences of our brothers and sisters in the oppressed countries – the semi-colonial countries – are therefore crucial for all of us engaged in the revolutionary struggle. As the famous woman revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg said a century ago, from now on there are only two possible alternatives for humanity “*Socialism or Barbarism.*”

**5. Imperialism involves the brutal super-exploitation of the poor countries of the world and the inhuman oppression of poor women.** However, the bourgeois media spread the illusion that parts of the world are democratic and free. But each and every progressive element and reform in today's societies exists solely thanks to two main factors: First, the historically successful struggles of the workers and oppressed for these reforms. And second, the readiness of the ruling classes to pacify entire layers of the oppressed classes in order to weaken their resistance. This is the reason why, for example, the rich countries can create the illusion of relative equality of women. It appears as if women in imperialist countries are *nearly* equal, because of reforms which give them advantages that women in the semi-colonial countries don't have. However, while the women of the oppressed classes in the imperialist countries are far from being equal to men of their respective class, it is the women in the semi-colonial countries who experience the full extent of the brutality of the imperialist beast. But revolutionary women do not accept *relative* equality for one part of the world, but rather fight for *full* equality for *all* parts of the world. This struggle is based on a revolutionary program for the liberation of *all* workers and oppressed. Part of this program is the struggle for the liberation of the women in the semi-colonial countries.

**6. A revolutionary program for the liberation of the women of the poor countries is based on their economic, political and ideological liberation.** It is the task of *all* revolutionaries throughout the world, irrespective of gender, age, or nationality, to fight together with the women in the semi-colonial countries for their liberation. In this struggle, the women of the poor countries are the teachers. We

women in the poor countries have unique experiences to share and we are the architects of our own future. Furthermore, women of the semi-colonial countries are also a crucial and leading part in the building of an international revolutionary women's movement and the revolutionary world party. It is no exaggeration to say: None of these can be achieved without the leading role played by the women of the semi-colonial countries.

**7. Economic development means less isolation for women.** In Black Africa as well as in Southern Asia more than 60% (in some countries, even more than 80%) of all working women labor in agriculture. Often concentrated in time-intensive and physically challenging occupations, these working women are often unpaid or remunerated very poorly. No wonder that in Black Africa only 21.4 % of the working women are wage earners. In Southern Asia the number is even smaller (20%). All other working women are occupied in family-related work, mainly agricultural. Irrespective of the concrete relationship with the family members, there is nothing idyllic about agricultural, family-related work. Work in factories and other professional fields is also hard, but at least it offers the possibility of communicating with many other working women (and men) and of exchanging experiences. In addition, women working in factories and other professional fields receive a wage and therefore have a base for relative economic independence vis. à vis. their male relatives. Whatever the concrete relationship with male relatives looks like, an economically independent base is always an advantage for us women. For this reason, revolutionary women fight for public employment programs which can increase the integration of women in the working class (in agriculture as well) and higher wages for women. They fight against the dependence of women upon their male relatives. As the woman revolutionary leader Alexandra Kollontai has stated, women who become part of the working class also become more "*independent inside and self-reliant outside.*"

**8. Militant trade unions are crucial for organizing working class women against the arbitrariness of their bosses.** We, as working class women, gain some important independence from our men folk when we receive our own income. However, this does not mean that the struggle for equality and independence is complete for women. This is just the beginning and needs to be organized against the capitalist bosses. This also means joining forces with male workers against the bosses. Working class women are not only an important part of the work force and, therefore, important fighters against capitalism. Often it is reported that women of the oppressed classes and peoples are far more determined in their struggle against the oppressors. Yaa Asantewaa, for example, the queen of Edweso and a strategic leader of the revolutionary uprising of the Ashanti people, provoked an uprising against the British occupiers in 1900 by claiming that the women will start a war against the British occupiers if the men refuse to do so. Militant trade unions should learn from history and organize women, putting them in positions of leadership. Furthermore, militant trade unions need to fight for day care centers, paid maternity leave and other demands which are very important for women workers. Women caucuses within the trade unions must be built, supported by progressive male workers, in order to fight against any form of sexism within the labor movement! Revolutionary women fight for such militant trade unions; they build and lead them together with male workers. The latter can consider themselves lucky to have such determined partners in class struggle!

**9. The land must be given to the poor peasants with women playing an equal role!** Professional work areas eliminate the relative isolation of many women employed in family-related economic units.

However, the demands and wishes of many poor peasants must be respected and fulfilled. Poor peasants *must* become the allies of factory and service workers in order to smash capitalism and to build a socialist society. More than this: Only close collaboration between the peasants and proletariat can develop economical strength. As the famous revolutionary Leo Trotsky stated: *"We must explain to the village that all the attempts of the worker to help the peasant by supplying the village with agricultural implements will give no result until workers' control of organized production is established."* Revolutionary women fight for the expropriation of the large foreign and domestic landowners and agricultural corporations. We fight for the nationalization of land and for the distribution of the land to the poor peasants who should be the ones who utilize it. The distribution of land must be equal between the men and women of the poor peasantry, i.e., female peasants must have an equal share in the jointly-owned property of land. Cooperatives of poor peasants should be built on a voluntary and gender-equal basis. Furthermore, selling the land should be prohibited. Most women in the rural areas of Black Africa need to walk for at least 30 minutes to reach water. Therefore, for us women of the poor peasantry, it is vital that the agricultural infrastructure be developed, including the water supply, electricity, sewage systems and more. None of this can be achieved without close collaboration with the proletarian workers!

**10. The urban and rural poor are close allies of the workers in the fight against imperialism.** Semi-colonial countries are in such bad shape economically because they are forced into and held in dependence by the imperialist countries, which plunder the country's natural resources and super-exploit its people. The result is starvation and poverty for the majority of the people, affecting us women the most. Women make up more than half of the world's population and contribute 2/3 of the working hours (when we include unpaid domestic work). However, we receive only 10% of the world income and possess less than 1% of the resources. No wonder that 60% of the poorest one billion are women. The protection of the national economy against the imperialist influence is extremely important, as we are driven into poverty through super-exploitation by the imperialists. It is the imperialist beast that exploits the workers in the factories and at the same time creates masses of rural and urban poor. While the rural poor are mainly poor peasants, the urban poor are *"self-employed"* former workers. 20% of the urban population in Latin America, 31% in South Asia and 55% in Black Africa live in slums. Overall this means that 1 out of 8 people in the world live in slums. Like the rural poor, the urban poor have an interest in collaborating closely with the working class to smash the class-based system. Revolutionary women argue for organizing joint forces of the working class, the rural and urban poor to drive the imperialists out of the semi-colonial countries. We fight for real independence of the semi-colonial countries and for the immediate cancellation of all debts to imperialist institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. These institutions force our countries into debt and, as a result, we are forced to live in poverty so that they can garner their huge interest payments! Instead, the gangster financiers should be forced to pay us back every cent they received under the imperialist debt regime. Furthermore, the imperialists must pay massive reparations to the people of the poor countries whom they have been robbing for centuries!

**11. Massive public investment programs to create jobs by developing the economy, the infrastructure and the social system are important demands to eradicate poverty.** In addition, it is vital that massive investments be made to improve the current living conditions in the slums. However, all of this is impossible as long as the economy of the semi-colonial countries is in the hands of the imperialists. The oppressed classes in the semi-colonial countries are the only ones we are capable of getting rid of the imperialists. While, on the surface, it would appear that it is in the interest of the domestic capitalists to

protect their own national economy, they are in fact the first to obey the imperialist dictates in order to maintain their own wealth and rule. They justifiably fear for the position of their own class, as there will be no exploiting class, no capitalist class, under socialism. We as women of the oppressed classes have the greatest interest in a developed and protected economy, a strong infrastructure and a social system that serves the poor, one that serves the majority of us women. We want to end poverty. We have no sympathy at all for those who want to retain their own personal wealth in a system which is so dependent on keeping us poor! We demand a social system that includes public high quality and free childcare facilities! We want to end illiteracy, as more than 40% of the women in Black Africa are affected by it. Therefore, we demand a strong educational system that is free and accessible for all, regardless of gender and age! We demand a social system that covers all health costs, including birth control and abortion! We demand a strong infrastructure and public laundries, cafeterias and many more facilities which will relieve us from the burden of the household! We demand all of this and much more and we are willing to organize ourselves to fight for these demands!

**12. We want to build a revolutionary women's movement based mainly in the semi-colonial countries.** While it is the unity of all workers and poor that we aim for, we respect the varying needs of each and every layer of the oppressed classes. As we face specific additional forms of oppression that (most) men don't face, including sexual violence, we want to organize ourselves in an international revolutionary women's movement. Such a movement should be based mainly in the semi-colonial countries. Such a movement must be part of a revolutionary world party that organizes all oppressed classes and all layers of oppressed in the joint struggle for socialism. We will prove it again, once and for all: We as women of the oppressed classes are the most determined militants of the class struggle!