

Once Again on the Emancipation of Women

A Brief Reply to New Labor Press & La Obrera

by Former Members of the Proletarian Feminist Research Group

EDITOR'S NOTE

We are pleased to share the following submission from comrades formerly involved in the now-defunct PROLETARIAN FEMINIST RESEARCH GROUP, who reached out to us following the publication of our launch documents. In CAPITALISM, IMPERIALISM, AND REVISIONISM we make direct reference to the positions put forward by the former PFRG and continue to find them to be largely correct points of orientation for communist intervention in the women's and LGBT movements today, making this defense of their content a timely contribution to the struggle for the clarification of our ideology. – **LM Editorial Committee**

Introduction

Red salute to the comrades of the Long March Editorial Board for the launch of their journal! In their launch announcement, they argue that

“The impact of our theoretical weakness means that our trend has little meaningful experience with engaging in [...] theoretical debate, and no clear sense of its stakes beyond shortsighted questions of practical work. Consequently, where struggle over theoretical and ideological questions occurs, it is blunted by antagonistic bloviation and disregard for questions of dialectical materialist *method*; precise argumentation is abandoned in favor of “scoring points,” posturing, or bombastic rhetoric. Substantive philosophical questions, when they are taken up at all, are dismissed as “abstract” and useless to the “real work” of practice. While we appreciate that the retreat of Marxist philosophy into the bourgeois academy (or into fashionable semi-academic publishing houses) has certainly resulted in the mass production of sterile petit-bourgeois philosophical tracts masquerading as Marxism, surrendering the terrain of philosophy to our enemies wholesale has meant that the philosophical equipment to which we have access today largely takes the form of “popularizer documents” that themselves engage in mechanistic distortions or stilted presentations of our ideology, resulting in a cycle of underdevelopment from which we are now responsible for breaking.”

This claim is consistent with the position which our own abortive project took up in our preliminary declaration in 2022, identifying as a main danger “the revisionism which dominates the International Communist Movement, and whose backwards lines have crept unopposed into the Maoist tendency itself; this trend wears a variety of masks, but always fails to present a dialectical materialist approach

to the women's struggle or provide a proletarian class line capable of leading it, and thereby liquidates the vanguard role of communist politics."¹ If, as we assessed at the time, the U.S. anti-revisionist (that is, Maoist) camp faced ideological crisis and theoretical disorganization, the principle task, even before the consolidation of an organizational headquarters, was to *rectify its outlook*, a task which the Long March comrades refer to as the "rectification of the general line." As veteran activists of the women's and LGBT movements, we understood our own responsibility to be the pursuit of that rectification as regards our trend's orientation towards the question of women's emancipation in particular, leading us to launch the now-defunct (but aspirationally named) "Proletarian Feminist Research Group". It was this understanding which drove us to take up the banner of *proletarian feminism*, an abbreviation whose generic content we might sum up as *the imposition of the proletarian class line in the women's movement*. We remain committed to that outlook today, although we acknowledge that our pursuit of that task was essentially incomplete. On its basis, we articulated our project in the following terms:

"[A] theoretical intervention to disambiguate the correct line for the women's and transgender struggles, and to oppose the wrong ideas which inform the mechanical-materialist, chauvinistic and petit-bourgeois postmodernist positions which have been taken up by a wide set of so-called Maoist groupments across the ICM."²

In this spirit, we produced a series of documents outlining our orientation, including: a) a basic historical materialist account of the super-exploitation and oppression of women in capitalist society b) a presentation of the ideological expression of this super-exploitation and oppression, with a particular eye to its role in motivating LGBT oppression and c) a polemic against an ultra-chauvinistic line put forward by *Klassenstandpunkt*, an organ associated with the German supporters of the International Communist League.

Since their publication, these documents have been adopted as training tools by a number of revolutionary and feminist organizations around the U.S. and Canada, have been republished and expanded on by sympathetic groups, and have even been translated into at least two other languages (that we know of). While we're proud of our rather small contribution to the revitalization of serious theoretical engagement with the "feminist question" by the anti-revisionist left, we're also keenly aware of the limits of our project, including the failure to develop our polemic against certain deeply eclectic tendencies common in the LGBT movement or expand our presentation of the link between imperialism and women's oppression in the third world countries, and our failure to articulate a programmatic content for the proletarian feminist struggle in the U.S. Most egregious, however, was our abrupt dereliction of the project altogether. When the struggle around abortion and transgender oppression escalated sharply from 2022 on, rather than developing and fighting for a serious ideological intervention which could have consolidated activists around a clear class line in the growing mass movement, we liquidated into narrow practicalism and abandoned the theoretical terrain to a general confusion and disorientation which was then, and today remains, dominant.

Had we remained active, we also could have responded in a more timely way to the "polemics" levied at our position by the New Labor Press (NLP) and their camp's women's affiliate, La Obrera (LO). In this, we admit to a certain aloofness which was unbecoming of serious revolutionaries. When we received the publication of NLP's mischaracterization of our line, we found its argument to be so

vacuous and juvenile that we responded in the manner of Lenin: “Trotsky has sent in a silly letter. We shall neither print it nor reply to him.”³ While our assessment of the content of the NLP “critique” of our position remains the same—it is an unserious bloviation, indicating either exceedingly poor reading comprehension or a deliberate attempt at falsification—the reproduction of its inanity in the pages of LO has made clear that the influence of the incorrect ideas of the NLP/LO/Class Partisan camp is of increasingly serious concern given the apparent growth of their wing of the movement across the country.

In keeping with the objectives of Long March as we understand them, we submit the below document as a contribution to the struggle for ideological clarity coextensive with the LM comrades’ polemic against the right-opportunist Maoist Communist Union, and as an opportunity to defend our own orientation from its mischaracterization. Our objective here is primarily to “correct the record” on the question of proletarian feminism, and so we will only secondarily treat with questions external to that problematic (e.g., labor line), and that only when relevant for the purposes of supporting our primary line of argumentation.

We have structured this paper principally as a response to the NLP criticisms and only laterally with their re-articulation by LO in “Centrism and Eclecticism in the Women’s Movement.”⁴ We hope to engage in longer form with the line advanced by La Obrero in a future document responding to their article on organizational trends in the women’s movement.

In autumn of 2024, NLP published *A Worker’s Guide to: Theoretical Publications*⁵, a document which, taken at its name, is apparently intended to instruct comrades on engaging in theoretical inquiry and writing. As materialists, however, we recognize that the main function of a document is not what it *purports to do* but *what it does in reality*; in reality, of course, the NLP’s “guide” does very little to develop the theoretical capacity of its readers, given its apparent inability to seek truth from facts (a key step in the process of synthesizing rational knowledge!) or engage substantively with the arguments of its interlocutors, crucial skills for any budding theoretician.⁶

In order to adopt an attitude of assuming the best in our interlocutors, we have chosen to believe that they are severely misreading us, as we would prefer that to the alternative (that our friends would go on the internet and tell lies).

NLP’s failure to advance beyond a *superficial characterization* of our line forecloses from the start their capacity to struggle productively with its content. Take, for example, the confusion that plagues NLP in attempting to describe our stance on the purpose of gender and sexuality as ideological constructs.

“We have the immediate contradiction that according to the text gender and sexuality exist ‘only insofar as it serves to organize certain ideological constructions’ (i.e. gender and sexuality do not exist objectively in the real world) but, on the other hand, ‘we also take for granted the thesis that transgender people exist in the world’ (presumably the objective material world?!).”⁷

Contrast this claim with our own words, which appear in the very same document cited by the NLP: “To speak of the existence of women (or of men) as social group is to speak of the existence of a set of social relations (exploitation of women by the bourgeoisie) with an ideological superstructure.” We hope the wide gulf between this passage and NLP's characterization of it should be obvious; in order to leave nothing to chance, however, we will take the time to clarify explicitly the basic Marxist thesis that social relations *exist objectively in the real world*, and thus *can be changed in the real world*. Their rejection of this fact is, presumably, the cause of their incredulous parenthetical exclamation, “presumably the objective material world?!”

The full passage reads “We also take for granted the thesis that transgender people – *by which we mean people who experience gender dysphoria and seek to change their bodies or social existence in order to relieve that dysphoria* – exist in the world.” We imagine it is as clear to our readers as it is to us that transgender people exist and that NLP excised this definition from their citation of our document in order to distort the line they set out to critique. Unfortunately for the NLP, deleting text does not free them from the obligation to read.

Another crucial error occurs in the following passage:

“Similarly, as a function of their hybrid Marxist-Althusserian framework we are presented with the thesis that gender and sexuality only exist as ‘ideological constructions’ tied to private property, something which is verifiably false given that we know gender and sexuality have existed in primitive classless societies without private property.”⁸

We do not make this claim this *anywhere* within *any* of our documents. What we argue, in the sections our friends in the NLP themselves quote, is that gender, understood as a *historically specific social phenomenon*—which, like all social phenomena, has today a distinct character proper to its determination in the last instance by the capitalist mode of production and the residue it retains from its historic iterations in pre-capitalist social formations—is mobilized by the bourgeoisie to facilitate the reproduction of the conditions of production via the family form. The NLP *should* understand this, because in the very section they cite we state that

“the concept of gender (which is to say, the ideology of gender) develops and was deployed after the institution of father-right in order to justify the particular economic arrangement of the family form. The interpellation and constitution of women as a distinct social group coheres on the basis of both this particular economic arrangement (the family) and its ideological expression, but this is hardly an unchanging set of criteria (and as Lenin taught, ‘the fundamental proposition of Marxian dialectics is that all boundaries in nature and society are conventional and mobile’).” (Ideology and the Gender Question)

Following Engels, we accept that the family-form as we know it today emerged alongside private property. Its specific character corresponds to the particular structure of the social formation which gives rise to it. In order to make this point as clearly as possible, and so as to demonstrate to our friends that this claim is far from “postmodern,” we quote Engels’ *Origins of the Family* text *in extenso*:

“In the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) there still existed in the first half of the nineteenth century a form of family in which the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces were exactly what is required by the American and old Indian system of consanguinity. But now comes a strange thing. Once again, the system of consanguinity in force in Hawaii did not correspond to the actual form of the Hawaiian family. For according to the Hawaiian system of consanguinity all children of brothers and sisters are without exception brothers and sisters of one another and are considered to be the common children not only of their mother and her sisters or of their father and his brothers, but of all the brothers and sisters of both their parents without distinction. While, therefore, the American system of consanguinity presupposes a more primitive form of the family which has disappeared in America, but still actually exists in Hawaii, the Hawaiian system of consanguinity, on the other hand, points to a still earlier form of the family which, though we can nowhere prove it to be still in existence, nevertheless *must* have existed; for otherwise the corresponding system of consanguinity could never have arisen.

The family [says Morgan] represents an active principle. It is never stationary, but advances from a lower to a higher form as society advances from a lower to a higher condition ... Systems of consanguinity, on the contrary, are passive; recording the progress made by the family at long intervals apart, and only changing radically when the family has radically changed. [Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 444. – Ed.]

‘And,’ adds Marx, ‘the same is true of the political, juridical, religious, and philosophical systems in general.’ While the family undergoes living changes, the system of consanguinity ossifies; while the system survives by force of custom, the family outgrows it. But just as Cuvier could deduce from the marsupial bone of an animal skeleton found near Paris that it belonged to a marsupial animal and that extinct marsupial animals once lived there, so with the same certainty we can deduce from the historical survival of a system of consanguinity that an extinct form of family once existed which corresponded to it.

The systems of consanguinity and the forms of the family we have just mentioned differ from those of today in the fact that every child has more than one father and mother. In the American system of consanguinity, to which the Hawaiian family corresponds, brother and sister cannot be the father and mother of the same child; but the Hawaiian system of consanguinity, on the contrary, presupposes a family in which this was the rule. Here we find ourselves among forms of family which directly contradict those hitherto generally assumed to be alone valid. The traditional view recognizes only monogamy, with, in addition, polygamy on the part of individual men, and at the very most polyandry on the part of individual women; being the view of moralizing philistines, it conceals the fact that in practice these barriers raised by official society are quietly and calmly ignored. The study of primitive history, however, reveals conditions where the men live in polygamy and their

wives in polyandry at the same time, and their common children are therefore considered common to them all – and these conditions in their turn undergo a long series of changes before they finally end in monogamy. The trend of these changes is to narrow more and more the circle of people comprised within the common bond of marriage, which was originally very wide, until at last it includes only the single pair, the dominant form of marriage today.”⁹

Is our Engels here engaged in a vile postmodernism, or must we admit that other ways of organizing social and biological reproduction, corresponding to earlier stages of the development of the productive forces of society, have given rise to *other formulations of gender and sexuality*? We must remain utterly precise: *the particular structuring effects of a given mode of production generate specific ideas about how the social formation should be organized*, ideas which necessarily absorb the elements peculiar to the prehistory of that social formation in a repurposed form proper to the new structure. Our discussion of gender, sexuality and the family must therefore attend carefully to its particular character as a *specific social phenomenon proper to a specific social formation* in order to grasp, as Engels does, its historically specific character. Or, to quote Anuradha Ghandy, “patriarchy takes different content and forms in different societies depending on their level of development and the specific history and condition of that particular society [...] it has been and is being used by the ruling classes to serve their interests.”¹⁰

NLP’s methodological and historical errors completely prevent them from firmly grasping our position, and apparently from grasping Marxism in general, given their wholesale liquidation of basic elements of our tradition’s theory of the state and ideology.

For example, they claim that, according to us, “men and women only exist ‘ideologically,’” and thus that “it logically follows that they are only oppressed ‘ideologically’ and can only be liberated ‘ideologically.’”¹¹

Let us respond by quoting our own text.

“If, as we argue above [e.g., in ‘The Political Economy of Women’s Oppression’], the oppression of women generates superprofits for the bourgeoisie, it follows that the same bourgeoisie retain a vested interest in the maintenance of that oppression, particularly insofar as it is rooted in a particular set of relations integral to social reproduction; a challenge to the institutions which *organize the forces of this oppression* would therefore pose a threat to those same superprofits *as well as* the conditions of production themselves. The ideological function of patriarchy serves as the bourgeois answer to that possibility, reinforcing the economic base of women’s oppression (the family) and perpetuating the subjugated position of women more broadly through social chauvinism and political/legal repression.

The family constitutes the primary structure around which the oppression of women is oriented. The various ideological appendages which follow from this, from ‘sexuality’ to gender or ‘deficient womenly nature’, **are meaningful only insofar as they are translated into social practices which maintain or execute that oppression**, and must be conceived

of in strictly historical terms, in accordance with that structural function.” (“Ideology and the Gender Question”)

We have placed the particularly relevant clause in bold so as to make it harder to miss for our friends in the NLP. We reiterate: *the ideological constitution of the social role ascribed to women under capitalism becomes materially substantive only upon its effectuation (or the threat of its effectuation) on real human beings by the real disciplinary practices of capitalist social life.*

To illustrate this we point to the example of capitalist law, an ideological construction *par excellence*: does the law exist in any domain *other* than the ideological, as a set of *expressions* of the conditions of existence of bourgeois rule articulated as juridical forms? Only upon its enforcement by the pigs or the courts (or the threat of its enforcement), does the law “become real,” and we know (and assume that the NLP know as well) that the batons of the police are *very real indeed*, not very ideological at all, and this despite the ideological character of the law!

We ask our readers for forgiveness as we belabor this point *even further* by quoting Marx and Engels’ *German Ideology*, which our friends in the NLP also reference:

“The conditions of existence of the ruling class (as determined by the preceding development of production), ideally expressed in law, morality, etc., to which [conditions] the ideologists of that class more or less consciously gave a sort of theoretical independence; they can be conceived by separate individuals of that class as vocation, etc., and are held up as a standard of life to the individuals of the oppressed class, partly as an intelligent or recognition of domination, partly as the moral means for this domination. It is to be noted here, as in general with ideologists, that they inevitably put a thing upside-down and regard their ideology both as the creative force and as the aim of all social relations, whereas it is only an expression and symptom of these relations.”¹²

We agree with the NLP that *The German Ideology* articulates historical materialism in a masterful and concise manner; apparently *unlike* the authors of NLP’s polemic, however, we have *actually read the text*. The claim that a social formation’s mode of production generates an ideological superstructure proper to its form is rather basic Marxism, despite the confusion of the NLP. Our discussion of the *ideology* of the family is a discussion of a conceptual form corresponding to the *obviously actually existing* social structure of the family, which organizes relations as varied as consanguinity, property transfer, cohabitation, biological reproduction, child rearing, etc. This now is contra La Obrera, who share in the mischaracterization of our position, and in Centrism and Eclecticism in the Women’s Movement go so far as to suggest that we believe the family does not exist, stating, ostensibly in opposition to us, that “the family exists materially. When we as women are abused, attacked, beaten, and killed by men in our families, this is a material reality and not an ideological one. It reproduces itself *not* by ideology but by material political economic relations.”

We agree in no uncertain terms with the LO authors that the family *exists materially* and to the benefit of its immediate patriarch—although we note, in their characterization, the absence of reference to the benefit afforded to the bourgeoisie as a whole!—and *it is precisely for this reason* that it possesses an ideological structure corresponding to it.

The LO claim that we transform the family “from a real social relation that people *enter into spontaneously* under the material demands of class society and a material part of the superstructure of society, to a mere ideological apparatus that can be deployed by thought alone” (emphasis ours) in our paper. Again, we ask: where do we claim that the family “can be deployed by thought alone”? The red thread of our theoretical project may well be reduced to the specific examination of, and strict emphasis placed on, the role played by the family-form in facilitating a core need of the bourgeoisie: the reproduction of the conditions of production. Unlike the LO, we are interested in undertaking a concrete analysis of precisely *how* it accomplishes this for the bosses. Rather than hand-waving analysis of a real social relation away by simply claiming that people “enter into the family spontaneously,” we aimed to examine *how and why* the family-form is situated within capitalism, how it reproduces itself, and how the ideological mechanism of its reproduction is linked to the special oppression of LGBT people.

If a man enters into a family relationship with a woman, raises children, etc., because, as the LO put it, it benefits his material financial interests (a claim with which we agree, as we spent the entirety of our first document on political economy developing!), we ask: *how does he know that it does so?* Rather than chalking that knowledge up to a magical natural intuition that would enable a family to form “spontaneously,” we are clear that ideology—the set of ideas about the world corresponding to the dominant class of a particular social formation’s need to reproduce the conditions according to which its position is secured, ideas which are transmitted to the population through a variety of mechanisms, from schools to churches to, yes, families—is a *real force with a material basis* and which is behind the decision of our budding patriarch to take on his wife.

LO, lacking a clear theory of ideology, are forced to adopt an incoherent, literally *mystifying*, conception of the process by which subjects enter into social structures. These alleged materialists, who have mounted their polemic against us ostensibly in *defense* of materialism, have jettisoned it altogether. We enter the family relation “spontaneously.” We are assigned gender at birth “spontaneously.” Indeed, by daring to risk a concrete analysis of just how such processes work—processes which are hardly spontaneous, but instead involve real human subjects driven by the *real force of ideology*, whether a doctor performing surgery on an intersex infant to bring them in line with a patriarchal gender binary or a man seeking a tradwife “bangmaid” to exploit and abuse—we, our friends have decided, are the *real* idealists.

We note here that just because we paid special attention to an ideological mechanism *in a paper on the question of ideology* does not mean that we are not aware of the manifold aspects of the reproduction of the family-form; on the contrary, as we lay out in our response to Klassenstandpunkt,

“If ‘construction’ refers to the notion that something is contingent and shaped by fluctuating historical processes, this is not a threat to Marxism. In fact, such a view is *inherent* to the dialectical outlook, which understands that history is shaped by material processes in a system of complex social relations. Marxism does not assert that things have an unchanging internal essence; rather they exist within processes and systems of social relations. On the other hand, we reject the postmodernist idea that social phenomena are continuously constructed via *discourse*. Unfortunately, the Germans equate these two possible readings of “construction” and treat it with the utmost philosophical superficiality.

This philosophical laziness thus leads the Klassenstandpunkt article to offer a particularly mystified view of women's oppression. For them, struggle against patriarchy and oppression by patriarchy both exist at the level of superstructural norms and behavior alone. Consequently, the authors approach the question of women's oppression *with the same error as the postmodernists*. Contingency as a concept is rejected altogether, and this rejection thus throws out the entirety of the materialist analysis advanced by Marxists like Adrianzen. The reader is thus left without any dialectical materialist theory of patriarchy in the first place." ("Against the Chauvinist Line")

The entire thesis of our response to the chauvinist line is that its conception of patriarchal oppression reduces its entire approach to the merely behavioral-superstructural—which is to say ideological—and argues that

"The struggle of the women's movement used to be that these differences in appearance [between men and women] should not exist. You can see this in how 'flirtatious' the women comrades were in the Cultural Revolution. They had the same cap and the same jacket as the male comrades, a slightly different haircut perhaps and sometimes a skirt, but that was it. And that was a good thing. They then also did the same jobs as the men and were in no way inferior to them. This is the Marxist understanding of women's liberation."¹³

Against this narrowly ideological conception, we understand that the oppression and exploitation of women is irreducible to *merely* problems of behavior. The emancipation of women demands not only that we work the same jobs as men and wear the same clothes, or that the capitalist economic basis of our current position be utterly destroyed through socialist revolution and proletarian dictatorship, but that the *family-form itself must be dismantled and replaced by the full socialisation of housework and childcare*, and the *ideological residue of patriarchy and male chauvinism must be rooted out and annihilated over the course of cultural revolution* against the remnant practices and ideas of the old society.

Indeed, the latter point is merely the application of the principle of cultural revolution to the specific situation of women; as Chen Boda famously wrote in the "Cow Demons and Snake Spirits" document,

"In the last analysis, the class struggle in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle for leadership. The exploiting classes have been disarmed and deprived of their authority by the people, but their reactionary ideas remain rooted in their minds. We have overthrown their rule and confiscated their property, but this does not mean that we have rid their minds of reactionary ideas as well. During the thousands of years of their rule over the working people, the exploiting classes monopolized the culture created by the working people and in turn used it to deceive, fool and benumb the working people in order to consolidate their reactionary state power. For thousands of years, theirs was the dominant ideology which inevitably exerted widespread influence in society. Not reconciled to the overthrow of their reactionary rule, they invariably try to make use of this influence of theirs surviving from the past to shape public opinion in preparation for the political and economic restoration of capitalism. The uninterrupted struggle on the

ideological and cultural front in the 16 years from liberation up to the current exposure of the anti-Party and anti-socialist black line of the “Three-Family Villages,” big and small, has been a struggle between the forces attempting restoration and the forces opposing restoration.

The proletarian cultural revolution is aimed not only at demolishing all the old ideology and culture and all the old customs and habits, which, fostered by the exploiting classes, have poisoned the minds of the people for thousands of years, but also at creating and fostering among the masses an entirely new ideology and culture and entirely new customs and habits — those of the proletariat. This great task of transforming customs and habits is without any precedent in human history. As for all the heritage, customs and habits of the feudal and bourgeois classes, the proletarian world outlook must be used to subject them to thoroughgoing criticism. It takes time to clear away the evil habits of the old society from among the people. Nevertheless, our experience since liberation proves that the transformation of customs and habits can be accelerated if the masses are fully mobilized, the mass line is implemented and the transformation is made into a genuine mass movement.”¹⁴

As we argue, the *ideology* of patriarchy serves the interests of the bourgeoisie by helping to maintain the super-exploitation of women and to fix their role in the reproduction of the conditions of production. It is a reactionary ideology of the old society and must be swept away through cultural revolution.

Our argument, again following Engels in no uncertain terms, is that the family-form, far from a natural and transhistorically-stable phenomenon, has a specific character particular to its instantiation under capitalism, which is to the benefit of the bourgeoisie. This specific character is a “social custom”: the particular way that relations of consanguinity and social reproduction are organized in a particular society. This custom is linked to a broad set of such customs related to male chauvinism, specific ideas about the status of women, LGBT people, gendered behavior, etc., and we refer to that set of customs as “patriarchy.” Patriarchy is *reactionary*, not neutral, and *must be swept away through cultural revolution*, which is only possible under *the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat*.

All this is clear as day in our existing documents.

In a rather ironic twist, later in the NLP’s own “guide,” they (correctly!) adopt a conceptual framework not at all dissimilar to our own, but applied to the concepts of race and nation. They argue:

“Racial ideology is not unique to our American context, but is employed as a reactionary bourgeois idea by reactionaries and imperialists around the globe in order to better disorganize the masses and better organize the oppression and exploitation of oppressed nations, national minorities, and immigrant groups.”¹⁵

Their statement that racial ideology is produced by imperialism to “better organize the oppression and exploitation of oppressed nations, national minorities, and immigrant groups” is, in essence, identical to our statement that gender and sexuality exist as such to better organize the oppression of women and

LGBT people, and indeed *parallels exactly our phrasing*, as we describe patriarchal ideology as tool for the defense of “the institutions which **organize the forces of [women’s] oppression.**”

Let us examine these arguments—a superstructural construct (race/so-called biologically determined gender relations) emerged to justify a social relationship (national oppression/patriarchy) to ensure the reproduction of the mode of production and help maintain the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. As it turns out, something *can* exist “to organize certain ideological constructions in the service of the reproduction of the [...] conditions of production”!

We note in passing that NLP’s *whole strategic orientation*, based on the understanding that the bourgeois unions are fundamentally captured by the state, also implicitly utilizes the very same conceptual framework. Their account of the state unions, with which (at the level of analysis, if not necessarily program) we agree, characterizes them as “wedded to the strength and health of the bourgeois democratic state, and in particular its counter insurgency welfare arm.”¹⁶ The state unions, they argue, capture, organize and disarm the class struggle, and mislead workers into believing in a class truce, in peaceful struggle, in legal tactics, etc. Ideology, *par excellence!*

Moreover, this is, on their own argument, basically an “Althusserian” position, since it leverages a conception of the state which is broader than merely “special bodies of armed men”—they accuse us of having “embrace[d] Althusser’s revisions of Marxism regarding ideology and the superstructure, specifically the concepts of ‘repressive state apparatuses’ and ‘ideological state apparatuses’”¹⁷ and yet do so themselves by insisting, correctly, that the state apparatus (a Leninist term, despite the allergic reaction it seems to have caused in our friends) includes a “counter-insurgency *welfare arm.*”¹⁸ The essence of the thesis that the state is (like all things) comprised of a divided unity, possessed of a repressive and an ideological aspect, is one which dates back to Engels and to Lenin’s own account in *The State and Revolution*, and is even further developed by Mao over the course of the Cultural Revolution.

As this is not a long-form theoretical document on the question of Marxist state theory, we leave the elaboration of this argument to our interlocutors. In the interests of citing our references clearly, however, we point to the following passage in *The State and Revolution* as illustrative of this concept:

“Another reason why the omnipotence of ‘wealth’ is more certain in a democratic republic is that it does not depend on defects in the political machinery or on the faulty political shell of capitalism. A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell (through the Palchinskys, Chernovs, Tseretelis and Co.), it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it.

We must also note that Engels is most explicit in calling universal suffrage as well an instrument of bourgeois rule. Universal suffrage, he says, obviously taking account of the long experience of German Social-Democracy, is ‘the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state.’

The petty-bourgeois democrats, such as our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and also their twin brothers, all the social-chauvinists and opportunists of Western Europe, expect just this “‘more’ from universal suffrage. They themselves share, and instill into the minds of the people, the false notion that universal suffrage ‘in the present-day state’ is really capable of revealing the will of the majority of the working people and of securing its realization. Here, we can only indicate this false notion, only point out that Engels’ perfectly clear statement is distorted at every step in the propaganda and agitation of the ‘official’ (i.e., opportunist) socialist parties.”

Lenin’s insistence on specific form of the bourgeois democratic state, and on the role of universal suffrage as an instrument of bourgeois rule, illustrates that the state functions to secure capitalist domination not simply through violence but through practices, institutions, and social/cultural rituals that interpellate individuals into *subjects of bourgeois law* through the *threat* of violence. The educative system is directly linked to this, and the family, as a hybrid disciplinary-educative-social reproductive structure reflects that link. Fierce struggles over the revolutionization of the educative system during the GPCR are instructive in this regard:

“In class society, education is a phenomenon of class struggle. It is by no means true that ‘a man should receive a proper education in order to be a man.’ Every class wants education to be given because it wants to maintain its rule. Education develops out of the needs of class struggle, not of an abstract ‘human’ need. Every class educates and transforms the younger generation in accordance with its own world outlook and political line, training its own successors and thereby achieving the purpose of consolidating its own rule. After seizing political power, the proletariat must turn education, which is an instrument for bourgeois rule, into an instrument for demolishing this rule and for completely eliminating, the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes.”¹⁹

The conception of education rendered here as consolidating the rule of the dominant class means that the educative system is by definition *part of the state*, understood in the broad sense developed by Lenin as *the tool by which the ruling class of a given social formation dominates the other social classes*. The state is *the* tool by which the ruling class’ political power is exercised, its rule is consolidated. Other social phenomena which facilitate this aim are thus classed under the broad header of apparatuses—a word which, despite the anxieties of our friends, literally just means a collection of tools, instruments, machinery, or materials used for a specific purpose or activity—of the state, which we then subdivide as either principally *repressive* apparatuses or principally *ideological* apparatuses, although we note that both kinds of apparatus fulfill both functions at various times (one need not have a police gun over ones’ shoulder to be interpellated by bourgeois law, while the abusive fists of the father are as strong a repressive tool as the memory of his voice in one’s head). As we have already referenced our conception of the GPCR and the relationship between the state and ideology above, we take for granted that readers can readily grasp our position on the development of this problematic by Mao and the Chinese communists.

Consequently, one can, indeed, arrive at these conclusions without citation of Althusser at all (as the NLP have inadvertently demonstrated, and which we attempted to demonstrate above by deliberately

developing our counter-arguments without reference to him until this very paragraph). That we choose to at all is merely because we find specific aspects of his argument to provide us with a convenient shorthand.

Our friends at the NLP and LO seem more concerned with the *fact of our having cited Althusser* than the content of our (or, indeed, his) positions. Were there substantive criticisms of Althusser offered, we would be delighted to engage with them; unfortunately, neither the NLP nor LO provide us with any, which is unfortunate, given the load-bearing dependence of their allegation of revisionism on the mere fact that we have employed concepts from a theorist they dislike. And this despite the fact that they seem (however unconsciously) to employ the very same concepts!

Despite the lengths we have gone to make our positions absolutely clear, we harbor little doubt that even with this clarification our friends at the NLP and LO will still have disagreements, either real or imagined, with our orientation. Still, as Chairman Gonzalo reminds us, Communists must always be optimists, even if that hope is rather slim. Far more importantly, however, we hope that the publication of this document can thoroughly rebut the more egregious misrepresentations of our orientation, draw a clear line of demarcation between a genuinely materialist position on the “feminist question,” and the confused mess advanced by our friends at the NLP, and correct the undue and harmful influence of such misleadership to the broader movement.

- 1 PFRG, “A Blunt Knife Draws No Blood.” All PFRG documents can be found at proletarianreserachgroup.wordpress.com.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 Lenin to Inessa Armand, January 22, 1917, in LCW v.35.
- 4 La Obrera / The Working Woman, “Centrism and Eclecticism in the Women’s Movement.” March, 2026.
- 5 New Labor Press (Organizing Committee), “A Worker’s Guide to: Theoretical Publications.” August, 2024.
- 6 This is not to say that we find ourselves in agreement with the October Roadist line of the OCR, which the NLP also criticizes in the ‘Guide’ document. As with all broken clocks, they seem to be right twice a day: once, on their account of the “state union” problem (with which we engage below) and again on their insistence on the correct conception of the military line of the proletariat, which is to say, the defense of the universality of popular war.
- 7 ‘Guide,’ *op cit.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. 1884. Trans. Alick West, 1942.
- 10 Ghandy, “Philosophical Trends in the Feminist Movement.”
- 11 ‘Guide,’ *op cit.*
- 12 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1968 Progress Publishers ed.)
- 13 Klassenstandpunkt, “The ideological decay of imperialism.”
- 14 Chen Boda, “Sweep Away All Cow Demons and Snake Spirits.” *People’s Daily*, 1 June 1966.
- 15 ‘Guide,’ *op cit.*
- 16 New Labor Press (Organizing Committee), “State Unionism in the United States.”
- 17 Guide, *op cit.*
- 18 An observation also made by our friends’ erstwhile critics at The Worker: “We have informed the comrades that we disagree with this label [state unions]. While they correctly identify the role of bourgeois trade unions, they fall into a mechanical importation of countries undergoing corporativization, a process not taking place in the USA. The bourgeois unions are not part of the state apparatus—the comrades lapse into an Althusserite deviation by way of accident. While NLP exemplifies the creative application of the problem of the “left” abandonment of the proletariat as the base and leading force, their use of the term is a problem.” (The Worker, ‘A Critique of New Labor Press: The Principal Task of Revolutionaries in the USA is Reconstituting the Communist Party, Expressed in the Current Task of Uniting Under Maoism.’)
- 19 Shanghai Revolutionary Mass Criticism Writing Group, ‘Who transforms whom?’ Peking Review, 6 March 1970)