

What is Bourgeois Feminism?

TCWU = Twin Cities
Women's Union

Generally speaking, bourgeois feminism is an analysis of the position of women that sees men as the enemy - it sees the main contradiction in society as one between men and women. But how many women are going to be attracted to a movement that fundamentally questions their relationship to their husbands, families, or boyfriends?

The brand of feminism that organizations like NOW and the Women's Political Caucus uphold is what is usually thought of when ~~bourgeois~~ bourgeois feminism is mentioned. It has been characterized as bourgeois feminism because it is reformist in nature - working for reforms under capitalism that give illusions about capitalism working; and because it has attracted and is led mainly by professional women from the petit-bourgeoisie who view carving a better position for women within the capitalist system as the ~~liberation~~ necessary liberation for all women. But the basis of why bourgeois feminism is in fact bourgeois is the class that it serves. By viewing men as the enemy and fostering illusions about capitalism working in favor of the people, bourgeois feminism strengthens the dominant bourgeois ideology, thereby objectively serving the bourgeoisie - and weakens and divides the working class and undermines the class struggle which is the driving force behind all revolutionary change.

But let's look at the TCWU - does it represent a rejection of bourgeois feminism or not? To do this let's look at the 3 key elements of an organization: ideology, form of organization and program.

IDEOLOGY: Socialist feminism combines a socialist analysis with a feminist analysis and sees the contradictions of class, sex and race as equal. Accepting that there are only two world outlooks or ideologies - proletariat and bourgeois - we need to examine which ideology Socialist Feminism represents. Women's economic exploitation and their consequent oppression is based on the private ownership of the means of production, the exploitation of man by man. The term class is used to describe the relationship of a section of the population to the means of production. Capitalists own the mines, factories, and financial institutions - they are the capitalist class - the bourgeoisie. The proletariat works in the mines, factories, and offices, but does not own them, it is the working class. The main contradiction in an advanced industrial society like the U.S. is between these two classes, the working ~~and another~~ class and the bourgeoisie. A theory that explains the oppression of women must recognize that the base of that oppression is the same as that of the working class - seeing class as the main contradiction, puts the particular oppression of women in this perspective. But socialist feminism fails to do this and thereby strengthens the dominant bourgeois ideology by undermining the importance of class struggle. For the TCWU to take a proletarian class stand means it must stand with the working class and fight in its interests and develop working class leadership in that struggle.

ORGANIZATION: The TCWU like many left organizations has failed to attract working class women to its ranks. Why is this? Where does a working woman with a family fit into an organization that is largely a social grouping of young single women with alternative lifestyles? How does a woman join one of the unions workgroups and start rapping about the connections between the welfare system and imperialism when she has no basic theory to understand the society we live in beyond her own class experiences, which haven't been viewed as that important in the past?

How can working class women be in leadership bodies in the union when they lack certain "movement" skills? How many mothers even have time to check out the union when child care is not constantly seen as an organizational responsibility? The answer to these questions may provide the answer to this final question - why has the union remained virtually the same size - 30 active members and a mailing list of 200 for the 3 years its been around? By failing to integrate working class women and develop their leadership, the union has not served the interests of the working class. And if its not serving the working class, its serving the bourgeoisie. For the union to become a mass based working class womens organization it must understand the necessity of working class leadership to eh the ~~revolution~~ revolutionary struggle and see the development of working class leadership its primary task and develop forms of organization accordingly.

PROGRAM: The unions strongest work has been in the area of culture - developing a feminist culture - theatre, graphics, films, dances, etc. By focusing on alternative institutions and cultures ~~the~~ organizations like the unions have for too long diverted the energy of the working class away from its primary task - class struggle and away from programs that meet the material needs of working people - child care, jobs, health, cheap food, etc. Alternatives give the illusion that capitalism can work for you if you create your own space within it - but people know that doesn't work. The other programs that the union has developed around welfare, prison support, anti imperialist support work etc, have been basically reformist in nature. These programs have taken an issue, done agitational and support work around them but not put forward a clear enough political analysis of their interconnections to give people the necessary understanding thats going to move anyone forward. The fact that these programs have failed to integrate working class women into them is a reflection of not only this but also the lack of political education that goes on in the workgroups. By failing to develop struggle oriented programs that fight the capitalist system and respond to peoples material needs, the union through its external practice strengthens the influence of bourgeois ideology on the working class, thereby serving the bourgeoisie. How can an organization that doesn't involve itself in struggles against the capitalist class say it is working in the interests of the working class?

What this points out is the contradiction within the union between the desire to put revolutionary theory into practice and actually and actively putting revolutionary theory into practice. In short, it is the contradiction between saying and doing. Recognizign this, the union can and must change if it is going to continue calling itself a organization that is committed to serving the working class.