

The YCL Approach to Women's Emancipation and the Struggle for the Transformation of Gender Relations

13 – 17 December 2006

A. Our key challenges and objectives in advancing gender struggles

1. The YCL is a youth organisation committed to the struggle for socialism. Our aim is to organise and mobilise young people against capitalism and for a new society based on people and not profit – a society free of exploitation and oppression. We recognise the interconnectedness of the systems of capitalism, racism and patriarchy, and that young black working class women are triply oppressed. We affirm the need to conduct struggles against racism, sexism and capitalism simultaneously. We also believe that while class, race and gender are inseparably linked, we also need to ensure that we understand and focus on each aspect of oppression in its particular manifestations, and its impact on young people.
2. Our first challenge is therefore to understand the relationship between racism, capitalism and patriarchy in order to challenge it. This paper explores the position of young black working class women and the nature of gender relations in South Africa in order to highlight the nature of the problem. We then explore the Marxist approach to gender, arguing that a materialist analysis is the most useful approach to understanding gender oppression. We also argue, however, that there is a need to apply Marxist concepts in a gendered way, as well as taking account of racial oppression. Without a consciously gendered application of Marxist concepts we will not do justice to our understanding of the racialised patriarchal capitalist system.
3. Our second challenge is to build a YCL that is conscious and active in challenging unequal gender relations and women's oppression in society and the economy. As a starting point we need to recognise that patriarchy exists within our organisation, since we are part of a patriarchal society. We therefore need to become more aware of how this manifests itself and how we can advance the struggle for gender equality within our own organisation. Key to this is mobilising and conscientising all YCL

members as gender conscious activists as well as mobilising young women as active self agents for change in the YCL and broader society. We also need to ensure that the YCL is a campaigning, mobilising, fighting organisation, actively advancing working class gender struggles.

B. The position of young black working class women in South Africa and the nature of gender relations

This section will explore the experiences of young women and the nature of gender relations in South Africa in 3 broad areas: the economy; oppressive sexual relations, gender-based violence & HIV/AIDS; and other ideological and social issues.

Gender and the Economy in South Africa

4. In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels described the global economy as follows: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe... transforming the world in its own image.” Even though this was written more than a hundred years ago it remains an accurate description of the capitalist global economy today.
5. There have been changes in the global economy over the last thirty years, however, the capitalist nature of the global economy remains consistent. In general, the changes that we have seen in the world economy are based on the declining profitability of capital, with the accompanying drive by capital to maintain profit levels by lowering the cost of labour. They have achieved this through the displacement of labour by technology, retrenchments, growing casualisation and informalisation of work, and increased flexibility in working conditions. It is important to assert the fact that the changes that have taken place are in pursuit of profit. These changes are neither inevitable nor unchangeable.
6. In this context, women and men have different experiences of the economy based on their gender, their different positions in the economy and their different positions in the social relations between the genders. Both women and men have gendered experiences. It is not only women that are affected by living in a patriarchal society. While the gender relations in our patriarchal society give men dominance and privilege, men also simultaneously experience the pressure of having to conform to rigid gender roles and expectations. Thus, the privileges of being male in a patriarchal society come at a cost. Furthermore, the intersection of race, class and gender means that there are also significant differences between women and men of different classes and socially imposed ‘race groups’.

7. Gender oppression manifests itself in the economy in the form of the sexual division of labour. This means that there is a rigid division in society between the kinds of work that women do and that men do. This division of labour applies to work in the household and paid employment. Women are primarily responsible for unpaid reproductive labour in the household, and this also affects the world of work, where women's employment is associated with their domestic tasks, for example, cleaning, catering, and sewing.
8. The sexual division of labour means that women and men do different types of work in the economy. Firstly, a large amount of the work that women do in the economy is unpaid reproductive work in the household – this work is unpaid and unrecognised by the capitalist society, with the result that more women are unemployed and economic policies tend to ignore the unpaid work that women do. Secondly, much of women's paid work is outside of the formal economy. Thirdly, where women are in paid employment they tend to be located in specific sectors that are related to the work they do in the home (such as cleaning, catering, services and clothing work). Fourthly, women's paid work is valued less than men's paid work, in remuneration, status and levels of flexibility.
9. Thus a central feature of women's oppression is the greater burden of unpaid reproductive labour. In the current period, this has been exacerbated by cuts in government spending on social services, as well as privatisation and commercialisation of social services. This is a trend pushed by capital all over the world, using neo-liberal policies to dismantle the welfare state in the North and to impose structural adjustment programmes in the South.
10. There has been a growth in non-standard forms of employment, such as casual, temporary, part-time, subcontracted work, as well as home-working and informal employment. There are growing numbers of women employed in this type of work, based on the search for cheap labour by capital. Women are paid lower wages all over the world, and are located in low-paying more vulnerable sectors and occupations. Where there are jobs being created in South Africa, they are mostly these informalised, highly flexible (for the employer) and insecure jobs. In South Africa, the retail, hospitality and catering industries employ mostly younger women. These sectors have very high rates of casualisation.
11. It is important to analyse trends in capitalism and the global economy in terms of their differential impact on women and men. Young working class women are severely affected because of their position in economy and society, they are the most likely to be unemployed, discriminated against in the workplace, and they are generally the poorest of the poor. Yet we also need to take account of the fact that young working class men

are also negatively affected by unemployment and poverty. In the context of patriarchal notions of men as 'breadwinners' retrenchments can have a damaging impact on men, who are perceived by society in these traditional terms. In some instances, the frustration and humiliation experienced by men as a result of patriarchal capitalism boils over into various social problems, including domestic violence and abuse. The brunt of this is borne by women and children in the household.

Oppressive Sexual Relations, Gender-based Violence and HIV/AIDS

12. Unequal gender relations manifest themselves in unequal and oppressive sexual relations between women and men. Added to the massive class inequalities and poverty in our country, the levels of sexual violence and domestic abuse are staggering. In many countries in the world women do not have control over their own bodies, and over reproductive choices. This is a key aspect of the patriarchal system, which denies women the right to freedom of movement and safety because of the threat of rape, and in some cases domestic violence. Women are also subjected to control by society, family and religious institutions with regard to their sexual and reproductive choices. It is still difficult for women to assert their right to decide when to have sex and with whom within this society.
13. Gender-based violence is rooted in the historically unequal power relations (social, economic, cultural & political) between men and women. It can include physical, emotional or sexual abuse and violation. Women, young women and children are most often the victims. Gender-based violence can include rape and sexual assault, violence between intimate partners and femicide (the killing of women).
14. Sexual abuse and violence are extraordinarily high in South Africa. Our country is said to have amongst the highest incidence of rape in the world. Violence is frequently directed toward women and youth, who lack the economic and social status to resist or avoid it. Adolescents and young women, in particular, may experience abuse in the form of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault and sexual exploitation. Accurately estimating the prevalence of sexual abuse and violence is difficult. Social taboos against reporting abuse make it difficult to assess accurately. In many instances when young women speak out against abuse they are vilified, victimized and subjected to blame.
15. Young girls frequently report that their early sexual experiences were coerced. In a study in South Africa, 30 percent of girls report that their first sexual intercourse was forced.¹

¹ Wood K, Jewkes R. Violence, rape, and sexual coercion: everyday love in a South African township. *Gender & Development*.1997; 5(2):41-46.

16. Young women are vulnerable to coercion into sexual relationships with older men. "Sugar daddies" take advantage of girls' lack of economic resources by promising to help with their expenses in exchange for sex. This is known as transactional sex. While it is not as prevalent amongst young boys as girls, there are cases of both young women and men involved in transactional sex.
17. Rape in South Africa is a crisis of extreme proportions. The following statistics are indicative of this outrageous situation:
 - Rape occurred approximately 16 000 times annually during the 1980s
 - By 1992, the official figure for rape was 24 700
 - 55 000 cases of rape were reported in 2004
 - Between 1 in 9 and 1 in 20 rapes are reported (according to different studies)
 - This means that on average approximately 1 300 – 2700 women can be expected to be raped each day in South Africa
 - A woman is raped every 26 seconds
 - 40% of rapists are known to the rape survivor
 - 7% of reported cases lead to conviction
 - One study estimated that 1 in 2 South African women will be raped in her lifetime
 - The largest proportion of people subjected to rape and violence are lower income girl children
18. It is important to analyse the socio-economic and gendered context of rape. Young working class women are more likely to be raped and less likely to receive support and justice. Lack of safety and access to basic infrastructure and services such as transport, lighting and health care services makes the experience and incidence of rape in working class communities extreme and intensely traumatic.
19. Due to the unequal power relations between women and men, as well as biological differences, women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Not only are women more likely to be infected, but they are also more directly affected given their care-giving roles. With the poor levels of health care and access to treatment in the country, the burden of caring for the sick falls disproportionately on working class women.
20. Women's vulnerability to HIV infection is particularly heightened by their economic dependence on men, lack of access to education, poverty, sexual exploitation, coercion and rape, as well as by their engagement in informal and commercial sex work. Women face additional and more acute discrimination when they are identified as being HIV positive. Because they are often first to test positive through pre-natal testing, they are branded as the "spreaders" of the virus. Once their HIV-positive status is revealed or disclosed, women face being physically abused, losing

access to important economic resources, and face the threat of being chased from their homes.

21. Young women are disproportionately affected by HIV in South Africa. A study conducted for Love Life found that 15% of young South African women, between the ages of 15 and 24 are HIV-positive, compared to only 5% of South African males in the same age category (Pettifor et al, 2005). The nationally representative survey was conducted amongst 12 000 young South Africans, 82% of whom were black, just under half were living in townships or informal settlements and 25% were living in households without electricity. Only 38% had of 20-24 year olds had completed high school education.
22. Key factors increasing the rate of infection amongst women included older sexual partners, inconsistent condom use, multiple partners and sexually transmitted infections. Women are also more vulnerable to HIV-infection due to biological differences. The study also found that failure to complete high school and living in an urban area were predictive factors in HIV-infection. The main issue noted by the study was the gender differences in the infection rate and the fact that older partners put young women at greater risk.
23. The study found that whereas only 4% of 15 and 26 year olds were HIV-infected, by the age of 21 this had increased to 31%. A similar pattern was noted amongst males, with HIV prevalence at between 2-3% amongst 15-16 year olds, rising to 12% amongst 21 year olds. Nearly one in four women in their early 20s is HIV-infected compared to only one in 14 men in the same age range, according to the study.
24. Teenage pregnancy is also a factor, with a third of sexually active females under the age of 19 having reported that they had been pregnant, and 59% of sexually active women in their 20s reporting having been pregnant. This study also indicated that 2% of young men and 10% of young women said that they had been forced to have sex. Approximately 3% of young women and men reported having had transactional sex.

Gender and social issues

25. This section explores the ways in which gender relations are experienced and perpetuated through patriarchal ideology, the education system, religious institutions, cultural practices and beliefs and inequalities in social services and infrastructure.
26. Oppressive gender relations in our racist, patriarchal capitalist society are supported by a racist, patriarchal bourgeois ideology. Patriarchal ideology justifies the oppression of women by defining them as inferior, needing

- protection and lacking in ability. This ideology is so deep-seated that it is internalised by women. Thus, young women begin to believe that they have little value in society. We refer to this as *internalised oppression*.
27. One of our challenges is to confront patriarchal, racist and capitalist ideologies in our society. These are perpetuated through the education system, the media and through religious institutions. Part of our role as young communists is to challenge these oppressive ideas and to advance new ways of viewing the world.
 28. We have an important role to play in challenging sexism in the education system. Sexism manifests itself in education through overt discrimination against girls, through sexual abuse and through the transmission of racist, patriarchal capitalist ideology through the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to the ways in which young people learn to conform to oppressive social relations through what they are taught informally, rather than what is in the formal curriculum. It refers to the unspoken ways in which sexism is communicated, the hierarchical and disempowering ways in which schooling and learning is organised, and the conservative attitudes and perspectives communicated by educators and the system.
 29. Sexism is also perpetuated through religious institutions across the board, both through religious practices as well as ideas and views about women and men in churches, synagogues, temples and mosques. These ideas and practices have significant influence on the thinking of many young people.
 30. Patriarchal ideology and practices are also reflected in cultural practices and thought. It is of interest to note that some defend patriarchal relations as coming from their culture, reflecting the extent to which such gendered relations have been internalised as 'natural' and 'eternal', 'unchanging' and 'unchangeable'. This also reflects the fact that the interpretation of cultural values is usually gendered, and affected by various other experiences and factors. Culture and traditions are not fixed and static but change to adapt to circumstances and environment. Cultural beliefs and values are historically specific and are influenced by the dominant relations of ownership and production.
 31. Women are affected insufficient state intervention in providing services and infrastructure such as housing, transport, health, water, electricity and sanitation. The emphasis on neo-liberal policies of cost recovery and business management styles in the public sector has had a devastating effect on the poor. Furthermore, there has been insufficient attention to the differential access and needs of women (and young people) to basic necessities.

32. In conclusion, the previous sections have looked at gender relations in the economy, focusing on poverty, employment and unemployment; gender-based violence and oppressive sexual relations and the gendered impact of HIV/AIDS; gender and broader social relations, including ideological dimension of patriarchy and other social issues such as education, health, transport and basic services as well as religion and culture.
33. This brief overview of gender relations in South Africa has demonstrated that young women are disproportionately affected by unemployment, casualisation and informalisation of work, lack of access to quality education and HIV/AIDS. It has also demonstrated that young women carry the burden of unpaid reproductive labour, including childcare, which prevents them from actively participating at all levels in society. These are struggles which need to be taken up by the YCL. Before looking at this, we first turn to our theoretical analysis of women's oppression and gender relations.

C. Marxism and Gender

Understanding Racist Patriarchal Capitalism

34. To understand the developments described above and to set about changing them we need to have clear and appropriate theoretical frameworks to guide and inform our strategies and struggles. Dominant discourses on gender often fall short of a clear critique of capitalism and of the interrelationship of race, class and gender. There is a tendency to view women as one category, this often allows for the domination of more privileged women in these debates and policy processes, and the voices and experiences of working class women are thus silenced.
35. There is a need to synthesise the analysis of exploitation and oppression on the basis of class, race and gender, understanding that these are fundamentally linked and mutually dependent. Exploitation refers to the economic dimension of capitalist relations experienced by women and men workers. (There is some discussion on the application of the concept of exploitation to reproductive labour later in this section, but for the purposes of this section we refer to exploitation within productive relations).
36. Oppression speaks of the experiences of women and black people within patriarchal, racist, capitalist relations. Women's oppression refers to the experiences of women as wage worker, as mother, as household worker/caregiver, citizen and consumer. Mitchell (1974) identifies women's oppression in capitalist society as rooted in four structural dimensions: namely production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation of children.

37. Gender oppression refers to the gender roles and expectations of women and men in these various categories, and the unequal power relations between women and men. It is important to recognise that while men experience the negative effects of rigid gender stereotyping, men as a group are given the role of agents of oppression in our sexist society, while women as a group are the main targets of sexist oppression. It is therefore important not to obscure the unequal power relations and the oppressor role played by men by using the concept of gender oppression in a neutral way.
38. Racial oppression positions people within the racially structured relations in society – giving power and privilege to white people over black people. The liberation movement in South Africa has historically pointed to the triple oppression of black working class women, given that they are oppressed on the basis of race, class and gender.
39. It is important to note that oppression has both an ideological and material basis. In other words, oppression is structured into a system within the society, underpinned by the relations of ownership and production in the society. It is also justified and perpetuated through the dominant ideas and beliefs articulated within the society. According to Eisenstein: “Power – or the converse, oppression – derives from sex, race and class, and this is manifested through both the material and ideological dimensions of patriarchy, racism and capitalism.” (1979:23).
40. Patriarchy and unequal gender relations exist across cultures although they are also culturally specific. In other words, there are some universal features of women’s oppression but the forms that this takes will differ across cultures, also mediated by class, race, age, marital status and other factors within particular cultural contexts.
41. It is therefore essential to analyse the position of women and men in society and the economy through a framework that is able to analyse and challenge capitalism, and the exploitation and oppression of women and black people. Marxism provides the tools of analysis for this, however if Marxist concepts are applied in a gender-blind way they will be unable to do justice.
42. We need to be able to integrate Marx’s critique of capitalism with an analysis of women’s oppression and gender relations in a way that does not reduce these to class. Thus, we understand class to be central to the lives of human beings within a class system, such as capitalism, however we cannot reduce gender or racial oppression to economic exploitation, and we further recognise that class is gendered and raced.

43. Central to Marxism is historical materialism, an analysis that defines history as “the history of class struggles” between “oppressor and oppressed” (Communist Manifesto). In other words, change in society is brought about through the struggles between opposing classes, resulting in the overthrow of one class system and the institution of a new system, or mode of production. Examples of modes of production include early communalism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism.
44. Common to all of these is the division of society into classes, and relations of oppression and exploitation between the dominant and dominated. However, each mode of production differs in the nature of exploitation and oppression, the nature of the state, the division of labour, gender relations and the family. According to Marx and Engels it is the relations of production – the relationship between the owners of the means of production and the producers – that determines the social system.
45. The capitalist system is characterised as a system based on production and exchange for profit in a competitive market system. Capitalists will therefore focus all their efforts on increasing the productivity of labour, given that according to Marx, profit comes from wage labour. While each mode of production can have varying forms of government and gender relations, based on the historical conditions and context, each system has constraints that rule out certain possibilities, for example a workers’ government under capitalism (Holmstrom, 2003). The same would apply to gender relations – that the extent of freedom possible under capitalism is limited.
46. Marxists have pointed to the centrality of unpaid household labour (or reproductive labour) and the sexual division of labour in the oppression of women under capitalism. There is a dialectical (mutually-determining) relationship between production and reproduction, and between the economic and family systems. Thus, according to Eisenstein (1979:30): “The conditions of production in society then, define and shape production, reproduction and consumption in the family. So, too, the family mode of production, reproduction and consumption affects commodity production. They work together to define the political economy. Within a capitalist patriarchal economy – where profit, which necessitates a system of political order and control, is the basic priority of the ruling class – the sexual division of labour and society serves a specific purpose. It stabilises the society through the family while it organises a realm of work, domestic labour, for which there is no pay (housewives) or little pay (paid domestic workers), or unequal pay (in the labour force).”
47. A crucial distinction between capitalist and pre-capitalist social formations is the fact that in pre-capitalist societies, while there was a sexual division

- of labour, women, men and children worked together in the home and on the land to produce the goods necessary for their sustenance. With the rise of industrial capitalism, men were taken from the home and into the wage labour system, located in factories (Eisenstein, 1979:30).
48. Women were relegated to the home and with the rise of commodity production for exchange were increasingly viewed as 'non-productive'. They came to be seen increasingly in terms of their gender roles, particularly in the household. The domestic ideology is a significant dimension of patriarchy, which sees women primarily as housewives and domestic caregivers. This ideology further enables capitalists to pay lower wages to women who are not seen as workers.
 49. "The social definition of women as housewives thus is an important ideological device – it helps to perpetuate and strengthen the subordinate position of women within the hierarchical structure of production relations" (Custers, 1997:368). This is furthermore relevant to the growing trend of home-working in the garment industry where employers use the construction of women as housewives and mothers simply doing piece work for extra cash to justify and obscure high levels of exploitation. Thus, women's identity as wage labourers is masked and the necessity for them to engage in waged and non-wage work for their survival (and that of their families) is denied, enabling massive profits to be reaped from their labour (Custers, 1997:368).
 50. The bourgeoisie benefits from this through the ability to pay lower wages to women, and through the reproduction of labour at lower cost to themselves. Men benefit through the work done for them in the household. All men from all classes benefit from these privileges in the patriarchal capitalist system, although this is experienced differently based on class and race.
 51. The racial dimension in the differentiation of household labour is prominent in the South African system because the racist system of apartheid created a highly segmented working class, with black workers earning far less and therefore having to spend more time on unpaid reproductive labour, with the reliance on subsistence labour in the 'reserves' to subsidise ultra cheap labour in the mines and with enforced geographic segregation and discrimination in access to services which affected the support available to do household labour (e.g. in dusty townships, informal settlements and rural areas the nature and extent of household labour differs). Furthermore, the apartheid system created the availability of cheap black workers in the form of domestic workers which lightened the load for white women (and men).

52. We therefore need to recognise the ways in which this hidden unpaid labour has a strong class, and racial dimension to it. Household labour in the Sandton household is not the same as in the Khayelitsha household. In Sandton, there are high tech microwaves, dishwashers and washing machines that are operated by the domestic worker. In Khayelitsha, the burden of unpaid labour falls on the shoulders of the mothers and daughters of the household. So the exposure and struggle against hidden reproductive labour is particularly a working class issue since it is working class women who bear the brunt of it – in their own homes and as domestic workers in other people’s homes.
53. The sexual division of labour informs the fact that women are given responsibility for care-giving and unpaid household labour, and it also structures paid employment. Custers (1997:367) distinguishes between a social and sectoral division of labour between the sexes, the former relates the home and broader society, while the latter refers to paid employment.
54. The *social* division of labour between women and men is the responsibility throughout society, given to women for reproductive and domestic tasks such as child-rearing, cleaning, nurturing and cooking. The *sectoral* division of labour refers to the fact that within different sectors of the economy a “hierarchical division of labour between women and men operates”. Whereas the former is relatively ‘fixed and universal’ the latter tends to change according to context, period and demand of the capitalist economy.
55. Changes to the *sectoral* sexual division of labour are largely determined by the “need to preserve male power over women” (Custers, 1997:367). When work became mechanised male workers took over the work that had formerly been the territory of women workers. Women workers had predominated when the work was mostly manual, but with mechanisation they were displaced by male workers, demonstrating the gendered association of men with machines.
56. Another way in which the hierarchical sexual division of labour is maintained in waged employment is through the gendered manipulation of how skill is defined. Skill is valued in gendered terms, with skills associated with women’s reproductive labour being undervalued. These skills tend to be seen as ‘natural’, rather than being seen as a skill that needs to be recognised and acknowledged. Thus, we can conclude that the sexual division of labour is socially-determined and that “there are identifiable methods (such as skill definitions and men’s monopoly over machines) by which the subordinate position of women is maintained” (Custers, 1997:367).

57. There is a need to expand our analysis beyond the economy to personal relations “both to understand how oppression manifests itself in the most intimate aspects of our lives and also, most importantly, to give a more complete vision of human emancipation” (Holmstrom, 2003).
58. The importance of Marxism to the study of women’s oppression is that it provides a “class analysis necessary for the study of power” and secondly it has developed “a method of analysis that is historical and dialectical” (Eisenstein, 1979:6). Eisenstein (1979:7) argues that Marx’s dialectical method in the theory of alienation can be applied to the revolutionary potential of women. The theory of alienation reveals the revolutionary capacity of all human beings. Marx refers to ‘species beings’ as those who are able to reach their human potential for creative labour, social consciousness and social living through the struggle against capitalism, fully realised in a communist society. This conception is what reveals human beings as more than exploited under capitalist relations, it reveals them as potentially revolutionary.
59. When we extend this theory to gender relations it points towards “the possibility of freedom” existing “alongside exploitation and oppression” since human beings are potentially more than what they are under the oppressive and limiting system of capitalist patriarchy. While we are structured by what we are and what we experience currently, this is not the outer limit of what is possible. Thus, “by locating revolutionary potential as it reflects conflicts between people’s real conditions (existence) and possibilities (essence), we can understand how patriarchal relations inhibit the development of human essence”.
60. There is a need to build on Marx’s own writings on women, given that the theorisation on these questions is inadequate. The limitation is that the family and relations between women and men within marriage are seen as instrumental to capitalism. While this is an important observation, challenging liberal notions of the family that hide the power relations within it, it does not go far enough in understanding the nature of the family under capitalism.
61. A shortcoming of Marx and Engels’ analysis was their analysis of the cause and resolution for women’s oppression. They saw it as stemming from their exclusion from production, subordination to institutions of private property and class exploitation. While these are fundamental conditions of women’s oppression, these are not the only aspects, and if we only look at these aspects we are likely to conclude that the liberation of women will be achieved through the elimination of private property and their inclusion in paid employment alone. However, Lenin and Kollontai

62. In fact, experiences in socialist countries (while in some cases imperfect examples of socialism) show that this is a necessary but not sole condition for the transformation of gender relations and the emancipation of women.

D. Lessons from Socialist Countries in Dealing with the transformation of gender relations

63. There are a number of lessons that can be drawn from socialist experiences. Socialist countries made many advances in fighting for the socialisation of domestic labour through the establishment of communal kitchens, laundries and child care centres. They also made efforts to do away with the sexual division of labour by drawing women into paid employment and into work that was traditionally dominated by men. In Cuba, legislation known as the Family Code was introduced requiring women and men to participate in household activities, although it was found that it is very difficult to implement legislation around household gender relations. The early stages of the Russian Revolution grappled with the organisation and mobilisation of working class women and the key challenges for women's emancipation including household slavery and the institution of marriage. This section briefly summarises some lessons from socialist experiences.

64. *Women's participation in paid employment:*

A limitation of socialist states was that they saw women's emancipation as being achieved primarily through women's participation in the labour force. While this is very significant, it should not be the only focus as it does not address the root of the problem. For instance, women did not enter waged work in large numbers, and where they did, they were in a structurally disadvantaged position compared with men. Many progressive policies and practices were developed, such as education and training to counter sexual segregation in the workplace, equality at work, equal pay and social provisions such as childcare to facilitate women's labour force participation. But despite important gains, this meant a focus on women at work, without looking at what happened in the home, which remained an invisible sphere. This had the unfortunate consequence of placing a greater burden on women to fulfil multiple roles, as workers, as mothers and as political or community activists. In many pieces of legislation in socialist countries women were defined as workers and mothers, while men were defined solely as workers.

65. *The need for a women's movement to advance & defend struggles & policies:*

There were also shifts and contradictions in policies and ideology on the role of women. For example, during Stalin's time, there was a reversal of the gains made by the Bolsheviks who had introduced public child-care, laundry and kitchen facilities and a Family Code, which amongst other

things, legalised homosexuality, abortion and made divorce easier. Another remarkable aspect was that in cases of uncertainty about paternity, the courts would order all possible fathers named by the woman to pay child support. Under Stalin, not only were these and other gains reversed, but also there was a propaganda campaign that appealed for social stability and espoused conservative family values and the glory of worker motherhood. In China there were also contradictions that related to the economic requirements and demand for labour at a given time. For example, there was a concerted effort to get women into textile handcraft production, followed by a later campaign to get women to work in the fields with departure of men into the army. These examples show that there is a need for a movement of women and gender activists to be constantly vigilant in defending victories to ensure that these are not sacrificed because of short-term interests. Despite these shortcomings, socialists were clear in their acknowledgement of the complexities involved in the struggle for women's emancipation, for example, Mao Zedong was quoted as saying: "To liberate women is not to manufacture washing machines."

66. *The need to emphasise the role of men in resisting change*
Some socialist revolutionaries advanced the understanding that men benefit from women's oppression and are directly implicated as oppressors. For instance, Thomas Sankara identified this reality in a Women's Day speech: "Comrades, only the revolutionary transformation of our society can create conditions for your liberation. You are dominated by both imperialism and men. In every male languishes the soul of a feudal lord, a male chauvinist, which must be destroyed. This is why you must eagerly embrace the most advanced revolutionary slogans to make your liberation real and advance toward it more rapidly".
67. The most critical lessons that we can draw from these experiences include the following:
- ★ Class struggle on its own will not automatically solve women's oppression
 - ★ This highlights the need for women to organise to struggle against oppression
 - ★ Patriarchy needs to be analysed as having a material basis not simply as an ideological phenomenon
 - ★ In our theory production and reproduction must always be conceptually linked, we must guard against emphasising production only and contributing to the invisibility of reproductive labour
 - ★ There is a need to move beyond an analysis that sees patriarchy as simply functional to capitalism because, for instance men and capitalists may have conflicting interests in the use of women's labour power
 - ★ There is a need to acknowledge that not only is women's oppression

beneficial to capital, it also benefits individual men, including working class men, and not only do they benefit, they often play an active role in defending and perpetuating patriarchy

- ★ Power relations within the household must be explored, analysed and challenged
- ★ The struggle to transform interpersonal, gendered power relations between women and men must be addressed simultaneously with the socialisation of domestic work to ensure real change in household relations
- ★ The analysis of gender relations should not be confined to the relation of women to capital, but should also include household relations, gender and the state, gender and organisations, relations between women and men and differentiation amongst women

E. YCL Perspectives on the Struggle for the Transformation of Gender Relations

68. As has been discussed above, gender relations characterised by the subordination of women are the product of a patriarchal capitalist system which exploits the unpaid reproductive labour of women in households as well as their subsistence labour and waged labour (and that of men). Women cannot be liberated under capitalism, and the struggle for socialism is directly related to the struggle for gender equality and non-racism.
69. There are possibilities for reform within capitalism in the struggle towards socialism. A key challenge is to advance such reforms in a way that undermines the capitalist system rather than reinforcing it.
70. The state has a crucial role to play in this context, by intervening in lessening the burden of unpaid reproductive labour, acting to change the sexual division of labour in the home and the workplace, and consciously challenging unequal gender power relations.
71. A movement of women and gender activists is crucial in ensuring that the state responds to the needs and demands of citizens. We need to assert strongly and firmly that the government must respond to the demands of the people, particularly the working class.
72. We need to fight for democratic, transparent and accountable governance processes and progressive policies. Democratic governance must give space to citizens to determine how the resources of government are allocated and how policies are developed. It is particularly the citizens that are marginalised by the capitalist system in South Africa – urban and rural working class communities, the core constituency of the ruling party – that need to determine ANC policies and practices.

73. Key aspects of a gendered campaign to advance the interests of the working class include:
- *The demand for the socialisation of reproductive labour*, through income grants, access to basic services, childcare and early childhood development centres, communal kitchens and laundries and parental rights for workers.
 - *Access to decent quality employment for young women and men*, through legislation to limit casualisation and flexibilisation of work, and expanded public works programmes targeting young women for employment.
 - *The elimination of gender-based violence and sexual violence* through progressive changes to legislation on sexual violence to remove gender biases; adequate resources for policing and safety in working class communities; access to safe public transport and health services; campaigning and raising awareness amongst our members and communities; creating a conducive organisational environment for young women to be able to speak out about violence and rape.
 - *Access to treatment, care and support for people with HIV*, through massive investment into the health care system, including support for home-based health care workers, the firing of the minister of health and the urgent establishment of a crisis committee of government and civil society organisations to address the lack of political will to deal with the pandemic.
 - *The demand for Free Education*, to ensure that young people and particularly young women access decent quality education.

F. YCL Organisational Practice on Gender Issues

74. It will be crucial to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation in relation to gender struggles and organising young women in the build up to the Congress and at the Congress itself.
75. Gender issues have often tended to be subordinate within the struggle, despite the commitment to the simultaneous and interlinked class, national and gender struggles. There is a need to improve both our theory and practice with regard to gender equality and women's emancipation. While there is a commitment on paper to the need to advance gender equality, there has been little conscious effort in this regard.
76. The YCL launched with a good number of women in leadership at various levels, and was characterised by vibrant and vocal young women activists. The YCL has made some positive steps such as the representation of women in organisational structures and resolutions that refer to the need to advance gender struggles. However, we have not done enough to

- consciously sustain and deepen the participation of women and to develop gender-conscious cadres through mobilisation and conscientisation.
77. The YCL has not done enough to build our theory and practice around the transformation of unequal gender relations. We have not created space in the organisation to debate and theorise gender issues. As a result the dominant patriarchal views in our society find expression in our own organisation, advanced at times by both women and men. There is still much work to be done within the YCL to build a coherent political approach to gender issues.
 78. Given the continued dominance of patriarchal views and values in our organisation (whether deliberate or unthinking) the organisational space for young women to participate fully is inevitably hampered. Patriarchal attitudes in our organisation take the form of undermining the views of young women, assuming them not to be 'political' if they don't quote the right rhetoric and viewing young women as sexual objects rather than activists and equals.
 79. It would be useful for the YCL to do a thorough audit and analysis of our organisational culture and practices in order to ensure that the organisation creates a free and democratic environment for the participation of young women as well as young workers, rural youth, and young people at school-going age. These are all constituencies that are under-represented within the YCL, and such an organisational analysis may be useful in advancing our objective of recruiting and organising youth more widely, particularly those sections of young people that are the most marginalised in our society.
 80. While our campaigns have correctly articulated key issues facing young people, we rarely identify the specific needs and interests of young women. There is a need for more thorough research and organisational and mobilising work to identify the specific experiences and demands of young working class women. This will help to ensure that we are able to articulate the voice of young women more sharply. YCL has not actively integrated gender issues in its statements, policies and campaigns. There is therefore a need to build the gender awareness of YCL leaders and staff as well as members.
 81. There is a need for the conscious advancement of gender struggles and campaigns and mainstreaming gender in all YCL work at all levels, given the fact that we continue to operate in a gender-blind way. Gender-blindness in effect means the perpetuation of patriarchal relations. If we do not consciously challenge patriarchy in our work, it will remain dominant in our organisational practices, perspectives and views. The

- lack of a gender perspective means silence and consent to a continued patriarchal agenda.
82. A key means to ensure a conscious, campaigning programmatic approach to gender issues will be the establishment of *gender activist forums* at all levels of the YCL.
83. Some of the questions we need to debate at Congress include the following:
- Has the YCL done enough to harness the energy and enthusiasm of our young women activists?
 - Is there an enabling organisational environment and space for young women activists to assert themselves?
 - What campaigns has the YCL taken up to challenge the oppressive patriarchal relations in our country?
 - How effectively has the YCL given voice to and campaigned around the experiences, demands and oppression of young working class black women?
 - How have YCL campaigns & priorities taken account of gender relations?
 - What can we do better and differently to mobilise & recruit young women?
 - How can we improve our activism and consciousness around gender issues as the YCL?

G. Building a gender conscious activist YCL

84. Three key weaknesses have characterised gender struggles taken forward by the organisations within the Alliance and other social formations.
- Firstly, these struggles remain fragmented.
 - Secondly, there is a separation between the isolated incidences of community action (which are often focused on practical day-to-day concerns of women) and the activism of political organisations and trade unions on gender (which is not sufficiently practical and campaign-focused). There is a tendency within the left to address gender issues in a fairly abstract way, without engaging in practical campaigns that can draw on the support of working class communities.
 - Thirdly, there is currently no organisational home or platform for gender activists and women on the left to advance working class and socialist gender struggles.
85. There is thus a need to deepen the impact and levels of activism around gender issues in our country. This requires strong and independent women's activism, in order to build on the gains that have been made and in order to challenge the reversals resulting from the adoption of neo-

liberal, capital-friendly policies by government. A key task is to build conscious gender activists, both women and men. We need to ensure that the YCL campaigns around the key demands of young working class women towards the transformation of gender relations.

86. In sum, our tasks are as follows:

- *Building a working-class led women's movement, with active participation by young women:* We need to ensure that we advance a working class agenda within the progressive women's movement and that we build networks with other progressive organisations participating there. Central to our focus must be the socialisation of domestic labour through state intervention and ideological campaign work, so that we can ensure that women participate more freely in society and organisations. The YCL should actively build a network of young progressive women to advance the specific needs and interests of young working class women, and to mobilise them for social change.
- *Creating a platform and network of socialist women and gender activists to advance socialist struggles for gender equality:* The YCL together with the SACP and the Chris Hani Institute must work to establish a network of Socialist gender activists. This network would create space for gender activists to share ideas and advance struggles against capitalism and for a new society that deals with unequal gender and race relations as well as the class contradiction. The purpose of this network would be to develop our thinking on an African (and South African) socialist feminism; to build solidarity and support for activists and to advance campaigns and ideological work in society.
- *Organising and mobilising young women in campaigns around the day-to-day issues affecting their lives and infusing this with our strategic vision:* Key to our approach as communists is the need to link daily struggles for survival waged by the working class with the struggle against capitalism. We therefore need to play an active role in advancing gendered struggles, with our focus on the two most urgent challenges of unpaid labour and sexual violence. These struggles must be linked ideologically and politically to the struggle for socialism and against capitalism. This requires a clear ideological programme around gender issues.
- *Advancing ideological struggles and gender consciousness of YCL activists:* Hand-in-hand with a campaigning YCL is a politically conscious YCL. We therefore need to build a nation-wide cadreship development programme that includes a central focus on class consciousness, gender consciousness and non-racialism. To begin this process, we would need to hold intensive training for trainers in provinces, who would be tasked with facilitation of workshops and establishment of study circles and networks in branches and districts. We would need to develop materials for this, including induction, and subsequent manuals.

H. Mobilising young women as self-agents for social change

87. There is a need for a focused programme to mobilise women as self-agents for social change. What this means is that while we recognise that both women and men are affected by patriarchy and both women and men must form part of the struggle to challenge unequal gender relations, it is important for women to take the lead in fighting for their liberation. Our political objective is therefore to ensure that young women lead the struggle against patriarchal oppression given that they are the main targets of this oppression.
88. Internalised oppression, as discussed earlier, is key to maintaining the system of oppression. Central to the conscientisation of young women about oppression is the need to challenge internalised oppression. This can best be done through consciousness-raising and solidarity and support amongst women.
89. It is therefore necessary to develop a programme that involves political education, consciousness-raising and awareness for young women and also establishes a collective of young women within the YCL. This would be complementary to the conscientisation of young men around gender oppression, however there is a need for a focused approach to ensure that we build targeted women's cadreship.
90. This would be complementary to a programme of gender awareness for women and men, and the development of men as allies in the fight against patriarchy.
91. Therefore, our tasks include:
 - Mobilising young women to lead the struggle against patriarchal oppression, with men as allies and gender activists
 - Raising awareness and consciousness about internalised oppression
 - Building networks of solidarity and support amongst women at all levels of the organisation
 - Piloting youth camps for young women focusing on understanding the racist patriarchal capitalist system and ways of fighting it

Conclusion

92. In conclusion, the YCL faces a significant challenge of confronting the deeply entrenched and institutionalised sexism that exists in our society. We can only do this with good theory and analysis, strong, conscious cadres and an activist campaigning YCL.