

04/24/2009 14:59

NOT MUCH OF A DEBATE: 4/23/09

Radical Women (RW) and the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) claim to be engaging in a debate with the International Socialist Organization (ISO) about the origins of women's oppression and the struggle for women's liberation. We in the ISO feel that, misrepresentations and outright untruths aside, there is not much of a debate. We believe that the urgency of the current economic and political moment requires the left in general and members of socialist organizations in particular to find ways of forging unity. Real political differences should not be covered over, but should be argued out in a principled manner with the aim of clarifying the way forward and building the size and the strength of the left as a whole. We feel that Radical Women's "debate" with the ISO does not serve this purpose. Rather, it is an insult to our organization and a disservice to the left in general.

THE ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

Like RW/FSP, we believe that women's oppression is inextricably tied to the rise of class society. In this we follow the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, in particular *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. This position is clearly outlined in the introductory chapters of Sharon Smith's *Women's Liberation and Socialism*, as well as in many of the articles on women's oppression in our newspaper *Socialist Worker* and our journal *International Socialist Review* (<http://www.isreview.org/index.shtml>).

THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Like RW/FSP, we believe in the need for a movement for women's liberation. The ISO's position on women's liberation, and on the fight against oppression generally, is published every two weeks in the print version of *Socialist Worker* newspaper and is always available online. The "Full Equality and Liberation" section of "Where We Stand" reads as follows:

"Capitalism divides the working class, based on sexual, gender, racial, national and other distinctions. The specially oppressed groups within the working class suffer the most under capitalism.

"We oppose racism in all its forms. We support the struggle for immigrant rights. We fight for real social, economic and political equality for women, and for an end to discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

"We support the fight for Black liberation and all the struggles of the oppressed. The liberation of the oppressed is essential to socialist revolution and impossible without it."
(<http://socialistworker.org/where-we-stand>)

Based on this position, we believe that it is the responsibility of all of our members, and that it is in the interest of all working class people, to fight against all of the oppressions created by capitalism.

Our commitment to these struggles has been demonstrated repeatedly through our publications and the daily activity of our members in their unions, at their workplaces, in their communities, on their campuses, and in the streets. Not only have we participated in every major struggle geared specifically toward protecting or reclaiming women's rights—from abortion clinic defenses to fights against rape—but we bring our critique of women's oppression into all our work and point out how imperialism, the prison system, and the treatment of immigrants, as examples, impact women and add to their oppression.

THE RIGHT OF OPPRESSED PEOPLES TO ORGANIZE INDEPENDENTLY

Like RW/FSP, we recognize the right of oppressed people's to organize independently. However, we do not advocate for the practice of separate organization on principle because we believe that all working class people are harmed by every form of oppression even though every working class person does not experience all forms of oppression. Working class men do not benefit from sexism, working class white people do not benefit from racism, and working class straight people do not benefit from the oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

Unlike RW/FSP, we believe that the trend toward identity politics—organizing based on individual identity and the experience of a particular oppression—has been counterproductive in this country in that it has accommodated the divisions imposed on the working class by capitalism rather than helping to overcome them. This is a judgment based on an examination of history. Members of oppressed groups within the ISO may form separate caucuses should they so choose. It is a testament to our organization's ability to convince all of its members to take all forms of oppression seriously that there are no such caucuses currently in existence.

BUILDING SOCIALISM AND THE LEFT IN THE PRESENT

We have, do, and will continue to work with any progressive group or individual interested in building the fight for women's liberation, and we regret and strive actively to address the fact that there are so few such groups in existence. This is why we open our publications to progressive people with divergent political views and invite people from outside our organization to speak at our conferences (socialismconference.org/). Building the left in this way is particularly important given the current condition of the economy, which is adding to and exacerbating many forms of oppression. We believe that there is dire need and enormous opportunity for the left and for socialists to organize right now. This is why we find Radical Women's unprincipled and sectarian behavior particularly destructive.