

Communism and the Family

Will the family be maintained in the Communist State? Will it be just as it is today? That is a question which is tormenting the women of the working class, and which is likewise receiving attention from their comrades, the men. In recent days, this problem has particularly been agitating all minds among the working women, and this should not astonish us: life is changing under our very eyes; former habits and customs are gradually disappearing; the entire existence of the proletarian family is now being organised in a manner that is so new, so unaccustomed, so 'bizarre' as to have been impossible to foresee.

That which makes women at the present day all the more perplexed is the fact that divorce has been rendered easier in Soviet Russia. As a matter of fact, by virtue of the decree of the People's Commissars of 18 December 1917, divorce has ceased to be a luxury accessible only to the rich; henceforth the working woman will not have to petition for months, or even for years, for a separate credential entitling her to make herself independent of a brutish drunken husband, accustomed to beating her. Henceforth, divorce may be amicably obtained within the period of a week or two at the most.

But it is just this ease of divorce which is a source of such hope to women who are unhappy in their married life, which simultaneously frightens other women, particularly those who have been accustomed to considering their husband as the 'provider' as the only support in life, and who do not yet understand that women must become accustomed to seek and find this support elsewhere, no longer in the person of the man, but in the person of society, of the State.

From the genetic family to the present day

There is no reason for concealing the truth from ourselves: the normal family of former days, in which the man was everything and the woman nothing – since she had no will of her own, no time of

her own – this family is being modified day by day; it is almost a thing of the past. But we should not be frightened by this condition. Either through error or ignorance we are quite ready to believe that everything about us may remain immutable while everything is changing. It has always been so, and it will always be so. There is nothing more erroneous than this proverb! We have only to read how people lived in the past, and we shall learn immediately that everything is subject to change and that there are no customs, nor political organisations, nor morals which remain fixed and inviolable.

And the family in the various epochs in the life of humanity has frequently changed in form; it was once quite different from what we are accustomed to behold today. There was a time when only one form of family was considered normal, namely the generic family; that is to say, a family with an old mother at its head, around whom were grouped, in common life and common work, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. The patriarchal family was also once considered the sole norm; it was presided over by a father-master whose will was law for all the other members of the family; even in our days, such peasant families may still be found in Russian villages. In fact, in those places the morals and the family laws are not those of the city worker; in the country there still are a large number of customs no longer found in the family of a city proletarian.

The form of the family, its customs, vary according to race. There are peoples, such as, for instance, the Turks, Arabs, Persians, among whom it is permitted by law for a husband to have many wives. There have been, and there still are at present, tribes which tolerate the contrary custom of permitting a wife to have several husbands. The habitual morality of the present-day man permits him to demand of a young girl that she remain a virgin until legitimate marriage; but there were tribes among whom the woman, on the contrary, made it a matter of pride to have had many lovers, decorating her arms and legs with rings to indicate the number.

Such practices, which could not but astonish us, practices which we might even qualify as immoral are found among other peoples to have the sanction of holiness, peoples who in their turn consider our laws and customs to be ‘sinful’. Therefore there is no reason for our becoming terrified at the fact that the family is undergoing a modification, that gradually the traces of the past which have become

outlived are being discarded, and that new relations are being introduced between man and woman.

We have only to ask: 'What is it that has become outlived in our family system and what, in the relations of the working man and working woman and the peasant and peasant woman, are their respective rights and duties which would best harmonise with the conditions of life in the new Russia, in the workers' Russia which our Soviet Russia now is?' Everything compatible with this new condition would be maintained; all the rest, all the superannuated rubbish which has been bequeathed to us by the cursed epoch of servitude and domination which was characteristic of the landed proprietors and the capitalists, all this shall be swept aside together with the exploiting class itself, with these enemies of the proletariat and of the poor.

Capitalism destroyed the old family life

The family in its present form is also simply one of the legacies of the past. Formerly solid, compact in itself, indissoluble – for such was considered to be the character of marriage that had been sanctified by the priest in person – the family was equally necessary to all its members. Were it not for the family, who would have nourished, clothed, and trained the children, who would have guided them in life? The orphans' lot in those days was the worst that could befall one. In the family such as we have become accustomed to it is the husband who earns and supports the wife and children. The wife, on her part, is occupied with the housekeeping and the bringing up of the children, as she understands it.

But already for a century this customary form of the family has been undergoing a progressive destruction in all the countries in which capitalism is dominant, in which the number of factories is rapidly growing, as well as other capitalist enterprises which employ working men. The family customs and morals are being formed simultaneously with the general conditions of the life surrounding them. What contributed most of all to change the family customs in a radical manner was without doubt the universal spread of wage labour on the part of the woman. Formerly, it was only the man who was considered to be the support of the family. But for the past fifty or sixty years we have beheld in Russia (in other countries even somewhat earlier) the capitalist regime obliging women to seek remunerative work outside the family, outside the house.

30,000,000 women bearing a double burden

The wages of the 'providing' man being insufficient for the needs of the family, the wife in her turn found herself obliged to look for work that was paid for; the mother was obliged also to knock at the door of the factory offices. And year by year the number of women of the working class who left their homes in order to swell the ranks of the factory, to take up work as day labourers, saleswomen, office help, washerwomen, servants, increased day by day.

According to an enumeration made before the beginning of the world war, in the countries of Europe and America there were counted about sixty million women earning a living by their own work. During the war this number increased considerably. Almost half of these women are married, but it is easy to see what sort of family life they must have – a family life in which the wife and mother goes to work outside the house, for eight hours a day, ten if you include the trip both ways! Her home is necessarily neglected, the children grow up without any maternal care, left to themselves and all the dangerous risks of the street, in which they spend the greater part of their time.

The wife, the mother, who is a worker, sweats blood to fill three tasks at the same time: to give the necessary working hours as her husband does, in some industry or commercial establishment, then to devote herself as well as she can to her household and then also to take care of her children. Capitalism has placed on the shoulders of the woman a burden which crushes her: it has made of her a wageworker without having lessened her cares as a housekeeper and mother. We therefore find the woman crushed under her triple, insupportable burden, forcing from her often a swiftly smothered cry of pain, and more than once causing the tears to mount to her eyes. Care has always been the lot of woman, but never has woman's lot been more unfortunate, more desperate than that of millions of working women under the capitalist yoke today, while industry is in its period of greatest expansion.

Workers learn to exist without the family life

The more widespread becomes the wage labour of woman, the further progresses the decomposition. What a family life, in which the man and wife work in the factory in different departments; in

which the wife has not even time to prepare a decent meal for her offspring! What a family life when father and mother out of the home twenty-four hours of the day, most of which are spent at hard labour, cannot even spend a few minutes with their children!

It was quite different formerly; the mother, mistress of the house, remained at home, occupied with her household duties and her children, whom she did not cease to watch with her attentive eye – today, from early in the morning until the factory whistle blows, the working woman hastens to her work, and when evening has come, again, at the sound of the whistle, she hurries home to prepare the family's soup and to do the most pressing of her household duties; after an all too scant sleep, she begins on the next day her regular grind. It is a real workhouse, this life of the married working woman! There is nothing surprising, therefore, in the fact that under these conditions the family ties loosen and the family itself disintegrates more and more. Little by little all that formerly made the family a solid whole is disappearing, together with its stable foundation. The family is ceasing to be a necessity for its members as well as for the State. The ancient forms of the family are becoming merely a hindrance.

What was it that made the family strong in the days of old? In the first place, the fact that it was the husband and father who supported the family; in the second place, that the home was a thing equally necessary to all the members of the family; and in the third and last place, that the children were brought up by the parents. What is left of all this today? The husband, we have just seen, has ceased to be the sole supporter of the family. The wife, who goes to work, has become the equal of her husband in this respect. She has learned to earn her own living and also that of her children and her husband. This still leaves us as the function of the family the bringing up and support of the children while very young. Let us now see whether the family is not about to be relieved also even of this task just mentioned.

Household work ceasing to be a necessity

There was a time when the entire life of women in the poorer class, in the city as well as the country, was passed in the bosom of the family. Beyond the threshold of her own house, the woman knew nothing and doubtless hardly wished to know anything. To compensate for this, she had within her own house a most varied

group of occupations, of a most necessary and useful kind, not only to the family itself but also to the entire state. The woman did everything that is now done by any working woman or peasant woman. She cooked, she washed, she cleaned the house, she went over and mended the family clothing; but she not only did that.

She had also to discharge a great number of duties which are no longer done by the woman of today: she spun wool and linen; she wove cloth and garments, she knitted stockings, she made lace, and she took up as far as her resources permitted, the pickling and smoking of preserved foods; she made beverages for the household; she moulded her own candles. How manifold were the duties of the woman of earlier times! That is how the life of our mothers and our grandmothers passed. Even in our own days, in certain remote villages way off in the country, far from the railroads and, the big rivers, you may still run across little spots where this mode of life of the good old time has been preserved unchanged, in which the mistress of the house is overburdened with labour of which the working woman of the big cities and of the populous industrial regions have for a long time had no idea.

The industrial work of woman in the house

In the days of our grandmothers this domestic work was an absolutely necessary and useful thing, on which depended the well-being of the family; and the more the mistress of the house applied herself to these duties, the better was life in the house and the more order and affluence it presented. Even the State was able to draw some profit from this activity of woman as a housekeeper. For, as a matter of fact, the woman of other days did not limit herself to preparing potato soup either by herself or to be prepared by the family, but her hands also created many products of wealth, such as cloth, thread, butter etc, all of which were things which could serve as commodities on the market and which therefore could be considered merchandise, as things of value.

It is true that in the time of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers their labour was not estimated in terms of money. But every man, whether he was a peasant or a worker, sought for a wife a woman with 'hands of gold' as is still the proverbial saying among the people. For the resources of man alone 'without the domestic work of woman,' would have been insufficient to keep their future household going. But on this point the interests of the state,

the interests of the nation, coincided with those of the husband: the more active the woman turned out to be in the bosom of her family, the more she created the products of all kinds: cloth, leather, wool, the surplus of which was sold in the neighbouring market; and thus the economic prosperity of the country as a whole was increased.

But capitalism has changed all this ancient mode of living. All that was formerly produced in the bosom of the family is now being manufactured in quantity in workshops and factories. The machine has supplanted the active fingers of the wife. What housekeeper would now occupy herself in moulding candles, spinning wool, weaving cloth? All these products can be bought in the shop next door. Formerly every young girl would learn to knit stockings. Do you ever see a young working woman now knitting her own stockings? In the first place she would not have the time. Time is money and no one wants to waste money in an unproductive manner, that is without getting some profit from it. Now, every housekeeper who is also a working woman is more interested in buying her stockings readymade than losing her time by making them herself. Few and far between are the working women who could take up their time in pickling cucumbers or in making preserves when they remember that the grocery store next door has pickles and preserves ready to sell. Even if the product sold in the store is of an inferior quality, and even though the factory preserves are not as good as those made at home by the hands of an economical housekeeper, the working woman nevertheless has neither the time nor the strength which must be applied in any extensive operations of this kind for her own household.

However this may be, the fact is that the contemporary family is becoming more and more liberated from all domestic labours, without which concern our grandmothers could hardly have imagined a family. What was formerly produced in the bosom of the family is now produced by common labour of working men and working women in factories and shops.

Individual housekeeping

The individual consumes but no longer produces. The essential labours of the housekeeper are now four in number: matters of cleanliness (cleaning the floors, dusting, heating, taking care of lamps etc), cooking (preparation of dinners), washing and the care of linen and the clothing of the family (darning and mending).

These are painful and exhausting labours; they absorb all the time and all the energies of the working woman, who must in addition furnish her hours of labour in a factory. But it is nevertheless certain that the task of our grandmothers included a much greater number of operations. And, in addition, they possessed a quality which is completely lacking in the household labours of the working woman of our days: the latter having entirely lost their quality of being useful to the state from the standpoint of the national economy, for these labours do not create any new values; they do not contribute to the prosperity of the country.

The working woman would in vain spend all the day from the morning to evening cleaning her home, washing and ironing the linen, using herself up in ceaseless efforts to keep her worn out clothing in order, she might kill herself in preparing with her modest resources such food as might please her, and there would nevertheless at nightfall remain not a material result of all her days work, and she would have created with her indefatigable hands nothing that could be considered as a commodity on the commercial market. Even if a working woman should live a thousand years there would never be any change for her. There would always be a new layer of dust to be removed from the mantelpiece and her husband would always come in hungry at night and her little tots would always bring in mud on their shoes. The work of the housekeeping woman is becoming more useless day by day, more unproductive.

The dawn of collective housekeeping

The individual household has passed its zenith. It is being replaced more and more by collective housekeeping. The working woman will sooner or later need to take care of her own dwelling no longer; in the communist society of tomorrow this work will be carried on by a special category of working women who will do nothing else. The wives of the rich have long been freed from these annoying and tiring duties. Why should the working woman continue to carry out these painful duties? In Soviet Russia the life of the working woman should be surrounded with the same ease, with the same brightness, with the same hygiene, with the same beauty, which has thus far surrounded only the women of the richer classes. In a communist society the working women will no longer have to spend their, alas, too few hours of leisure, in cooking since there will be in the communist society public restaurants and central

kitchens to which everybody may come and take his meals.

These establishments have already been on the increase in all countries, even under the capitalist regime. In fact, for half a century the number of restaurants and cafes in all the great cities of Europe increased day to day; they sprang up like mushrooms after an autumn rain. But while under the capitalist system only people with well-lined purses could afford to take their meals in a restaurant, in the communist city, anyone who likes may come to eat in the central kitchens and restaurants.

The case will be the same with washing and other work: the working woman will no longer be obliged to sink in an ocean of filth or to ruin her eyes in darning her stockings or mending her linen; she will simply carry these things to the central laundries each week and take them out again each week already washed and ironed. The working woman will have one care less to face. Also, special clothes-mending shops will give the working women the opportunity to devote their evenings to instructive readings, to healthy recreations, instead of spending them as at present in exhausting labour.

Therefore, the four last duties still remaining to burden our women, as we have seen above, will soon also disappear under the triumphant communist regime. And the working women will surely have no cause to regret this. Communist society will only have broken the domestic yoke of woman in order to render her life richer, happier, freer and more complete.

The child's upbringing under capitalism

But what will remain of the family after all these labours of individual housekeeping have disappeared? We still have the children to deal with. But here also the state of the working comrades will come to the rescue of the family by substituting for the family; society will gradually take charge of all that formerly was on parents.

Under the capitalist regime, the instruction of the child has ceased to be the duty of the parents. The children were taught in schools. Once the child had attained school age, the parents breathed more freely. Beginning with this moment the intellectual development of their child ceased to be an affair of theirs.

But all the obligations of the family towards the child were not therefore finished. There was still the duty of feeding the child, buying its shoes, clothing it, making skilled and honest workers of

them, who might be able, when the time came, to live by themselves and to feed and support their parents in their old age. However, it was very unusual when a worker's family was able to fulfill entirely all these obligations towards their children; their low wages did not permit them even to give the children enough to eat, while lack of leisure prevented the parents from devoting to the education of the rising generation the full attention which it demanded for this duty. The family was supposed to bring up the children. But did it really? As a matter of fact it is the street which brings up the children of the proletariat. The children of the proletarians are ignorant of the amenities of family life, pleasures which we still shared with our own fathers and mothers.

Furthermore, the low wages of the parents, insecurity, even hunger, frequently bring it about that when hardly ten years of age, the son of the proletarian already becomes in his turn an independent worker. Now, as soon as the child (boy or girl) begins to earn money, he considers himself the master of his own person to such an extent that the words and counsels of his parents cease having any effect upon him, the authority of parents weakens and obedience is at an end. As the domestic labours of the family die out one by one, all obligations of support and training will be filled by society in place of the parents. Under the capitalist regime the children were frequently, too frequently, a heavy and unbearable burden to the proletarian family.

The child and the communist state

Here, also, the communist society will come to the aid of the parents. In Soviet Russia, owing to the care of the Commissariats of Public Education and Social Welfare, great advances are being made, and already many things have been done in order to facilitate for the family the task of bringing up and supporting the children. There are homes for very small babies, day nurseries, kindergartens, children's colonies and homes, infirmaries, and health resorts for sick children, restaurants, free lunches at school, free distribution of text books, of warm clothing, of shoes to the pupils of the educational establishments – does all this not sufficiently show that the child is passing out of the confines of the family and being placed from the shoulders of the parents on those of collectivity?

The care of children by the parents consisted of three distinct parts: (1) the care necessarily devoted to the very young babies; (2)

the bringing up of the child; (3) the instruction of the child. As for the instruction of children in primary schools and later in gymnasiums and universities, it has become a duty of the state, even in capitalist society. The other occupations of the working class, its conditions of life, imperatively dictated, even to capitalist society, the creation, for the purposes of the young, of playgrounds, infants' schools, homes, etc, etc. The more the workers became conscious of their rights, the better they were organised in any specific state, the more society would show itself to be concerned with relieving the family of the care of the children.

But bourgeois society was afraid of going too far in this matter of meeting the interests of the working class, lest it contribute in this way to the disintegration of the family. The capitalists themselves are not unaware of the fact that the family of old, with the wife a slave and the man responsible for the support and well-being of the family, that the family of this type is the best weapon to stifle the proletarian effort towards liberty, to weaken the revolutionary spirit of the working man and working woman. Worry for his family takes the backbone out of the worker, obliges him to compromise with capital. The father and the mother, what will they not do when their children are hungry?

Contrary to the practice of capitalist society, which has not been able to transform the education of youth into a truly social function, state work, communist society will consider the social education of the rising generation as the very basis of its laws and customs, as the corner stone of the new edifice. Not the family of the past, petty and narrow, with its quarrels between the parents, with its exclusive interests in its own offspring, will mould for us the man of the society of tomorrow. Our new man, in our new society, is to be moulded by socialist organisations such as playgrounds, gardens, homes and many other such institutions in which the child will pass the greater part of the day and where intelligent educators will make of him a communist who is conscious of the greatness of this sacred motto: solidarity, comradeship, mutual aid, devotion to the collective life.

The mothers' livelihood assured

But now, with the bringing up gone and with the instruction gone, what will remain of the obligations of the family towards its children, particularly after it has been relieved also of the greater

portion of the material cares of having a child, except for the care of a very small baby while it still needs its mother's attention, while it is still learning to walk, clinging to its mother's skirts. Here again the communist state hastens to the aid of the working mother. No longer shall the child mother be bowed down with a baby in her arms! The workers' state charges itself with the duty of assuring livelihood to every mother, whether she be legitimately married or not, as long as she is suckling her child, of creating all over maternity houses, of establishing in all the cities and all the villages, day nurseries and other similar institutions in order to thus permit the woman to serve the state in a useful manner and simultaneously be a mother.

Marriage no longer a chain

Let the working mothers be reassured. The communist society is not intending to take the children away from the parents nor to tear the baby from the breast of the mother; nor has it any intention of resorting to violence in order to destroy the family as such. No such thing! Such are not the aims of the communist society.

What do we observe today? The outworn family is breaking. It is gradually freeing itself from all the domestic labours which formerly were as so many pillars supporting the family as a social unit. Housekeeping? It appears to have outlived its usefulness. The children? The parent-proletarians are already unable to take care of them; they can assure them neither subsistence nor education. This is the situation from which both parents and children suffer in equal measure.

Communist society therefore approaches the working woman and the working man and says to them: 'You are young, you love each other. Everyone has the right to happiness. Do not fear marriage, even though marriage was truly a chain for the working man and woman of capitalist society. Above all, do not fear, young and healthy as you are, to give your country new workers, new citizen children. The society of the workers is in need of new working forces; it hails the arrival of every newborn child in the world. Nor should you be concerned because of the future of your child; your child will know neither hunger nor cold. It will not be unhappy nor abandoned to its fate as would have been the case in capitalist society. A subsistence ration and solicitous care are assured to the child and to the mother by the communist society, by the workers' state,

as soon as the child arrives in the world. The child will be fed, it will be brought up, it will be educated by the care of the communist fatherland; but this fatherland will by no means partake to tear your child away from such parents as may desire to participate in the education of their little ones. The communist society will take upon itself the duties involved in the education of the child, but the paternal joys, the maternal satisfaction – such will not be taken away from those who show themselves capable of appreciating and understanding these joys.’

Can this be called the destruction of the family by means of violence? Or a forcible separation of child and mother?

The family a union of affection and comradeship

There is no escaping the fact: the old type of family has seen its day. It is not the fault of the communist state, it is the result of the changed conditions of life. The family is ceasing to be a necessity of the state, as it was in the past; on the contrary, it is worse than useless, since it needlessly holds back the female workers from a more productive and far more serious work. Nor is it any longer necessary to the members of the family themselves, since the task of bringing up the children, which was formerly that of the family, is passing more and more into the hands of the collectivity.

But on the ruins of the former family we shall soon behold rising a new form which will involve altogether different relations between men and women, and which will be a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal persons of the communist society, both of them free, both of them independent, both of them workers. No more domestic ‘servitude’ for women! No more inequality within the family. No more fear on the part of the woman to remain without support or aid with little ones in her arms if her husband deserts her. The woman in the communist city no longer depends on her husband but on her work. It is not her husband but her robust arms which will support her. There will be no more anxiety as to the fate of her children. The state of the workers will assume responsibility for these.

Marriage will be purified of all its material elements, of all money calculations, which constitute a hideous blemish on family life in our days. Marriage is henceforth to be transformed into a sublime union of two souls in love with each other, each having faith in the other; this union promises to each working man and to each

working woman simultaneously, the most complete happiness, the maximum of satisfaction which can be the lot of creatures who are conscious of themselves and of the life which surrounds them. This free union, which is strong in the comradeship with which it is inspired, instead of the conjugal slavery of the past – that is what the communist society of tomorrow offers to both men and women.

Once the conditions of labour have been transformed and the material security of the working women has been increased, and after marriage such as was performed by the Church – this so-called indissoluble marriage which was at bottom merely a fraud – after this marriage has given place to the free and honest union of men and women who are lovers and comrades, another shameful scourge will also be seen to disappear, another frightful evil which is a stain on humanity and which falls with all its weight on the hungry working woman: prostitution.

No more prostitution

This evil we owe to the economic system now in force, to the institution of private property. Once the latter has been abolished, the trade in women will automatically disappear.

Therefore let the woman of the working class cease to worry over the fact that the family as at present constituted is doomed to disappear. They will do much better to hail with joy the dawn of a new society which will liberate the woman from domestic servitude, which will lighten the burden of motherhood for women, and in which, finally, we shall see disappear the most terrible of the curses weighing upon women, known as prostitution.

Social equality of men and women

The woman who is called upon to struggle in the great cause of the liberation of the workers – such a woman should know that in the new state there will be no more room for such petty divisions as were formerly understood: ‘These are my own children; to them I owe all my maternal solicitude, all my affection; those are your children, my neighbour’s children; I am not concerned with them. I have enough to do with my own.’ Henceforth the worker-mother, who is conscious of her own social function, will rise to a point where she no longer differentiates between yours and mine; she must remember that there are henceforth only our children, those of the communist state, the common possession of all the workers.

The workers' state has need of a new form of relation between the sexes. The narrow and exclusive affection of the mother for her own children must expand until it embraces all the children of the great proletarian family. In place of the indissoluble marriage based on the servitude of woman, we shall see rise the free union, fortified by the love and the mutual respect of the two members of the workers' state, equal in their rights and in their obligations. In place of the individual and egotistic family, there will rise a great universal family of workers, in which all the workers, men and women, will be, above all, workers, comrades. Such will be the relation between men and women in the communist society of tomorrow. This new relation will assure to humanity all the joys of so-called free love ennobled by a true social equality of mates, joys which were unknown to the commercial society of the capitalist regime.

Make way for healthy, blossoming children; make way for a vigorous youth that clings to life and its joys, which is free in its sentiments and in its affections. Such is the watchword of the communist society. In the name of equality, of liberty, and of love, we call upon the working women and the working men, peasant women and peasants, courageously and with faith to take up the work of the reconstruction of human society with the object of rendering it more perfect, more just, and more capable of assuring to the individual the happiness which he deserves. The red flag of the social revolution which will shelter, after Russia, other countries, of the world also, already proclaims to us the approach of the heaven on earth to which humanity has been aspiring for centuries.