The PKP and Makibaka Revisited: Women's Liberation in Revolutionary Theory and Practice

LEONORA C. ANGELES

REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN many Third World countries today have realized the importance of women's participation in the national liberation and socialist struggles. As a potential and actual revolutionary force in history, women find organizational expression of their general political and women-specific demands not only in male-dominated parties but also in autonomous women's liberation movements. Women pin their hopes on and actively support the revolutionary struggle as they realize that the end to their oppression as members of the exploited classes and of the subordinate sex could only be possible under socialism.

Since the success of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, feminists in the West and the Third World countries have focused their interests on the post-revolutionary status and roles of women in these societies. The long-dormant question, "Does socialism liberate the women?" or "Is socialism the necessary path to women's liberation?" confronting many women's movements today is reflected in the tensions between these movements and the bigger revolutionary organizations to which they are linked. These tensions are apparent in at least three major areas of concern: (1) How do male-dominated revolutionary parties relate with the women's movement?; (2) To what extent have these parties incorporated the woman question in its analysis of society and the liberation of women in its revolutionary agenda?; and, (3) How does the movement attempt to transform gender relations even before the seizure of power and the material conditions under socialism are achieved? The first tension is basically concerned with the question of organizational autonomy, the second with revolutionary theory, and the last with revolutionary practice.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the place of women's liberation in revolutionary theory and practice in the history of the Philippine Left. It will focus primarily on the experience of the old *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) or Communist Party of the Philippines in the 1930s up to 1960s and the national democratic *Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan* (Makibaka) or Free Association of New Women in the early 70s whose name was adopted by the women's arm of the underground National Democratic Front (NDF) today.

This paper will be composed of four parts. The first part will present the relevant experiences of some countries that have embarked on socialist reconstruction. The second part will focus on how the old PKP had attempted to integrate the woman question in its revolutionary agenda and practice. The third part will analyze how the *Makibaka* situated the woman question within the national democratic struggle, i.e. the question of why women have occupied a subordinate position in society. The last part will offer preliminary insights on the

problems and prospects in developing a feminist orientation within the progressive women's movement. It is hoped that by reflecting on the historical experiences of the PKP and *Makibaka*, we shall be able to draw meaningful insights and lessons valuable to today's Philippine Left in making women's liberation an essential component of its revolutionary agenda.

Feminism and National Liberation Struggle in the Third World: An Overview

During the first quarter of the 20th century, middle class and intellectual women in many colonial countries were behind the emergence of a feminism similar to the "equal rights" campaign of bourgeois women in the West. In their efforts to ape their female counterparts in their 'mother' countries, these colonial women propagated among their less fortunate sisters an image of women that had to be emulated — that of a modern, prominent woman whose own success sets her apart from the majority of poor women, and hence from the working class in general.

In colonies where there were large and strong bourgeoise, feminism of this kind became more significant than in countries where the bourgeois class was absent or weak. The aspirations of these women found concrete expression in the women's suffrage movements that mushroomed in the early 1900s. In the case of some countries, the women's suffrage movement was closely linked to the movement for independence from colonial domination whose leadership also emerged from the Western educated, nationalist middle class. (Liddle and Joski, 1986; Jayawardene, 1986). In some instances, the struggle of women for the vote was suspected to have been encouraged by the state in an attempt to westernize and argue for continued colonial presence (Liddle and Joski, 1986) or to divert the attention of women away from the more urgent issue of gaining national independence (Maranan, 1984). Such observations bring to light some debatable points on the contradictory impact of colonialism on the position of women despite the valid view that colonialism became the main stumbling block to social development.

History also provides us with concrete examples of the close working relationship between the women's movement and working class revolutionary movements in an attempt of the latter to encourage more women's participation in the political struggle. At the same time, this relationship posed a countervailing factor to the state which had a tendency to utilize women's organizations in generating support for its own ends. As women are incorporated into left parties and in separate women's organizations, both male and female revolutionaries realize that the struggle for women's liberation must not be seen as an isolated struggle but as a battle necessarily interwoven into the people's struggle for national and social liberation. This realization is the main dividing line between women's movements in the Third World and the West.

Third World revolutionary history is replete with examples of how the woman question became a good entry point for the integration of women into the revolutionary struggle. In fact, there was a case where women were found to be the most oppressed, and hence, the most crucial revolutionary force. Because women in the traditional Moslem societies of Soviet Central Asia had occupied the lowest status and suffered the most degrading conditions, Soviet authorities found them to be the most potential bearers of a militant revolutionary consciousness — "in effect, a surrogate proletariat (in a society) where no proletariat in the real Marxist sense existed" (Massel, 1974: 22).

Women in revolutionary parties and women's movements in Third World countries have realized that they have to move against the entire structure of exploitation to change the situation of women in society. This is clearly articulated by women activists in their statements, manifestoes and conferences. Dora Maria Tellez of Nicaragua, for instance, proclaimed in an interview that "women's liberation has to do with men's liberation, society's liberation" *(Archives Baricada International:* 5). In a 1973 conference of women in Mozambique, the women declared that by joining the struggle at all levels, the women

> are opening up new prospects for their future, destroying in practice the concepts which relegated them to a passive and voiceless role in society. In short, they are creating the conditions for participating in the exercise of power, taking their destiny into their own hands (Chinchilla, 1979: 150).

The same view is expressed by the leadership of women's liberation movements in other countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Davies, 1983; Randall, 1981; Leacock, 1979).

While the revolution may provide a good venue for the articulation of women's demands and aspirations, women's liberation under post-revolutionary societies would never be achieved unless the women consciously address gender contradictions in the process of the revolution as they strengthen their unions, movements and organizations. The experiences of women today in Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Nicaragua show that the struggle to liberate women does not end with the seizure of state power by the revolutionary party. In the same way that a socialist revolution does not automatically create socialism but only creates the necessary conditions for the socialist reconstruction to take place, socialism does not automatically liberate women unless a distinct women's movement is created to make women's liberation a necessary component and not the mere aftermath of socialism.

The experiences in countries that have undergone revolutionary reconstruction show that it is not divisive to raise the woman question in the process of the revolution; on the contrary, it is even more divisive not to raise it. Unless the question is confronted and addressed, the material divisions imposed by class society are simply taken for granted, reinforced, and perpetuated. It is true that the inequalities of class society can never be fully overcome until classes themselves are liquidated (and this is a very long process), but it is also true that in the process of overcoming class society examples of what socialism can mean must be created (Chinchilla, 1979: 150). Thus, putting forward the issue of women's liberation is one case of transforming social relationships even before the complete transformation of material conditions under socialism is achieved.

PKP and the Woman Question

This section analyzes the problems encountered by the old PKP in integrating women and the woman question into the revolutionary struggle waged in the 1930s up to the late 1960s, particularly the role that women played in the Huk movement, and how the PKP leadership then tackled the question of women's oppression.

The women's suffrage movement led by women of the bourgeoisie during the early part of the century was organizationally divorced from the nascent working class movement. Hence, this incipient form of feminism among women suffragettes did not go beyond the struggle for women's right to vote nor raise other feminist issues tied to class politics. While it served as a good stepping stone, in raising women's consciousness on the issue of women's separation from public life and social significance, the movement clearly reflected the class bias and aspirations of the middle and upper classes that hardly touched the lives of the majority of poor women who viewed the right to vote as a useless exercise under a foreign-dominated and elitist political system.

The other possibility opened during the pre-war period was the trade union movement inspired by socialist ideals. It is lamentable however, that the nascent trade union movement was not able to recognize the opportunity opened by the women's suffrage movement to inspire women's greater political interest and activity. In the first place, there were very few women workers in the formal labor sector. In the second place, the male leadership of the movement, as well as the women themselves, have deeply internalized religious and cultural beliefs characteristic of patriarchal societies. The strength of the prevailing ideology on gender that hitherto pervades the home, family, schools, churches, and the society at large, has prevented even progressive men and women at that time to question the subordinate role of women and the general patterns of social attitudes, interaction, and structures that relegated women to domesticity and subordination.

Statistics from the Women and Child Labor section of the Bureau of Labor then showed that there were 21,326 women employed in cigar and cigarettes, embroidery, textile, footwear, candy, shirt, and button factories. Women were hardly found in printing companies, woodwork factories, and other commercial establishments where trade unionism was most strong (Kurihara, 1942). Even to assume that 100% of the employed women at that time were trade union members, their number was still relatively small compared to the male union members. (See Table I and II). It was

also very likely that these women were not active in trade unionism because of the prevailing gender ideology that taught that politics was not suited to the female personality and therefore, better entrusted to males. Because of less female participation in the labor force, the chances of women to organize around working class issues were greatly diminished.

In rural areas, women have been observed to be more active participants in agricultural production. In this sense, peasant women had greater possibilities of participating actively in peasant organizations led by the Socialist Party that was most active in Central Luzon. While there is no sufficient data to reveal the quantitative and qualitative participation of women in peasant organizations, it might be plausible to suggest that peasant women, like industrial women workers, could not afford the luxury of leaving their homes and children in favor of organizational tasks. They tend to shy away from public political life, if not dissuaded by their fathers or husbands.

Evidently, these are examples of the social and cultural realities that constrain women's active participation in politics.

Empirical evidences show that under capitalism, and even in its underdeveloped form in Third World economic formations, women have not been incorporated into the agricultural and industrial labor force in the same degree as men. Even when some part of the female population is drawn into the labor force, capitalism has done it in such a way as to re-create a gender-based division of labor in the workplace (Abeyesekera, 1983:6). True, in enabling women to work outside of the home, the labor demands of capitalism have been progressive to a certain extent. Yet, work experience is no guarantee that women could be freed from household and childbearing responsibilities considered to be a female domain, nor is it the only precondition for the diminution of the strength of the patriarchal family. This is a clear challenge to the orthodox Marxist position forwarded by Engels (1971) and Lenin (1975) that by bringing women into productive labor outside of the home, women could be liberated from their unpaid domestic tasks and align themselves with the working class in the struggle against capitalism.

Owing to its apparent gender-blindedness, orthodox Marxism is inadequate to explain women's marginalization in economic production and their continued domestication within the home and family. It is also unable to capture the difficulties in organizing women solely around specific working class interests and appreciate the need to understand other forms of oppression that are not reducible to class. By reducing all ideological and political elements as mere expression of the economic base, particularly class relations, it sees women's oppression as a contradiction that could be automatically eradicated when production relations are resolved under socialism — an untenable position that has been refuted by realities in many socialist countries today. While housework and childcare are socialized in these countries, the traditional gender division of labor is left unquestioned since women are still the ones who perform these functions as they continue to contribute their labor, together with men, in meeting the demands of economic production. In China for instance, the socialist revolution had not led to its expected result of undermining the strength of the patriarchal family nor to the elimination of traditional anti-women attitudes and practices, such as preferences for sons. This reality led one social analyst to point out that the Chinese revolution had incepted what she called "patriarchal socialism" (Stacey, 1984).

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In the Philippines, the interregnum brought about by the three-year Japanese occupation opened new possibilities for the integration of women into the anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare led by the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (Hukbalahap) or the Anti-Japanese People's Army. In fact, the participation of women in the armed resistance was considered by a former Huk leader as "one of the proudest features of the Hukbalahap" (Taruc, 1953:102).

After the war, former *Hukbalahap* members who refused to disarm were forced to

return to the hills when they were met with repression by armed civilian guards hired by big landlords resistant to agrarian reform. The Huk guerrilla warfare continued in the countrysides as some PKP members and trade unionists in the urban areas tried the parliament as an arena of struggle. The tactical shift to parliamentary struggle was later abandoned when party intellectuals headed by the Lava brothers saw the revolutionary potentials of the peasantry and declared that the armed struggle should be the main form of struggle based on their analyses of the political situation at that time. The PKP went underground and converted its guerrilla army into a regular revolutionary army, a development which forced the government to declare the PKP and its military arm, the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB) or National Liberation Army, as illegal organizations.

The transformation of the guerrilla army into a regular revolutionary army effected very little changes on the role of women in the revolutionary struggle. Since the Japanese occupation, women in the guerrilla movement were confined to the performance of auxilliary tasks that clearly resembled their domestic functions within the home. They were assigned to do the cooking, washing, and nursing. When the regular revolutionary army became operational, young women and girls became members of the *Squad Balutan* charged with procuring food, medicine, and other supplies for their comrades in the hills. Women and children were also believed to be best suited for intelligence work, as couriers and militia in the villages, because of their inconspicuous nature and discrete ways especially to unsuspecting enemies. Majority of the women were also active in the cultural guilds as singers and artists who provide entertainment to the guerrillas. Very few women like Celia Mariano Pomeroy of the National Education Department and Remedios Gomez *(Ka Liwayway)*, squadron commander, rose to the rank of full party members who had to assume greater responsibilities in education, military operations, and organizational expansion (Pomeroy, 1968).

It has been observed that protracted people's war prior to the seizure of state power opened greater opportunities for the transformation of social relations between the sexes (Chinchilla, 1979:153). The long historical record of struggle of the Huk movement enabled the gradual transformation of domestic labor division and relations between revolutionaries in the realm of love, courtship, marriage, and sex. A more egalitarian division of reproductive domestic labor was observed among men and women in the Huk movement than in ordinary working class families in the lowlands. Interviews with former Huk members revealed that male comrades were encouraged and trained to do the cooking, washing, and childcaring. Conventional practices in courtship and romantic relationships were also transformed. Such transformations were seen as permissible and justified under the peculiar circumstances in the movement.

Courtship within the Huk movement was different from bourgeois practice. The eligible man had to ask permission first from the chairperson of the household where the woman was living and if there were no objections from either the woman or the chairperson concerned, the courtship could go on. It was not clear from accounts however, whether the woman could also take the initiative or assume the more active role in the courtship process.

Since marriages between the Huks could not be held in the plains, couples were given elaborate ceremonies in the hills performed by any ranking leader and attended by the whole camp. The bride and groom would take their marriage vows under an arch of rifles held by their comrades as they swore loyalty not only to each other but also "loyalty to the movement above their relationship and loyalty to the principles of equality of men and women," about which the officiating leader would give a lecture. Huk marriages based not only on mutual affection but also on mutual service to the revolutionary cause were said to be more enduring and faithful than ordinary bourgeois relationships.

The formulation of "The Revolutionary Solution to the Sex Problem" was another attempt on the part of the PKP leadership to transform relations between the sexes. This "solution" or policy was addressed to cases wherein a married man would usually take another wife in the forest in face of difficulties in seeing his common-law wife in the lowlands. The feudal outlook that women should not join their husbands in

the hills and be left in the homes to take care of the children shaped many of these cases. The "solution" was formulated "to settle the problem on a moral plane and to correct this feudal attitude" after a lengthy intra-party discussion on the biological grounds of prolonged sexual frustration that could hamper the political work of men and women. It was agreed in a Party Conference that a man could take a forest wife if it served the interest of the movement and upon strict observance of the following regulations:

> Firstly, a married man cannot take a forest wife unless he can convince the leading committees in the Regional Command to which he belongs that either his health or his work are being adversely affected by the absence from his wife.
>
> Secondly, he must write to or otherwise communicate with his wife in the lowlands and inform her of his intention and need to take a forest wife. He must, at the same time, under the principle of equality give his wife the freedom to enter into a similar relationship in the barrio or city, if she too, finds herself unable to withstand the frustration.
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> Thirdly, the forest wife must be clearly informed that the man is already married and that their relationship will terminate when he is able to return to his regular wife. In other words, there must be no deception of the regular wife and no deception of the forest wife. If at the end of the struggle, a man should decide that he prefers a permanent relation with the forest wife, he must completely separate from previous wife (Pomeroy, 1968: 143-144).

Sexual relationships between revolutionaries indeed pose tough problems to any revolutionary movement. But the "solution to the sex problem" within or outside the revolutionary movement does not lie in the mere formulation of policies (although this could be a progressive starting point) that would govern relations between men and women in married and familial life. The "sex problem" common to both revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries is clearly rooted in unequal gender relations manifested in traditional social expectations of sex-roles, even in relationships. The solution requires the transformation of men's and women's consciousness, indeed a "revolution within the revolution" that would undermine the prevailing gender ideology that becomes an important material force in itself. This poses a big challenge to any revolutionary movement that claims to have a total vision of social liberation.

In the preceding discussion, this paper noted several social, economic and cultural obstacles that prevented the more active participation of women in progressive politics. The revolutionary movement itself led by the PKP could have offered the greatest possibility in integrating more women into the revolution, yet the PKP as a vanguard party failed to coherently analyze the woman question, how women could contribute to the revolutionary cause, and how the revolutionary agenda could address their problems as poor women, doubly oppressed by their being females.

Perhaps, it was only William Pomeroy who had pondered upon the conditions of women then, but it is doubtful whether his ideas became the basis of any concrete party formulation:

> In my years in the Philippines, it is the Filipina that I have found the most interesting, perhaps because in a colonial country, she is found under a double weight. She lacks the independence of her nationality and she lacks the independence of her sex. . .
>
> Just as the Huks are the avenues for the anger of the young men, so are the Huks the gateway to the hope of the young women. Hope for what? For a break in the dull monotony of barrio life and of the early future awaiting her. For the tremendous release of her personality that is found in the quality of life in our camps. For the chance to contribute to her country more than just the act of giving it sons. In the Huks, she is a Filipino, whose purpose is the nation and not the mere confines of a single home and a single man.

Because of the PKP's inability to come up with a systematic analysis of the woman question, owing to its class reductionist view of politics that poses limits to its realization of other equally important forms of oppression and loci of struggle, the seeds of a genuine women's liberation movement that could have been sown in the fertile grounds of that historical juncture were not produced. This is indeed unfortunate considering that in Russia then, which the PKP had looked up to as the center of its orientation and activity, there was already an open, healthy debate among progressive men and women on the particularities of women's oppression and their liberative aspirations and demands.

At best, the PKP had only realized the need for the inclusion of more women in the revolutionary struggle as members of the oppressed classes, if only because they could add numerical strength and support

to the movement. An instrumentalist view of the role of women in the revolution that sees the necessity of integrating more women into the political struggle without adequately confronting the specific oppression of women as a subordinate sex, only reflects the overall opportunist tendency of that movement. While the liberation of women is contingent upon the liberation of all oppressed classes, it is also imperative for the revolutionary movement to confront gender inequalities or the problem of women's oppression as a subordinate sex. A party or revolutionary movement's difficulty in conceptualizing on the woman question and incorporating in its agenda a comprehensive framework to liberate women from their specific forms of oppression is a reflection of that movement's fragmented view of social liberation and its more fundamental problems in revolutionary praxis.

The MAKIBAKA and the Woman Question

The degeneration of the old Communist Party compelled a group of young students from the radical youth organization *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) or Nationalist Youth to initiate a rectification process within the movement. The splinter group was purged from the party and asserted the appropriateness of a national democratic struggle based on their analysis of Philippine society that was highly influenced by Mao Tse-Tung thought. Soon enough, new political organizations among youth and students mushroomed and adopted the national democratic line, among them was the *Makibaka* which literally means "to struggle."

Makibaka was the first women's organization that brought the issue of women's liberation within the context of national liberation and the liberation of all oppressed classes. It traced its formal launching to the day when the organization spearheaded a picket during the coronation night of the Miss Philippines beauty pageant on April 18, 1970, a mobilization tactic reminiscent of Western feminist movements. Part of its manifesto for the occasion read:

> The *Makibaka* believes that the women of the Philippines have a far more important role in our society than participation in such inane activities as beauty contest. *Makibaka* believes that in these crucial times the women of the Philippines should participate in the struggle for change towards a just and equitable society. *Makibaka* calls upon all progressive sectors of our society to join the movement for the emancipation of women from *feudal restraints which prevent their full participation in the struggle for national democracy.* (emphasis supplied.)

From the above statement alone, it was clear that *Makibaka* was formed not only to fill the vacuum left by the irrelevance of conservative women's groups at that time but also to organize more women to advance the national democratic struggle.

There were at least three factors that served as impetus for the organization of an all-women's group like *Makibaka*. First, the participation of women in the militant mass movement, especially younger women in the student movement, were constrained by traditional male views on the proper role of women in society. Even in movements or organizations that were espousing egalitarian principles, women found themselves relegated to auxilliary functions and subordinate tasks. Second, as mentioned earlier *Makibaka* would like to challenge the limited world view and concerns of existing conservative women's organizations at that time. A more meaningful integration of women in public life and social significance would entail their participation in the national struggle for social liberation. Third, if indeed the vision of liberation were to be total, then that vision had to include women's liberation from traditional expectations of their sex roles.

In its assessment of the conservative women's groups, *Makibaka* stressed that these groups should be evaluated in terms of the paths they had taken in tackling the exploitation of women and of the Filipino people. To *Makibaka*, the social welfare concerns of these groups proceeded from their acceptance of the "inevitability" of exploitation and inequalities in a class-divided society. Their reformist claims for legal rights of women were seen as "an abstraction of the problem or the isolation of the woman question from the concrete conditions of Philippine society." To avoid their mistakes, *Makibaka* therefore brought the issue of women's liberation within the scope of the national democratic struggle.

Makibaka naturally imbibed the national democratic analysis of Philippine society and its alternative agenda for social transformation. It viewed the three basic ills of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat,

"Makibaka *was too concerned with politics that it failed to analyze other bases of women's oppression. . .*"

capitalism as the root causes of the exploitation of the Filipino people. The woman question or the subordination of the female sex was traced to the power of the four authorities—political, clan, religious, and male — that were seen as expressions of the feudal-patriarchal ideology and system that perpetuates the oppression of women. This analysis was clearly patterned after Mao's analysis of women's conditions in Chinese society.

To *Makibaka*, the "semi- colonial and semi-feudal" character of society is reflected in the likewise semi-colonial and feudal values of the Filipino people when treating Filipino women. It held that it was the semi-feudal character of Philippine society that subjugated women to the men and diminished the former's role in society, while it was the semi-colonial character that gave rise to sexual commercialism and the projection of women as sex objects. Women therefore could only liberate themselves by transforming this "semi-colonial, semi-feudal" society through their joining the national democratic struggle.

Professing to have this correct orientation in its hands, *Makibaka* members proceeded to organize progressive women and brought under one umbrella all women's bureaus of student organizations such as the KM and the Women's Organizing Committee of the *Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan* (SDK) or Youth Democratic Organization. Though the bulk of its membership came from university students, *Makibaka* also had women workers, peasants, housewives, mothers, and professionals as members. It set-up day-care centers in urban poor communities, launched symposia and photo-exhibits, integrated with workers and jeepney drivers who were on strikes, and joined all the mainstream protest actions during the pre-martial law period. Because of the novelty of women's organizing at that time and the creative forms of its protest actions, *Makibaka* easily gained media publicity as well as enemies and critics, especially from the ranks of their male comrades.

The 'debates' between women activist members of *Makibaka* and their male comrades were most lively in the pages of the *Philippine Collegian*, the student paper of the University of the Philippines. Male criticism of women's organizing at that time were primarily aimed at 'reminding' their female comrades of the "proper orientation" women's organizations must carry — an orientation that essentially followed the class reductionist orthodox Marxist view of the question which, when translated in practice, presents an instrumentalist idea on the role of women in social change. Traditional Marxists see women's oppression as traceable to class oppression alone, women are merely a tactical force indispensable to the revolutionary struggle. The women's liberation movement was viewed as a "valid, significant and novel ideological perspective, capable of tactical mobilization and organizational potentialities, but it is not the fundamental perspective of the class struggle." This line of thought was clearly articulated by Pangilinan and Gonzales (1971) in their theses on women's liberation:

> 1. The fundamental problem of female emancipationists is to crystallize the locus of the women's liberation movement within the strategy of the class struggle.
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> 2. The predominantly *tactical* value of the women's liberation movement lies in the historical imperative to unmask the phenomena of female oppression in all specific and varied forms and manifestations; the tactical effectiveness of the movement lies in its *mobilizing potential*. . .a situation in which the female masses have to be led toward a consciousness on their exploited condition, so that out of this *initial* qualitative change in consciousness, a moment of crisis is reached which leaves them no choice but to objectify their participation in the struggle for national liberation.
>
> 3. The danger that faces any women's liberation movement is to regard male dominance as a central strategic focus. Discovered initially as *necessary clarification* of the specificity of the women's role, the concept male chauvinism *cannot* be treated as axiomatic of the concept of female oppression.
>
> 4. The struggle for women's liberation is an indispensable aspect of the class struggle, female oppression being a structural part of class oppression, and women's participation being an indispensable part of the revolutionary struggle.

5. To consider the women's struggle as a class struggle in itself is a disjunctive, self-defeating premise. It gives the illusion of women as a class capable of waging their own struggle. Once conceived in this manner, the women's liberation movement becomes more than a tactical necessity; it becomes a declaration of principles [emphasis in the original].

There was very little need in the first place to extend such reminders to *Makibaka* so that it would not develop into an extremely "self-conscious political organization" confined to the "narrowness of feminism" (Gonzalez, 1971). In fact, *Makibaka* was all too concerned with the bigger political issues of national democracy that it failed to analyze the other bases of women's oppression that were not reducible to class nor determined by economic relations alone. It was all too critical of the "narrowness of feminism" in the West that it failed to fully understand the valid arguments and more substantive concerns of Western feminists, particularly those who emerged as part of the militant left movement. It was also too subsumed organizationally to the political democratic framework that its adoption *in toto* of its political line and agenda inevitably limited its perspective on women's liberation.

Several factors account for the shift in orientation and perspective of the progressive women's movement today. For one thing, the leadership of the movement is composed of core groups of articulate and educated women who are critical of the "instrumentalist" view of the women's role in the political struggle. They view that if indeed the women's movement would not seriously tackle women's oppression as women, then why create a separate women's liberation movement at all? Their wider exposure to feminist politics abroad and openness to adopt relevant organizing and campaign strategies in an attempt to indigenize feminism also contributed a lot to this change in perspective. Secondly, practical organizing experiences among women also provided lessons that grassroots women are truly facing gender-specific problems which could not be simply reduced to class contradictions, nor easily accommodated within national campaigns. Thirdly, the movement today is composed of individual women and organizations belonging not to a single political line but to different ideological traditions that comprise the Philippine Left spectrum. In the 1970s, the national democratic movement, through *Makibaka*, enjoyed a virtual monopoly of revolutionary praxis on the issue of women's liberation since the other left movements then were in no position of organizational strength and dynamism to come up with their own women's group or at least, analysis of the woman question. Today, unlike before, there are other centers of leftist politics — some are reactivated, others are newly formed — that see the importance of women's liberation in their alternative social vision.

The fragmentation of the women's movement along political ideological lines and traditions, that are nonetheless progressive despite their minor differences, may be viewed by some as counter-productive to the forging of unity within the movement itself. On the other hand, it may turn out, as in this case, to be even healthier for the women's movement at this stage of its development. A pluralist context in organizing and ideological orientation can become the ideal incubator of feminist ideas on social liberation. It appears therefore that unlike in the West where a feminist is anyone who fights for women's rights regardless of political views (she may be a right-wing conservative or a communist, but just the same, a feminist), the term "feminist" has taken on a radical leftist connotation and origins, as in the case of other Third World women activists who consciously distinguish their ideology from that of Western feminism.

It might be interesting to find out why despite the reality that women's organizing in the Philippines is formed and fragmented along ideological lines, the various progressive women's groups are able to unite on certain issues, especially those that most concern women. The specific issues that easily come to mind are those on agrarian reform, women's health and reproductive rights, legal reforms, and four-month maternity leave. It has been observed that unlike the larger movements where they are linked, networking and tactical alliances are more possible and successful among the various women's groups, especially when the campaign centers on a very specific and focused issue. Is this an indication of the oft-repeated line that a commonality of women's experiences exists despite their being divided still along class, ideological, and sectoral lines?

Do women set aside their ideological differences when they come together to tackle women's issues on which they share a lot of common views? Do the women merely postpone or avoid discussions of their larger political agenda in order to preserve the seeming unity within the women's movement, or is this unity merely illusory?

"The women's movement must constantly push its feminism within the nationalist movement. . ."

Makibaka offered no apologies for its orientation. In all its manifestos and publications that reveal its basic organizing strategies, a class-based perspective was used as framework for analyzing women's oppression. The following lines succinctly summarized that outlook:

> The liberation of women has to be put squarely within and alongside of the national democratic struggle. For women are oppressed as Filipinos, as members of their class in society, and as women. Their struggle is essentially *political* as their double oppression assumes the form of *class oppression*. (emphasis supplied.)

Since women's oppression was seen by *Makibaka* as emanating solely from class contradictions, it viewed the success of the national democratic struggle as a *necessary* and a *sufficient* condition for the liberation of women. Hence, *Makibaka's* program did not view women's liberation as having a central significance in the struggle for social liberation. Instead, it viewed women as having a centrally significant role in the struggle. This position expectedly diluted its women's agenda in favor of the "larger political issues." Excerpts from its program clearly prove this point:

> *Makibaka* seeks nationalist industrialization and genuine land reform in order to create a vigorous national economy. Only a vigorous national economy can provide the necessary conditions necessary for the eventual elimination of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, unfair labor practices, inadequate health services and other iniquities in our semi-feudal and semi-colonial economy. *Moreover, only in such an economy can there be greater opportunities for Filipino women who have long been suffering from discriminatory wages and labor practices.*
>
> *Makibaka* is determined to work for the liberation of women from idecadent bourgeois and feudal shackles which condemn them to an existence geared only to the bed-kitchen-church-nursery circle, *denying them the opportunity to develop into more than domestic machines and sexual objects, to contribute their potential for the huge task of nation-building and socialist construction* (emphasis in the original). (Makibaka Information Bureau, *Collegian*, 1972)

Even Makibaka's spokesperson, Ma. Lorena Barros, who was considered then by many of her comrades to have articulated very feminist ideas in private, fell into the trap of viewing women's liberation as an agenda that could wait after the revolution. In fact it was seen as something that was naturally or automatically guaranteed by the revolution. To her, women's liberation means

> first of all, that since the exploitation of women both as members of an oppressed class and as a social group rests on an economic base, liberation entails a restructuring of the economic system and from there the superstructure which is built on it. . .
>
> Second, the broad masses of the Filipino people must first be liberated before any sector, such as women, can be liberated. The primary exploitative relation, that between the American imperialists and their landlord-comprador-bureaucrat capitalist allies on the one hand, and the Filipino masses on the other, must first be all destroyed. . .
>
> It is only by her full commitment in the struggle to liberate the broad masses of the Filipinos from foreign and feudal oppression, the struggle for national democracy that the Filipina can prove herself truly the equal of man.

Makibaka's poor recognition of the need to raise concerns that at first glance seem to belong to the "personal" and their interconnection with politics was criticized by a certain Susan Ramirez (1972). She attacked the movement's "inability and unwillingness to recognize the inter-relationship of the concrete aspects of our daily lives with (its) overall theory." She further asserts that

> such an attitude ignores that the simple social and personal problems of women have both political as well as economic reasons and ramifications. Instead, they are simply considered as "non-political" irrelevances. Therefore, women who just favor easy divorce, abortions on demand, child day care centers, etc., are not politically motivated, not politically oriented, and consequently lost to both Makibaka and the coming revolution.