

# Lenin on the Emancipation of Women

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These articles are all in the book: Lenin on the Emancipation of Women, but some of the shorter articles and excerpts have been omitted. Also, all the articles by Lenin have been taken directly from his *Collected Works*.

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*Nadezhda K. Krupskaya*

## **From *Writings of V.I. Lenin***

In the course of his revolutionary activities Lenin often wrote and spoke about the emancipation of working women in general and peasant women in particular. To be sure, the emancipation of women is inseparably bound up with the entire struggle for the workers' cause, for socialism. We know Lenin as the leader of the working people, as the organiser of the Party and Soviet government, as a fighter and builder. Every working woman, every peasant woman must know about all that Lenin did, every aspect of his work, without limiting herself to what Lenin said about the position of working women and their emancipation. But because there exists the closest connection between the entire struggle of the working class and improving the position of women, Lenin often – on more than forty occasions, in fact – referred to this question in his speeches and articles, and every one of these references was inseparably bound up with all the other things that were of interest and concern to him at the time.

From the very start of his revolutionary career Comrade Lenin paid special attention to the position of women workers and peasants and to drawing them into the working-class movement. Lenin did his first practical revolutionary work in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad), where he organised a group of Social-Democrats which became extremely active among the St. Petersburg workers, publishing illegal leaflets and distributing them at factories. The leaflets were usually addressed to the workmen. At that time the class consciousness of the mass of the workers was still little developed, the most backward among them being working women. They received very low wages and their rights were flagrantly violated. So the leaflets were usually addressed to the men (the two leaflets addressed to the working women of the Laferm tobacco factory were an exception). Lenin also wrote a leaflet for the workers of the Thornton cloth mill (in 1895) and although the women working there were most backward, he entitled the leaflet: "To the Working Men and Women of the Thornton Mill." This is a detail, but a very important one.

When he was in exile in 1899, Lenin corresponded with the Party organisation (the First Party Congress was held in 1898) and

mentioned the subjects he wanted to write about in the illegal press. These included a pamphlet called "Women and the Workers' Cause". In this pamphlet Lenin intended to describe the position of women factory workers and peasant women and to show that the only salvation for them was through their participation in the revolutionary movement, and that only the victory of the working class would bring emancipation to women workers and peasants.

Writing in 1901 about the women who took part in the Obukhov defence,<sup>1</sup> about the speech delivered by a woman worker Marfa Yakovleva in court, Lenin said:

"The memory of our heroic comrades murdered and tortured to death in prison will increase tenfold the strength of the new fighters and will rouse thousands to rally to their aid, and like the eighteen-year-old Marfa Yakovleva, they will openly say: 'We stand by our brothers!' In addition to reprisals by the police and the military against participants in demonstrations, the government intends to prosecute them for rebellion; we will retaliate by uniting our revolutionary forces and winning over to our side all who are oppressed by the tyranny of tsarism, and by systematically preparing for the uprising of the whole people!" Lenin made a close study of the life and labour conditions of women factory workers, peasants and women employed in the handicrafts.

While in prison, Lenin studied the position of peasants as revealed by statistical reports; he studied the influence of the handicrafts, the drift of the peasants to the factories and the influence exerted by the factories on their culture and way of life. At the same time he studied all these questions from the viewpoint of women's labour. He pointed out that the peasant's proprietorial psychology places on women a burden of unnecessary and senseless drudgery (every peasant woman of a large family clearing only the small part of the table she eats on, cooking a separate meal for her own child and milking a cow to get only just enough milk for her own child).

In his book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* Lenin describes how cattle farmers exploit peasant women, how the merchant-buyers exploit women lace-weavers; he shows that large-scale industry emancipates women and that the work at factories broadens their outlook, makes them more cultured and independent and helps them to break the shackles of patriarchal life. Lenin said that the

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<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 248-9.

development of large-scale industry would create the basis for complete emancipation of women. Characteristic in this respect is Lenin's article "A Great Technical Achievement" written in 1913.

Workers in the bourgeois countries must fight for equal rights for men and women.

In exile Lenin devoted much of his time to working out the Party programme. At that time the Party had no programme. There was only a draft programme compiled by the Emancipation of Labour group. Examining this programme in his article "A Draft Programme of Our Party" and commenting on #9 of the practical part of the programme, which demanded "the revision of our entire civil and criminal legislation, the abolition of social-estate divisions and of punishments incompatible with the dignity of man", Lenin wrote that it would be well to add here: "*complete equality of rights for men and women.*"<sup>2</sup> (My italics – N. K.)

In 1903, when the Party Programme was adopted, this clause was included in it.

In 1907, in his report on the International Congress in Stuttgart Lenin noted with satisfaction that the Congress condemned the opportunist practices of the Austrian Social-Democrats who, while conducting a campaign for electoral rights for men, put off the struggle for electoral rights for women to "a later date".

The Soviet government established full equality of rights for men and women.

"We in Russia no longer have the base, mean and infamous denial of rights to women or inequality of the sexes, that disgusting survival of feudalism and medievalism which is being renovated by the avaricious bourgeoisie... in every other country in the world without exception."<sup>3</sup>

In 1913, studying the forms of bourgeois democracy and exposing the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, Lenin also dealt with the problem of prostitution and showed how, while encouraging white slave traffic and raping girls in the colonies, representatives of the bourgeoisie at the same time hypocritically pretended to be campaigning against prostitution.

Lenin returned to this question in December 1919, when he

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<sup>2</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, "The Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", October 14, 1921.

wrote that "free, civilised" America was touting for women for bawdy houses in the vanquished countries.<sup>4</sup>

In close connection with this question Lenin examined the question of child-bearing and indignantly wrote of the appeal of some intellectuals to the workers to practise birth control on the grounds that their children were doomed to poverty and privation. This is a petty-bourgeois view, wrote Lenin. The workers take a different view. Children are our future. As for poverty and so on, this can be remedied. We are fighting against capitalism and when we win a victory we shall build a bright future for our children....

And finally, in 1916-17, when he could see the socialist revolution was drawing near and was considering what the essential elements of socialist construction would be, and how to draw the masses into this construction, he particularly stressed the need to draw working women into social work, the need to enable all women to work for the benefit of society. *Eight* of his articles written in this period deal with this question, which he links up with the need to organise social life under socialism along new lines. Lenin saw a direct connection between this and the drawing of the most backward groups of women into the work of ruling the country, the need for re-educating the masses in the actual process of social work.

Social work teaches the art of government. "We are not utopians," Lenin wrote before the October Revolution. "We know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration. In this we agree with the Cadets, with Breshkovskaya, and with Tsereteli. We differ, however, from these citizens in that we demand an immediate break with the prejudiced view that only the rich, or officials chosen from rich families, are capable of *administering* the state, of performing the ordinary, everyday work of administration. We demand that *training* in the work of state administration be conducted by class-conscious workers and soldiers and that this training be begun at once, i.e., that a *beginning* be made at once in training all the working people, all the poor, for this work."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East", November 22, 1919.

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" October, 1917.

We know that the Soviet government has done all it can to draw working women in the town and countryside into the work of administration. And we know what great successes have been achieved on this front.

Lenin warmly greeted the awakening of the women of the Soviet East. Since he attached particular importance to raising the level of the nationalities that had been oppressed by tsarism and capitalism, it is quite understandable why he so warmly greeted the conference of delegates of the Women's Departments of Soviet regions and republics in the East.

Speaking of the achievements of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin pointed out that "the Congress will strengthen the ties with the communist movement of women, thanks to the international conference of working women called at the same time."<sup>6</sup>

In October 1932 we observed the fifteenth anniversary of Soviet power and summed up our achievements on all fronts, including the front of women's emancipation.

We know that women took a very active part in the Civil War, that many of them died in action but many others were steeled in battle. Some women were awarded the Order of the Red Banner for the active part they played in the struggle for Soviets during the Civil War. Many former women partisans now occupy important posts. Women have been persistent in learning to conduct social work.

Delegates' conferences are a school of social work. In 15 years almost 10 million women delegates have passed through this school.

At the time when we observed the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution 20 to 25 per cent of the deputies of the village Soviets, district executive committees and city Soviets were women. There were 186 women members of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. On this work they attain ever higher standards.

The number of women members of the Communist Party has also been steadily growing. In 1922 there were only 40,000 but by October 1932 the number exceeded 500,000.

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<sup>6</sup> Collected Works, Vol. 31, "The Second Congress of the Communist International".

Much progress has been made recently in fulfilling Lenin's behest concerning the complete emancipation of women.

In the last few years large-scale industry has been developing on a tremendous scale. It is being reorganised on the basis of modern technology and scientific organisation of labour. The socialist emulation and shock-workers' movement which have now been widely adopted stimulate a new, communist attitude towards labour. And it must be said that women are not lagging behind men in this. Every day we see more and more front-rank women workers who display great stamina and perseverance in labour. Labour is not something women have to get used to. Under the old regime the lives of women were full of continual, unending labour, but it was the kind of labour that was looked down upon and bore the imprint of bondage. And now this labour training and perseverance in labour place women in the front ranks of the builders of socialism and heroes of labour.

Collectivisation of agriculture was of the utmost importance for the emancipation of women. From the very start Lenin regarded the collectivisation of agriculture as a way of reorganising it along socialist lines. Back in 1894, in his book *What the Friends of the People Are* Lenin quoted Marx's words to the effect that after "the expropriation of the expropriators" is accomplished, that is, when the landowners are dispossessed of their landed estates and the capitalists of their factories, free workers will be united into co-operatives and the communal ("collective", as Lenin explained) ownership of the land and the means of production they create will be established.

Following the October Revolution, which marked the beginning of "the expropriation of the expropriators", the Soviet government raised the question of organising agricultural artels and communes. Particular attention was paid to this back in 1918 and 1919, but many years passed (as Lenin had predicted) before collectivisation became extensive and struck deep roots. The years of the Civil War, when the class struggle swept the country, the progress of Soviet power in the villages, the help, the cultural assistance rendered by the Soviet government to the countryside – all this prepared the ground for collectivisation, which is developing and growing stronger in the struggle against the kulaks.

Small-scale and middle peasant farming shackled women, tied them to the individual households, and narrowed their outlook; they were in fact slaves of their husbands, who often beat them cruelly. Small scale farming paved the way for religion. The peasants used



to say: "Each man for himself and God for all." Lenin quoted this saying on many occasions, as it perfectly expressed the psychology of a small proprietor. Collectivisation transforms the peasant from a small proprietor into a collectivist, undermines the peasants' isolation and the hold of religion and emancipates women. Lenin said that socialism alone would bring emancipation for women. His words are now coming true. We can see how women's position has changed in the collective farms.

The Congress of front-rank collective farmers held in the middle of February is striking evidence of the headway made in the collective cultivation of the land. There are now 200,000 collective farms, as compared with the 6,000 we had before. The Congress discussed the question of the best way to organise work on the collective farms. There were many women among the delegates. Sopina, a collective farmer from the Central Black Earth Region, made a fine speech which evoked thunderous applause. When she takes a hand in collective-farm development, the peasant woman grows in stature, learns to govern and to fight resolutely against the kulaks, the class enemy....

Religion is losing ground. Now collective-farm women come to the library and say: "You always give me books that simply say that there is no God. I know that without reading books. Give me a book that will tell me how and why religion arose and how and why it will die away." In the last few years there has been a tremendous growth of political consciousness of the masses. Political departments at the machine and tractor stations' (whose membership also includes women's organisers) will help not only to consolidate the collective farms, but will also help collective farmers, men and women, to get rid of surviving prejudices and cultural backwardness; lack of rights for women will become a thing of the past.

Ten years have passed since the day of Lenin's death. On that sad day we shall check the fulfilment of all of Lenin's behests. We shall sum up the results. Lenin's behest concerning the emancipation of women is being fulfilled under the guidance of the Party. We shall continue to advance along this path.

November 30, 1933

N. Krupskaya

## Capitalism and Female Labour

Present-day capitalist society conceals within itself numerous cases of poverty and oppression which do not immediately strike the eye. At the *best* of times, the scattered families of poor townspeople, artisans, workers, employees and petty officials live in incredible difficulties, barely managing to make both ends meet. Millions upon millions of women in such families live (or, rather, exist) as “domestic slaves”, striving to feed and clothe their family on pennies, at the cost of desperate daily effort and “saving” on everything – except their own labour.

It is these women that the capitalists most willingly employ as home-workers, who are prepared for a monstrously low wage to “earn a little extra” for themselves and their family, for the sake of a crust of bread. It is from among these women, too, that the capitalists of all countries recruit for themselves (like the ancient slave-owners and the medieval feudal lords) any number of concubines at a most “reasonable” price. And no amount of “moral indignation” (hypocritical in 99 cases out of 100) about prostitution can do anything against this trade in female flesh; so long as wage-slavery exists, inevitably prostitution too will exist. All the oppressed and exploited classes throughout the history of human societies have always been forced (and it is in this that their exploitation consists) to give up to their oppressors, first, their unpaid labour and, second, their women as concubines for the “masters”.

Slavery, feudalism and capitalism are identical in this respect. It is only the form of exploitation that changes; the exploitation itself remains.

An *exhibition* of the work of “women exploited at home” has opened in Paris, the “capital of the world”, and the centre of civilisation.

Each exhibit has a little tag showing how much the woman working at home receives for making it, and how much she can make per day and per hour on this basis.

And what do we find? *Not on a single* article can a woman working at home earn more than 1.25 francs, i.e., 50 kopeks, whereas the earnings on the vast majority of jobs are very much smaller. Take lampshades. The pay is 4 kopeks per dozen. Or paper bags: 15 kopeks per thousand, with earnings at six kopeks an hour. Here are little toys with ribbons, etc.: 2.5 kopeks an hour. Artificial

flowers: two or three kopeks an hour. Ladies' and gentlemen's underwear: from two to six kopeks an hour. And so on, without end.

Our workers' associations and trade unions, too, ought to organise an "exhibition" of this kind. It will not yield the colossal profits brought in by the exhibitions of the bourgeoisie. A display of proletarian women's poverty and indigence will bring a different benefit: it will help wage-slaves, both men and women, to understand their condition, look back over their "life", ponder the conditions for emancipation from this perpetual yoke of want, poverty, prostitution and every kind of outrage against the have-nots.

Written on April 27 (May 10), Printed from the *Pravda* text.  
1913

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From *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, pp. 230-231

## The Working Class and Neomalthusianism

At the Pirogov Doctors' Congress much interest was aroused and a long debate was held on the question of abortions. The report was made by Lichkus, who quoted figures on the exceedingly widespread practice of destroying the foetus in present-day so-called civilised states.

In New York, 80,000 abortions were performed in one year and there are 36,000 every month in France. In St. Petersburg the percentage of abortions has more than doubled in five years.

The Pirogov Doctors' Congress adopted a resolution saying that there should never be any criminal prosecution of a mother for performing an artificial abortion and that doctors should only be prosecuted if the operation is performed for "purposes of gain".

In the discussion the majority agreed that abortions should not be punishable, and the question of the so-called neomalthusianism (the use of contraceptives) was naturally touched upon, as was also the social side of the matter. Mr. Vigdorichik, for instance, said, according to the report in *Russkoye Slovo*,<sup>1</sup> that "contraceptive measures should be welcomed" and Mr. Astrakhan exclaimed, amidst thunderous applause:

"We have to convince mothers to bear children so that they can be maimed in educational establishments, so that lots can be drawn for them, so that they can be driven to suicide!"

If the report is true that this exclamation of Mr. Astrakhan's was greeted with thunderous applause, it is a fact that does not surprise me. The audience was made up of bourgeois, middle and petty bourgeois, who have the psychology of the philistine. What can you expect from them but the most banal liberalism?

From the point of view of the working class, however, it would hardly be possible to find a more apposite expression of the completely reactionary nature and the ugliness of "social neomalthusianism" than Mr. Astrakhan's phrase cited above.

... "Bear children so that they can be maimed" ... For that alone? Why not that they should fight better, more unitedly, consciously and resolutely than we are fighting against the present-day conditions of life that are maiming and ruining our generation?

This is the radical difference that distinguishes the psychology of the peasant, handicraftsman, intellectual, the petty bourgeois in general, from that of the proletarian.

The petty bourgeois sees and feels that he is heading for ruin, that life is becoming more difficult, that the struggle for existence is ever more ruthless, and that his position and that of his family are becoming more and more hopeless. It is an indisputable fact, and the petty bourgeois protests against it.

But *how* does he protest?

He protests as the representative of a class that is hopelessly perishing, that despairs of its future, that is depressed and cowardly. There is nothing to be done... if only there were fewer children to suffer our torments and hard toil, our poverty and our humiliation – such is the cry of the petty bourgeois.

The class-conscious worker is far from holding this point of view. He will not allow his consciousness to be dulled by such cries no matter how sincere and heartfelt they may be. Yes, we workers and the mass of small proprietors lead a life that is filled with unbearable oppression and suffering. Things are harder for our generation than they were for our fathers. But in one respect we are luckier than our fathers. *We have begun to learn and are rapidly learning to fight* – and to fight not as individuals, as the best of our fathers fought, not for the slogans of bourgeois speechifiers that are alien to us in spirit, but for our slogans, the slogans of our class. We are fighting better than our fathers did. Our children will fight better than we do, and *they will be victorious*.

The working class is not perishing, it is growing, becoming stronger, gaining courage, consolidating itself, educating itself and becoming steeled in battle. We are pessimists as far as serfdom, capitalism and petty production are concerned, but we are ardent optimists in what concerns the working-class movement and its aims. We are already laying the foundation of a new edifice and our children will complete its construction.

That is the reason – the only reason – why we are unconditionally the enemies of neomalthusianism, suited only to unfeeling and egotistic petty-bourgeois couples, who whisper in scared voices: “God grant we manage somehow by ourselves. So much the better if we have no children.”

It goes without saying that this does not by any means prevent us from demanding the unconditional annulment of all laws against abortions or against the distribution of medical literature on contraceptive measures, etc. Such laws are nothing but the hypocrisy of the ruling classes. These laws do not heal the ulcers of capitalism,

they merely turn them into malignant ulcers that are especially painful for the oppressed masses. Freedom for medical propaganda and the protection of the elementary democratic rights of citizens, men and women, are one thing. The social theory of neomalthusianism is quite another. Class-conscious workers will always conduct the most ruthless struggle against attempts to impose that reactionary and cowardly theory on the most progressive and strongest class in modern society, the class that is the best prepared for great changes.

*Pravda* No. 137, June 16, 1913      Published according to the  
Signed: *V.I.*      *Pravda* text

From *Collected Works*, Vol. 19, pp. 235-237

### **Note**

[1] Lenin here refers to the decisions passed by the Fifth (All-Russian) Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. held in Paris between December 21 and December 27, 1908 (January 3-9, 1909). The Conference was attended by 16 delegates with full powers: five Bolsheviks, three Mensheviks, five Polish Social-Democrats and three Bundists. Lenin represented the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.; he delivered a report on “The Tasks of the Party in the Present Situation”; he also spoke on the Social-Democratic Duma group and on organisational and other questions. At the Conference the Bolsheviks fought two opportunist trends in the Party – liquidationism and otzovism. On Lenin’s proposal the Conference condemned liquidationism and called upon all Party organisations to struggle resolutely against all attempts to liquidate the Party. Bolshevik resolutions on all questions were adopted.

## Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women, November 19, 1918

*(Comrade Lenin is greeted by the delegates with stormy applause.)* Comrades, in a certain sense this Congress of the women's section of the workers' army has a special significance, because one of the hardest things in every country has been to stir the women into action. There can be no socialist revolution unless very many working women take a big part in it.

In all civilised countries, even the most advanced, women are actually no more than domestic slaves. Women do not enjoy full equality in any capitalist state, not even in the freest of republics.

One of the primary tasks of the Soviet Republic is to abolish all restrictions on women's rights. The Soviet government has completely abolished divorce proceedings, that source of bourgeois degradation, repression and humiliation.

It will soon be a year now since complete freedom of divorce was legislated. We have passed a decree annulling all distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children and removing political restrictions. Nowhere else in the world have equality and freedom for working women been so fully established.

We know that it is the working-class woman who has to bear the full brunt of antiquated codes.

For the first time in history, our law has removed everything that denied women rights. But the important thing is not the law. In the cities and industrial areas this law on complete freedom of marriage is doing all right, but in the countryside it all too frequently remains a dead letter. There the religious marriage still predominates. This is due to the influence of the priests, an evil that is harder to combat than the old legislation.

We must be extremely careful in fighting religious prejudices – some people cause a lot of harm in this struggle by offending religious feelings. We must use propaganda and education. By lending too sharp an edge to the struggle we may only arouse popular resentment; such methods of struggle tend to perpetuate the division of the people along religious lines, whereas our strength lies in unity. The deepest source of religious prejudice is poverty and ignorance; and that is the evil we have to combat.

The status of women up to now has been compared to that of a slave; women have been tied to the home, and only socialism can

save them from this. They will only be completely emancipated when we change from small-scale individual farming to collective farming and collective working of the land. That is a difficult task. But now that Poor Peasants' Committees are being formed, the time has come when the socialist revolution is being consolidated.

The poorest part of the rural population is only now beginning to organise, and socialism is acquiring a firm foundation in these organisations of poor peasants.

Before, often the town became revolutionary and then the countryside.

But the present revolution relies on the countryside, and therein lie its significance and strength. The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it. The Soviet government is doing everything in its power to enable women to carry on independent proletarian socialist work.

The Soviet government is in a difficult position because the imperialists of all countries hate Soviet Russia and are preparing to go to war with her for kindling the fire of revolution in a number of countries and for taking determined steps towards socialism.

Now that they are out to destroy revolutionary Russia, the ground is beginning to burn under their own feet. You know how the revolutionary movement is spreading in Germany. In Denmark the workers are fighting their government. In Switzerland and Holland the revolutionary movement is getting stronger. The revolutionary movement in these small countries has no importance in itself, but it is particularly significant because there was no war in these countries and they had the most "constitutional" democratic system. If countries like these are stirring into action, it makes us sure the revolutionary movement is gaining ground all over the world.

No other republic has so far been able to emancipate woman. The Soviet government is helping her. Our cause is invincible because the invincible working class is rising in all countries. This movement signifies the spread of the invincible socialist revolution. (*Prolonged applause. All sing the "Internationale".*)

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From *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 180-182.



# **The Tasks of the Working Women's Movement in the Soviet Republic**

## **Speech Delivered at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-Party Working Women**

September 23, 1919

Comrades, it gives me pleasure to greet a conference of working women. I will allow myself to pass over those subjects and questions that, of course, at the moment are the cause of the greatest concern to every working woman and to every politically-conscious individual from among the working people; these are the most urgent questions—that of bread and that of the war situation. I know from the newspaper reports of your meetings that these questions have been dealt with exhaustively by Comrade Trotsky as far as war questions are concerned and by Comrades Yakovleva and Svidersky as far as the bread question is concerned; please, therefore, allow me to pass over those questions.

I should like to say a few words about the general tasks facing the working women's movement in the Soviet Republic, those that are, in general, connected with the transition to socialism, and those that are of particular urgency at the present time. Comrades, the question of the position of women was raised by Soviet power from the very beginning. It seems to me that any workers' state in the course of transition to socialism is faced with a double task. The first part of that task is relatively simple and easy. It concerns those old laws that kept women in a position of inequality as compared to men.

Participants in all emancipation movements in Western Europe have long since, not for decades but for centuries, put forward the demand that obsolete laws be annulled and women and men be made equal by law, but none of the democratic European states, none of the most advanced republics have succeeded in putting it into effect, because wherever there is capitalism, wherever there is private property in land and factories, wherever the power of capital is preserved, the men retain their privileges. It was possible to put it into effect in Russia only because the power of the workers has been established here since October 25, 1917. From its very inception Soviet power set out to be the power of the working people,

hostile to all forms of exploitation. It set itself the task of doing away with the possibility of the exploitation of the working people by the landowners and capitalists, of doing away with the rule of capital. Soviet power has been trying to make it possible for the working people to organise their lives without private property in land, without privately-owned factories, without that private property that everywhere, throughout the world, even where there is complete political liberty, even in the most democratic republics, keeps the working people in a state of what is actually poverty and wage-slavery, and women in a state of double slavery.

Soviet power, the power of the working people, in the first months of its existence effected a very definite revolution in legislation that concerns women. Nothing whatever is left in the Soviet Republic of those laws that put women in a subordinate position. I am speaking specifically of those laws that took advantage of the weaker position of women and put them in a position of inequality and often, even, in a humiliating position, i.e., the laws on divorce and on children born out of wedlock and on the right of a woman to summon the father of a child for maintenance.

It is particularly in this sphere that bourgeois legislation, even, it must be said, in the most advanced countries, takes advantage of the weaker position of women to humiliate them and give them a status of inequality. It is particularly in this sphere that Soviet power has left nothing whatever of the old, unjust laws that were intolerable for working people. We may now say proudly and without any exaggeration that apart from Soviet Russia there is not a country in the world where women enjoy full equality and where women are not placed in the humiliating position felt particularly in day-to-day family life. This was one of our first and most important tasks.

If you have occasion to come into contact with parties that are hostile to the Bolsheviks, if there should come into your hands newspapers published in Russian in the regions occupied by Kolchak or Denikin, or if you happen to talk to people who share the views of those newspapers, you may often hear from them the accusation that Soviet power has violated democracy.

We, the representatives of Soviet power, Bolshevik Communists and supporters of Soviet power are often accused of violating democracy and proof of this is given by citing the fact that Soviet power dispersed the Constituent Assembly. We usually answer this accusation as follows: that democracy and that Constituent Assem-

bly which came into being when private property still existed on earth, when there was no equality between people, when the one who possessed his own capital was the boss and the others worked for him and were his wage-slaves—that was a democracy on which we place no value. Such democracy concealed slavery even in the most advanced countries. We socialists are supporters of democracy only insofar as it eases the position of the working and oppressed people. Throughout the world socialism has set itself the task of combating every kind of exploitation of man by man. That democracy has real value for us which serves the exploited, the underprivileged. If those who do not work are disfranchised that would be real equality between people. Those who do not work should not eat.

In reply to these accusations we say that the question must be presented in this way—how is democracy implemented in various countries? We see that equality is proclaimed in all democratic republics but in the civil laws and in laws on the rights of women—those that concern their position in the family and divorce—we see inequality and the humiliation of women at every step, and we say that this is a violation of democracy specifically in respect of the oppressed. Soviet power has implemented democracy to a greater degree than any of the other, most advanced countries because it has not left in its laws any trace of the inequality of women. Again I say that no other state and no other legislation has ever done for women a half of what Soviet power did in the first months of its existence.

Laws alone, of course, are not enough, and we are by no means content with mere decrees. In the sphere of legislation, however, we have done everything required of us to put women in a position of equality and we have every right to be proud of it. The position of women in Soviet Russia is now ideal as compared with their position in the most advanced states. We tell ourselves, however, that this is, of course, only the beginning.

Owing to her work in the house, the woman is still in a difficult position. To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialised and for women to participate in common productive labour. Then women will occupy the same position as men.

Here we are not, of course, speaking of making women the equal of men as far as productivity of labour, the quantity of labour, the length of the working day, labour conditions, etc., are concerned; we mean that the woman should not, unlike the man, be

oppressed because of her position in the family. You all know that even when women have full rights, they still remain factually down-trodden because all house-work is left to them. In most cases housework is the most unproductive, the most barbarous and the most arduous work a woman can do. It is exceptionally petty and does not include anything that would in any way promote the development of the woman.

In pursuance of the socialist ideal we want to struggle for the full implementation of socialism, and here an extensive field of labour opens up before women. We are now making serious preparations to clear the ground for the building of socialism, but the building of socialism will begin only when we have achieved the complete equality of women and when we undertake the new work together with women who have been emancipated from that petty, stultifying, unproductive work. This is a job that will take us many, many years.

This work cannot show any rapid results and will not produce a scintillating effect.

We are setting up model institutions, dining-rooms and nurseries, that will emancipate women from housework. And the work of organising all these institutions will fall mainly to women. It has to be admitted that in Russia today there are very few institutions that would help woman out of her state of household slavery. There is an insignificant number of them, and the conditions now obtaining in the Soviet Republic—the war and food situation about which comrades have already given you the details—hinder us in this work. Still, it must be said that these institutions that liberate women from their position as household slaves are springing up wherever it is in any way possible.

We say that the emancipation of the workers must be effected by the workers themselves, and in exactly the same way the emancipation of working women is a matter for the working women themselves. The working women must themselves see to it that such institutions are developed, and this activity will bring about a complete change in their position as compared with what it was under the old, capitalist society.

In order to be active in politics under the old, capitalist regime special training was required, so that women played an insignificant part in politics, even in the most advanced and free capitalist countries. Our task is to make politics available to every working

woman. Ever since private property in land and factories has been abolished and the power of the landowners and capitalists overthrown, the tasks of politics have become simple, clear and comprehensible to the working people as a whole, including working women. In capitalist society the woman's position is marked by such inequality that the extent of her participation in politics is only an insignificant fraction of that of the man. The power of the working people is necessary for a change to be wrought in this situation, for then the main tasks of politics will consist of matters directly affecting the fate of the working people themselves.

Here, too, the participation of working women is essential—not only of party members and politically-conscious women, but also of the non-party women and those who are least politically conscious. Here Soviet power opens up a wide field of activity to working women.

We have had a difficult time in the struggle against the forces hostile to Soviet Russia that have attacked her. It was difficult for us to fight on the battlefield against the forces who went to war against the power of the working people and in the field of food supplies against the profiteers, because of the too small number of people, working people, who came whole-heartedly to our aid with their own labour. Here, too, there is nothing Soviet power can appreciate as much as the help given by masses of non-party working women. They may know that in the old, bourgeois society, perhaps, a comprehensive training was necessary for participation in politics and that this was not available to women. The political activity of the Soviet Republic is mainly the struggle against the landowners and capitalists, the struggle for the elimination of exploitation; political activity, therefore, is made available to the working woman in the Soviet Republic and it will consist in the working woman using her organisational ability to help the working man.

What we need is not only organisational work on a scale involving millions; we need organisational work on the smallest scale and this makes it possible for women to work as well. Women can work under war conditions when it is a question of helping the army or carrying on agitation in the army. Women should take an active part in all this so that the Red Army sees that it is being looked after, that solicitude is being displayed. Women can also work in the sphere of food distribution, on the improvement of public catering

and everywhere opening dining-rooms like those that are so numerous in Petrograd.

It is in these fields that the activities of working women acquire the greatest organisational significance. The participation of working women is also essential in the organisation and running of big experimental farms and should not take place only in isolated cases. This is something that cannot be carried out without the participation of a large number of working women. Working women will be very useful in this field in supervising the distribution of food and in making food products more easily obtainable. This work can well be done by non-party working women and its accomplishment will do more than anything else to strengthen socialist society.

We have abolished private property in land and almost completely abolished the private ownership of factories; Soviet power is now trying to ensure that all working people, non-party as well as Party members, women as well as men, should take part in this economic development. The work that Soviet power has begun can only make progress when, instead of a few hundreds, millions and millions of women throughout Russia take part in it. We are sure that the cause of socialist development will then become sound. Then the working people will show that they can live and run their country without the aid of the landowners and capitalists. Then socialist construction will be so soundly based in Russia that no external enemies in other countries and none inside Russia will be any danger to the Soviet Republic.

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## Soviet Power and the Status of Women

The second anniversary of Soviet power is an occasion for taking stock of what has been done during this period and for reflecting on the significance and the aims of the revolution that has been accomplished.

The bourgeoisie and its supporters charge us with having violated democracy. We, on the other hand, assert that the Soviet revolution has given an unprecedented impulse to the development of democracy in breadth and in depth, democracy, that is, for the working people oppressed by capitalism, democracy for the overwhelming majority of the people, socialist democracy (for the working people), as distinct from bourgeois democracy (for the exploiters, for the capitalists, for the rich).

Who is right?

To give proper thought to this question and achieve a deeper understanding of it one must take stock of the experience of these two years and make better preparations for further development.

The status of women makes clear in the most striking fashion the difference between bourgeois and socialist democracy and furnishes a most effective reply to the question posed.

In a bourgeois republic (i.e., where there is private ownership of land, factories, shares, etc.), be it the most democratic republic, women have never had rights fully equal to those of men, anywhere in the world, in any one of the more advanced countries. And this despite the fact that more than 125 years have passed since the great French (bourgeois-democratic) Revolution.

In words bourgeois democracy promises equality and freedom, but in practice *not a single* bourgeois republic, even the more advanced, has granted women (half the human race) and men complete equality in the eyes of the law, or delivered women from dependence on and the oppression of the male.

Bourgeois democracy is the democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, lavish promises and high-sounding slogans about *freedom and equality*, but in practice all this cloaks the lack of freedom and the inequality of women, the lack of freedom and the inequality for the working and exploited people.

Soviet or socialist democracy sweeps away these pompous but false words and declares ruthless war on the hypocrisy of “democrats”, landowners, capitalists and farmers with bursting bins who are

piling up wealth by selling surplus grain to the starving workers at profiteering prices.

Down with this foul lie! There is no “equality”, nor can there be, of oppressed and oppressor, exploited and exploiter. There is no real “freedom”, nor can there be, so long as women are handicapped by men’s legal privileges, so long as there is no freedom for the worker from the yoke of capital, no freedom for the labouring peasant from the yoke of the capitalist, landowner and merchant.

Let the liars and the hypocrites, the obtuse and the blind, the bourgeois and their supporters, try to deceive the people with talk about freedom in general, about equality in general and about democracy in general.

We say to the workers and peasants—tear the mask from these liars, open the eyes of the blind. Ask them:

Is there equality of the two sexes?

Which nation is the equal of which?

*Which class is the equal of which?*

Freedom from what yoke or from the yoke of which class?  
Freedom for which class?

He who speaks about politics, democracy and freedom, about equality, about socialism, without posing these questions, without giving them priority, who does not fight against hushing them up, concealing and blunting them, is the worst enemy of the working people, a wolf in sheep’s clothing, the rabid opponent of the workers and peasants, a lackey of the landowners, the tsars and the capitalists.

In the course of two years of Soviet power in one of the most backward countries of Europe more has been done to emancipate woman, to make her the equal of the “strong” sex, than has been done during the past 130 years by all the advanced, enlightened, “democratic” republics of the world taken together.

Education, culture, civilisation, freedom—all these high-sounding words are accompanied in all the capitalist, bourgeois republics of the world with incredibly foul, disgustingly vile, bestially crude laws that make women unequal in marriage and divorce, that make the child born out of wedlock and the “legally born” child unequal and that give privileges to the male and humiliate and degrade womankind.

The yoke of capital, the oppression of “sacred private property”, the despotism of philistine obtuseness, the avarice of the small property-owner—these are the things that have prevented the



most democratic bourgeois republics from abolishing these foul and filthy laws.

The Soviet Republic, the republic of workers and peasants, wiped out these laws at one stroke and did not leave standing a single stone of the edifice of bourgeois lies and bourgeois hypocrisy.

Down with this lie! Down with the liars who speak about freedom and equality *for all*, while there is an oppressed sex, oppressing classes, private ownership of capital and shares and people with bursting bins who use their surplus grain to enslave the hungry. Instead of freedom for all, instead of equality for all, let there be *struggle* against the oppressors and exploiters, *let the opportunity* to oppress and exploit *be abolished*. That is our slogan!

Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex!

Freedom and equality for the workers and labouring peasants!

Struggle against the oppressors, struggle against the capitalists, struggle against the kulak profiteers!

This is our fighting slogan, this is our proletarian truth, the truth of the fight against capital, the truth that we hurl in the face of the world of capital with its honeyed, hypocritical and pompous phrases about freedom and equality *in general*, about freedom and equality *for all*.

And it is because we have laid bare this hypocrisy, because, with revolutionary vigour, we are ensuring freedom and full rights for the oppressed working people, against the oppressors, against the capitalists, against the kulaks—precisely because of this Soviet rule has become so dear to the workers of the whole world.

It is because of this, the sympathies of the working masses, the sympathies of the oppressed and exploited in all countries of the world are with us on this occasion of the second anniversary of Soviet rule.

Because of this, on the occasion of the second anniversary of Soviet rule, despite the famine and cold, despite all the suffering caused by the imperialists' invasion of the Russian Soviet Republic, we are fully convinced of the justness of our cause, firmly convinced of the inevitable victory of Soviet power on a world scale.

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Signed: *N. Lenin*

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## **To the Working Women**

Comrades, the elections to the Moscow Soviet show that the Communist Party is gaining ground among the working class.

Working women must take a bigger part in the elections. The Soviet government is the first and only government in the world to have completely abolished all the old, despicable bourgeois laws which placed women in a position of inferiority to men, which placed men in a privileged position, for example, in respect of marital rights and of children. The Soviet government, the government of the working people, is the first and only government in the world to have abolished all the privileges of men in property questions, privileges which the marriage laws of all bourgeois republics, even the most democratic, still preserve.

Wherever there are landowners, capitalists and merchants, women cannot be the equal of men even before the law.

Where there are no landowners, capitalists or merchants, and where the government of the working people is building a new life without these exploiters, men and women are equal before the law.

But that is not enough.

Equality before the law is not necessarily equality in fact.

We want the working woman to be the equal of the working man not only before the law but in actual fact. For this working women must take an increasing part in the administration of socialised enterprises and in the administration of the state.

By taking part in administration, women will learn quickly and will catch up with the men.

Elect more working women to the Soviet, both Communist women and non-party women. As long as they are honest working women capable of performing their work sensibly and conscientiously, even if they are not members of the Party—elect them to the Moscow Soviet!

Send more working women to the Moscow Soviet! Let the Moscow proletariat show that it is prepared to do everything, and is doing everything, to fight for victory, to fight the old inequality, the old bourgeois humiliation of women!

The proletariat cannot achieve complete liberty until it has won complete liberty for women.

*N. Lenin*

February 21, 1920

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## International Working Women's Day

Capitalism combines formal equality with economic and, consequently, social inequality. That is one of the principal features of capitalism, one that is deliberately obscured by the supporters of the bourgeoisie, the liberals, and is not understood by petty-bourgeois democrats. This feature of capitalism, incidentally, renders it necessary for us in our resolute fight for economic equality openly to admit capitalist inequality, and even, under certain conditions, to make this open admission of inequality the basis of the proletarian statehood (the Soviet Constitution).

But even in the matter of formal equality (equality before the law, the "equality" of the well-fed and the hungry, of the man of property and the propertyless), capitalism cannot be consistent. And one of the most glaring manifestations of this inconsistency is the inequality of women. Complete equality has not been granted even by the most progressive republican, and democratic bourgeois states.

The Soviet Republic of Russia, on the other hand, at once swept away all legislative traces of the inequality of women without exception, and immediately ensured their complete equality before the law.

It is said that the best criterion of the cultural level is the legal status of women. This aphorism contains a grain of profound truth. From this standpoint only the dictatorship of the proletariat, only the socialist state could attain, as it has attained, the highest cultural level. The new, mighty and unparalleled stimulus given to the working women's movement is therefore inevitably associated with the foundation (and consolidation) of the first Soviet Republic—and, in addition to and in connection with this, with the Communist International.

Since mention has been made of those who were oppressed by capitalism, directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, it must be said that the Soviet system, and only the Soviet system, guarantees democracy. This is clearly shown by the position of the working class and the poor peasants. It is clearly shown by the position of women.

But the Soviet system is the last decisive struggle for the *abolition of classes*, for economic and social equality. Democracy, even democracy for those who were oppressed by capitalism, including the oppressed sex, *is not enough for us*.

It is the chief task of the working women's movement to fight for economic and social equality, and not only formal equality, for women. The chief thing is to get women to take part in socially productive labour, to liberate them from "domestic slavery", to free them from their stupefying and humiliating subjugation to the eternal drudgery of the kitchen and the nursery.

This struggle will be a long one, and it demands a radical reconstruction both of social technique and of morals. But it will end in the complete triumph of communism.

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*Clara Zetkin*

## **An Interview with Lenin on the Woman Question**

Comrade Lenin repeatedly discussed with me the problem of women's rights. He obviously attached great importance to the women's movement, which was to him an essential component of the mass movement that in certain circumstances might become decisive. Needless to say he saw full social equality of women as a principle which no Communist could dispute.

We had our first lengthy talk on this subject in the autumn of 1920, in Lenin's big study in the Kremlin. Lenin sat at his desk, which was covered with books and papers, indicating study and work without the "brilliant disorder" associated with genius.

"We must by all means set up a powerful international women's movement on a clear-cut theoretical basis," he began after greeting me. "It is clear that without Marxist theory we cannot have proper practice. Here, too, we Communists need the greatest clarity of principle. We must draw a sharp line between us and all other parties. Our Second International Congress unfortunately did not come up to expectations in discussing the question of women. It posed the question but did not get around to taking a definite stand. A committee is still in charge of the matter. It is to draft a resolution, theses and directives but has made little progress so far. You must help it."

I had already heard from others what Lenin was now telling me and I expressed my amazement. I was full of enthusiasm for everything Russian women had done during the revolution and what they were doing now for its defense and further development. As for the standing and activity of women in the Bolshevik Party, I thought that it was a model party indeed, the model party. It alone supplied the international Communist women's movement with a valuable trained and experienced force and set a great example for history.

"That is true, it's wonderful," Lenin remarked with a faint smile. "In Petrograd, here in Moscow, and in other cities and industrial centres, proletarian women showed up splendidly during the revolution. We would not have won without them, or hardly. That is my opinion. What courage they showed and how courageous they still are! Imagine the suffering and privation they are enduring. But

they are holding out because they want to defend the Soviets, because they want freedom and communism. Yes, our working women are magnificent class fighters. They are worthy of admiration and love. In general, it must be acknowledged that even the ladies of the 'Constitutional Democrats' in Petrograd showed greater courage in fighting us than those wretched military Cadets."

"It's true that we have reliable, intelligent and tireless women in our Party. They hold important posts in the Soviets, Executive Committees, People's Commissariats, and public offices of every kind. Many of them work day and night either in the Party or among the workers and peasants or in the Red Army. That is of great value to us. It is important for women all over the world, as it is evidence of the capacity of women, of the great value of the work they do for society. The first proletarian dictatorship is truly paving the way for the complete social equality of women. It eradicates more prejudice than volumes of feminist literature. However, in spite of all this, we do not yet have an international Communist women's movement and we must have one without fail. We must immediately set about starting it. Without such a movement, the work of our International and of its parties is incomplete and never will be complete. Yet our revolutionary work has to be fulfilled in its entirety. Tell me how Communist work is getting on abroad."

I did as well as I could at the time, with the links between the Comintern parties still very loose and irregular. Lenin listened attentively, leaning slightly forward, with no sign of boredom, impatience or fatigue, keenly following even details of secondary importance. I have never known anyone who was a better listener or who could co-ordinate and generalize all that he had heard as fast as he did. That was evident from the short and always very specific questions he asked from time to time about what I told him, and from the fact that he returned to this or that particular of my narrative later on. Lenin made some brief notes.

Naturally, I spoke in great detail about the state of affairs in Germany. I told Lenin of the vast importance which Rosa Luxemburg attached to drawing the greatest number of women into the revolutionary struggle. When the Communist Party had been founded, she insisted that a women's newspaper be published. When Leo Jogiches and I met for the last time thirty-six hours before he was murdered he discussed the Party's plan of work with me. He gave me various tasks to perform, among them a plan for

the organisation of work among working women. The Party tackled this question at its first illegal conference. The trained and experienced women agitators and leaders who had become prominent before and during the war had almost without exception remained Social-Democrats of the one or the other shade, and kept the agitated and active proletarian women under their sway. However, there was already a small nucleus of energetic, devoted women who took part in the Party's every job and every battle. Furthermore, the Party itself had already organised methodical activity among the working women. Of course all this was merely a start, but a good start nevertheless.

“Not bad, not bad at all,” Lenin said. “The Communist women's energy, devotion and enthusiasm, their courage and intelligence during the illegal and semi-legal periods, promise well for the development of our work. It would be useful for the expansion of the Party and the growth of its strength to win over the masses and carry through actions. But how about giving all the comrades a clear understanding of the fundamentals of this question and training them – how are you getting along in this respect? This is what counts most in the work among the masses. It is very important in terms of the ideas we convey to the masses, and of the things we want the masses to adopt and take inspiration from. I cannot remember at the moment who said ‘It takes inspiration to do great deeds.’ We and the working people of the whole world still have really great deeds to perform. What inspires your comrades, the proletarian women of Germany? What about their proletarian class-consciousness? Do their interests and activities centre on the political demands of the moment? What is the focal point of their thoughts?

“I have heard strange things about that from Russian and German comrades. I must tell you what I mean. I understand that in Hamburg a gifted Communist woman is bringing out a newspaper for prostitutes, and is trying to organize them for the revolutionary struggle. Now Rosa, a true Communist, felt and acted like a human being when she wrote an article in defence of prostitutes who have landed in jail for violating a police regulation concerning their sad trade. They are unfortunate double victims of bourgeois society. Victims, first, of its accursed system of property and, secondly, of its accursed moral hypocrisy. There is no doubt about this. Only a coarse-grained and short-sighted person could forget this. To under-



stand this is one thing, but it is quite another thing – how shall I put it? – to organize the prostitutes as a special revolutionary guild contingent and publish a trade union paper for them. Are there really no industrial working women left in Germany who need organizing, who need a newspaper, who should be enlisted in your struggle? This is a morbid deviation. It strongly reminds me of the literary vogue which made a sweet madonna out of every prostitute. Its origin was sound too: social sympathy, and indignation against the moral hypocrisy of the honourable bourgeoisie. But the healthy principle underwent bourgeois corrosion and degenerated. The question of prostitution will confront us even in our country with many a difficult problem. Return the prostitute to productive work, find her a place in the social economy that is the thing to do. But the present state of our economy and all the other circumstances make it a difficult and complicated matter. Here you have an aspect of the woman problem which faces us in all its magnitude, after the proletariat has come to power, and demands a practical solution. It will still require a great deal of effort here in Soviet Russia. But to return to your special problem in Germany. Under no circumstances should the Party look calmly upon such improper acts of its members. It causes confusion and splits our forces. Now what have you done to stop it?”

Before I could answer Lenin continued: “The record of your sins, Clara, is even worse. I have been told that at the evenings arranged for reading and discussion with working women, sex and marriage problems come first. They are said to be the main objects of interest in your political instruction and educational work. I could not believe my ears when I heard that. The first state of proletarian dictatorship is battling with the counter-revolutionaries of the whole world. The situation in Germany itself calls for the greatest unity of all proletarian revolutionary forces, so that they can repel the counter-revolution which is pushing on. But active Communist women are busy discussing sex problems and the forms of marriage ‘past, present and future’. They consider it their most important task to enlighten working women on these questions. It is said that a pamphlet on the sex question written by a Communist authoress from Vienna enjoys the greatest popularity. What rot that booklet is! The workers read what is right in it long ago in Bebel. Only not in the tedious, cut-and-dried form found in the pamphlet but in the form of gripping agitation that strikes out at bourgeois society. The

mention of Freud's hypotheses is designed to give the pamphlet a scientific veneer, but it is so much bungling by an amateur. Freud's theory has now become a fad. I mistrust sex theories expounded in articles, treatises, pamphlets, etc. – In short, the theories dealt with in that specific literature which sprouts so luxuriantly on the dung heap of bourgeois society. I mistrust those who are always absorbed in the sex problems, the way an Indian saint is absorbed in the contemplation of his navel.

“It seems to me that this superabundance of sex theories, which for the most part are mere hypotheses, and often quite arbitrary ones, stems from a personal need. It springs from the desire to justify one's own abnormal or excessive sex life before bourgeois morality and to plead for tolerance towards oneself. This veiled respect for bourgeois morality is as repugnant to me as rooting about in all that bears on sex. No matter how rebellious and revolutionary it may be made to appear, it is in the final analysis thoroughly bourgeois. Intellectuals and others like them are particularly keen on this. There is no room for it in the Party, among the class-conscious, fighting proletariat.”

I interposed that where private property and the bourgeois social order prevail, questions of sex and marriage gave rise to manifold problems, conflicts and suffering for women of all social classes and strata. As far as women are concerned, the war and its consequences exacerbated the existing conflicts and suffering to the utmost precisely in the sphere of sexual relations. Problems formerly concealed from women were now laid bare. To this was added the atmosphere of incipient revolution. The world of old emotions and thoughts was cracking up. Former social connections were loosening and breaking. The makings of new relations between people were appearing. Interest in the relevant problems was an expression of the need for enlightenment and a new orientation. It was also a reaction against the distortions and hypocrisy of bourgeois society. Knowledge of the modifications of the forms of marriage and family that took place in the course of history, and of their dependence on economics, would serve to rid the minds of working women of their preconceived idea of the eternity of bourgeois society. The critically historical attitude to this had to lead to an unrelenting analysis of bourgeois society, an exposure of its essence and its consequences, including the branding of false sex morality. All roads led to Rome. Every truly Marxist analysis of an important part

of the ideological superstructure of society, of an outstanding social phenomenon, had to lead to an analysis of bourgeois society and its foundation, private property. It should lead to the conclusion that “Carthage must be destroyed”.

Lenin nodded with a smile.

“There you are! You defend your comrades and your Party like a lawyer. What you say is of course true. But that can at best excuse, not justify, the mistake made in Germany. It remains a mistake. Can you assure me in all sincerity that during those reading and discussion evenings, questions of sex and marriage are dealt with from the point of view of mature, vital historical materialism? This presupposes wide-ranging, profound knowledge, and the fullest Marxist mastery of a vast amount of material. Do you now have the forces you need for that? Had you had them, a pamphlet like the one we spoke about would not have been used for instruction during reading and discussion evenings. It is being recommended and disseminated instead of being criticized. Why is the approach to this problem inadequate and un-Marxist? Because sex and marriage problems are not treated as only part of the main social problem. Conversely, the main social problem is presented as a part, an appendage to the sex problem. The important point recedes into the background. Thus not only is this question obscured, but also thought, and the class-consciousness of working women in general, is dulled.

“Besides, and this isn’t the least important point, Solomon the Wise said there is a time for everything. I ask you, is this the time to keep working women busy for months at a stretch with such questions as how to love or be loved, how to woo or be wooed? This, of course, with regard to the ‘past, present and future’, and among the various races. And it is proudly styled historical materialism. Nowadays all the thoughts of Communist women, of working women, should be centred on the proletarian revolution, which will lay the foundation, among other things, for the necessary revision of material and sexual relations. Just now we must really give priority to problems other than the forms of marriage prevalent among Australia’s aborigines, or marriage between brother and sister in ancient times. For the German proletariat, the problem of the Soviets, of the Versailles Treaty and its impact on the lives of women, the problem of unemployment, of falling wages, of taxes and many other things remain the order of the day. To be brief, I am still of the opinion

that this sort of political and social education of working women is wrong, absolutely wrong. How could you keep quiet about it? You should have set your authority against it.”

I told my fervent friend that I had never failed to criticize and to remonstrate with the leading women comrades in various places. But, as he knew, no prophet is honoured in his own country or in his own house. By my criticism I had drawn upon myself the suspicion that “survivals of a Social-Democratic attitude and old-fashioned philistinism were still strong” in my mind. However, in the end my criticism had proved effective. Sex and marriage were no longer the focal point in lectures at discussion evenings. Lenin resumed the thread of his argument.

“Yes, yes, I know that,” he said. “Many people rather suspect me of philistinism on this account, although such an attitude is repugnant to me – it conceals so much narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy. Well, I’m unruffled by it. Yellow-beaked fledglings newly hatched from their bourgeois-tainted eggs are all so terribly clever. We have to put up with that without mending our ways. The youth movement is also affected with the modern approach to the sex problem and with excessive interest in it.”

Lenin emphasized the word “modern” with an ironical, deprecating gesture.

“I was also told that sex problems are a favourite subject in your youth organizations too, and that there are hardly enough lecturers on this subject. This nonsense is especially dangerous and damaging to the youth movement. It can easily lead to sexual excesses, to overstimulation of sex life and to wasted health and strength of young people. You must fight that too. There is no lack of contact between the youth movement and the women’s movement. Our Communist women everywhere should cooperate methodically with young people. This will be a continuation of motherhood, will elevate it and extend it from the individual to the social sphere. Women’s incipient social life and activities must be promoted, so that they can outgrow the narrowness of their Philistine, individualistic psychology centred on home and family. But this is incidental.

“In our country, too, considerable numbers of young people are busy ‘revising bourgeois conceptions and morals’ in the sex question. And let me add that this involves a considerable section of our best boys and girls, of our truly promising youth. It is as you have

just said. In the atmosphere created by the aftermath of war and by the revolution which has begun, old ideological values, finding themselves in a society whose economic foundations are undergoing a radical change, perish, and lose their restraining force. New values crystallize slowly, in the struggle. With regard to relations between people, and between man and woman, feelings and thoughts are also becoming revolutionized. New boundaries are being drawn between the rights of the individual and those of the community, and hence also the duties of the individual. Things are still in complete, chaotic ferment. The direction and potentiality of the various contradictory tendencies can still not be seen clearly enough. It is a slow and often very painful process of passing away and coming into being. All this applies also to the field of sexual relations, marriage, and the family. The decay, putrescence, and filth of bourgeois marriage with its difficult dissolution, its license for the husband and bondage for the wife, and its disgustingly false sex morality and relations fill the best and most spiritually active of people with the utmost loathing.

“The coercion of bourgeois marriage and bourgeois legislation on the family enhance the evil and aggravate the conflicts. It is the coercion of ‘sacrosanct’ property. It sanctifies venality, baseness, and dirt. The conventional hypocrisy of ‘respectable’ bourgeois society takes care of the rest. People revolt against the prevailing abominations and perversions. And at a time when mighty nations are being destroyed, when the former power relations are being disrupted, when a whole social world is beginning to decline, the sensations of the individual undergo a rapid change. A stimulating thirst for different forms of enjoyment easily acquires an irresistible force. Sexual and marriage reforms in the bourgeois sense will not do. In the sphere of sexual relations and marriage, a revolution is approaching in keeping with the proletarian revolution. Of course, women and young people are taking a deep interest in the complex tangle of problems which have arisen as a result of this. Both the former and the latter suffer greatly from the present messy state of sex relations. Young people rebel against them with the vehemence of their years. This is only natural. Nothing could be falsier than to preach monastic self-denial and the sanctity of the filthy bourgeois morals to young people. However, it is hardly a good thing that sex, already strongly felt in the physical sense, should at such a time assume so much prominence in the psychology of young people.

The consequences are nothing short of fatal. Ask Comrade Lilina about it. She ought to have had many experiences in her extensive work at educational institutions of various kinds and you know that she is a Communist through and through, and has no prejudices.

“Youth’s altered attitude to questions of sex is of course ‘fundamental’, and based on theory. Many people call it ‘revolutionary’ and ‘communist’. They sincerely believe that this is so. I am an old man, and I do not like it. I may be a morose ascetic, but quite often this so-called ‘new sex life’ of young people and frequently of the adults too seems to me purely bourgeois and simply an extension of the good old bourgeois brothel. All this has nothing in common with free love as we Communists understand it. No doubt you have heard about the famous theory that in communist society satisfying sexual desire and the craving for love is as simple and trivial as ‘drinking a glass of water’. A section of our youth has gone mad, absolutely mad, over this ‘glass-of-water’ theory. It has been fatal to many a young boy and girl. Its devotees assert that it is a Marxist theory. I want no part of the kind of Marxism which infers all phenomena and all changes in the ideological superstructure of society directly and blandly from its economic basis, for things are not as simple as all that. A certain Frederick Engels has established this a long time ago with regard to historical materialism.

“I consider the famous ‘glass-of-water’ theory as completely un-Marxist and, moreover, as anti-social. It is not only what nature has given but also what has become culture, whether of a high or low level, that comes into play in sexual life. Engels pointed out in his *Origin of the Family* how significant it was that the common sexual relations had developed into individual sex love and thus became purer. The relations between the sexes are not simply the expression of a mutual influence between economics and a physical want deliberately singled out for physiological examination. It would be rationalism and not Marxism to attempt to refer the change in these relations directly to the economic basis of society in isolation from its connection with the ideology as a whole. To be sure, thirst has to be quenched. But would a normal person normally lie down in the gutter and drink from a puddle? Or even from a glass whose edge has been greased by many lips? But the social aspect is more important than anything else. The drinking of water is really an individual matter. But it takes two people to make love, and a third person, a new life, is

likely to come into being. This deed has a social complexion and constitutes a duty to the community.

“As a Communist I have no liking at all for the ‘glass-of water’ theory, despite its attractive label: ‘emancipation of love.’ Besides, emancipation of love is neither a novel nor a communistic idea. You will recall that it was advanced in fine literature around the middle of the past century as ‘emancipation of the heart’. In bourgeois practice it materialized into emancipation of the flesh. It was preached with greater talent than now, though I cannot judge how it was practiced. Not that I want my criticism to breed asceticism. That is farthest from my thoughts. Communism should not bring asceticism, but joy and strength, stemming, among other things, from a consummate love life. Whereas today, in my opinion, the obtaining plethora of sex life yields neither joy nor strength. On the contrary, it impairs them. This is bad, very bad, indeed, in the epoch of revolution.

“Young people are particularly in need of joy and strength. Healthy sports, such as gymnastics, swimming, hiking, physical exercises of every description and a wide range of intellectual interests is what they need, as well as learning, study and research, and as far as possible collectively. This will be far more useful to young people than endless lectures and discussions on sex problems and the so-called living by one’s nature. *Mens sana in corpore sana*. Be neither monk nor Don Juan, but not anything in between either, like a German Philistine. You know the young comrade X. He is a splendid lad, and highly gifted. For all that, I am afraid that he will never amount to anything. He has one love affair after another. This is not good for the political struggle and for the revolution. I will not vouch for the reliability or the endurance of women whose love affair is intertwined with politics, or for the men who run after every petticoat and let themselves in with every young female. No, no, that does not go well with revolution.”

Lenin sprang to his feet, slapped the table with his hand and paced up and down the room.

“The revolution calls for concentration and rallying of every nerve by the masses and by the individual. It does not tolerate orgiastic conditions so common among d’Annunzio’s decadent heroes and heroines. Promiscuity in sexual matters is bourgeois. It is a sign of degeneration. The proletariat is a rising class. It does not need an intoxicant to stupefy or stimulate it, neither the intoxicant of sexual

laxity or of alcohol. It should and will not forget the vileness, the filth and the barbarity of capitalism. It derives its strongest inspiration to fight from its class position, from the communist ideal. What it needs is clarity, clarity, and more clarity. Therefore, I repeat, there must be no weakening, no waste and no dissipation of energy. Self-control and self-discipline are not slavery; not in matters of love either. But excuse me, Clara, I have strayed far from the point which we set out to discuss. Why have you not called me to order? Worry has set me talking. I take the future of our youth very close to heart. It is part and parcel of the revolution. Whenever harmful elements appear, which creep from bourgeois society to the world of the revolution and spread like the roots of prolific weeds, it is better to take action against them quickly. The questions we have dealt with are also part of the women's problems."

Lenin spoke with great animation and deep persuasion. I could feel that his every word came from the heart, and the expression on his face added to this feeling. From time to time he punctuated some idea with energetic gestures. I was astonished to see how much attention he devoted to trivial matters and how familiar he was with them, side by side with highly important political problems. And not only as concerned Soviet Russia, but also the still capitalist countries. Splendid Marxist that he was, he grasped the particular wherever and in whatever form it revealed itself, in its relation to, and its bearing upon, the whole. All his zest and purpose was concentrated with unshakeable singleness, like irresistible forces of nature, upon the one goal of speeding the revolution as a work of the masses. He evaluated everything in terms of its effect on the conscious motive forces of the revolution, both national and international, for while he evaluated the historically conditioned features of the individual countries and their different stages of development, he always had his eyes on the indivisible world-wide proletarian revolution.

"Comrade Lenin, how I regret," I exclaimed, "that your words have not been heard by hundreds and thousands of people. As you know, you do not have to convert me. But how important it would be for friend and foe to hear your opinion!"

Lenin smiled amiably.

"I may speak or write some day on the questions we have discussed. But later, not now. Now all our time and strength must be concentrated on other things. There are bigger and more difficult



jobs to do. The struggle to maintain and strengthen the Soviet state is not yet over by any means. We have to digest the outcome of the Polish War and to make the most we can of it. Wrangel is still hanging on in the South. It is true, I am deeply convinced that we shall cope with him. That will give the British and French imperialists and their small vassals something to think about. But the most difficult part of our task, reconstruction, is still ahead. That will also bring the problems of sex relations, marriage and the family to the foreground. In the meantime, you will have to handle it as best you can where and when it is necessary. You should not allow these questions to be handled in an un-Marxist way or to serve as the basis for disruptive deviations and intrigues. Now at last I come to your work.”

Lenin consulted his watch.

“Half of the time I have at my disposal for you,” he said “has already expired. I have chatted too long. You are to work out the leading theses on communist work among women. I know your principled approach and practical experience. So our talk about this will be brief; you had better get busy. What do you think the theses should be?”

I gave him a concise account on this score. Lenin nodded approvingly a few times without interrupting. When I was through I looked at him questioningly.

“Right,” he remarked. “It would also be a good thing if you were to inform a meeting of responsible women Party comrades about it and to discuss it with them. Too bad Comrade Inessa<sup>1</sup> is not here. She is sick and has gone to the Caucasus. Put the theses in writing after the discussion. A committee will look them over and the Executive Committee will make the final decision. I give my opinion on only some of the main points, on which I fully share your views. They seem important to me also for our present agitation and propaganda work if it is to pave the way for action, for successful fighting.

“The theses must emphasize strongly that true emancipation of women is not possible except through communism. You must lay stress on the unbreakable connection between woman’s human and social position and the private ownership of the means of production. This will draw a strong, ineradicable line against the bourgeois

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<sup>1</sup> I.e., Inessa Armand.

movement for the 'emancipation of women'. This will also give us a basis for examining the woman question as part of the social, working-class question, and to bind it firmly with the proletarian class struggle and the revolution. The communist women's movement itself must be a mass movement, a part of the general mass movements; and not only of the proletarians, but of all the exploited and oppressed, of all victims of capitalism or of the dominant class. Therein, too, lies the significance of the women's movement for the class struggle of the proletariat and its historic mission, the creation of a communist society. We can be legitimately proud that we have the flower of revolutionary womanhood in our Party, in the Comintern. But this is not decisive, we have to win over the millions of working women in town and country for our struggle and, particularly, for the communist reconstruction of society. There can be no real mass movement without the women.

"We derive our organisational ideas from our ideological conceptions. We want no separate organisations of communist women! She who is a Communist belongs as a member to the Party, just as he who is a Communist. They have the same rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score. However, we must not shut our eyes to the facts. The Party must have organs – working groups, commissions, committees, sections or whatever else they may be called – with the specific purpose of rousing the broad masses of women, bringing them into contact with the Party and keeping them under its influence. This naturally requires that we carry on systematic work among the women. We must teach the awakened women, win them over for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party, and equip them for it. When I say this I have in mind not only proletarian women, whether they work in mills or cook the family meal. I also have in mind the peasant women and the women of the various sections of the lower middle class. They, too, are victims of capitalism, and more than ever since the war. The lack of interest in politics and the otherwise anti-social and backward psychology of these masses of women, the narrow scope of their activities and the whole pattern of their lives are undeniable facts. It would be silly to ignore them, absolutely silly. We must have our own groups to work among them, special methods of agitation, and special forms of organisation. This is not bourgeois 'feminism'; it is a practical revolutionary expediency."

I told Lenin that his arguments were a valuable encouragement for me. Many comrades, very good ones, too, vehemently opposed the Party's setting up special groups for planned work among women. They denounced it as a return to the notorious "emancipation of women" movement, to Social-Democratic traditions. They claimed that since the Communist Parties gave equality to women they should, consequently, carry on work without differentiation among all the working people in general. The approach to men and to women should be the same. Any attempt to consider the circumstances which Lenin had noted concerning agitation and organization would be branded by the exponents of this view as opportunism, as renunciation and betrayal of fundamental principles.

"This is not new and not conclusive," Lenin said. "Do not let it mislead you. Why are there nowhere as many women in the Party as men, not even in Soviet Russia? Why is the number of women in the trade unions so small? These facts give one food for thought. Denial of the indispensable special groups for work among the masses of women is part of the very principled, very radical attitude of our dear friends of the Communist Workers' Party. They are of the opinion that only one form of organization should exist – a workers' union. I know about it. Principles are invoked by many revolutionary-minded but confused people whenever there is a lack of understanding, i.e., whenever the mind refuses to grasp the obvious facts that ought to be heeded. How do such guardians of the 'purity of principles' cope with the historical necessities of our revolutionary policy? All their talk collapses in face of the inexorable necessities. We cannot exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat without having millions of women on our side. Nor can we engage in communist construction without them. We must find a way to reach them. We must study and search in order to find this way.

"It is therefore perfectly right for us to put forward demands for the benefit of women. This is not a minimum program, nor a program of reform in the Social Democratic sense, in the sense of the Second International. It does not go to show that we believe the bourgeoisie and its state will last forever, or even for a long time. Nor is it an attempt to pacify the masses of women with reforms and to divert them from the path of revolutionary struggle. It is nothing of the sort, and not any sort of reformist humbug either. Our demands are no more than practical conclusions, drawn by us from the crying needs and disgraceful humiliations that weak and underprivi-

leged woman must bear under the bourgeois system. We demonstrate thereby that we are aware of these needs and of the oppression of women, that we are conscious of the privileged position of the men, and that we hate – yes, hate – and want to remove whatever oppresses and harasses the working woman, the wife of the worker, the peasant woman, the wife of the little man, and even in many respects the woman of the propertied classes. The rights and social measures we demand of bourgeois society for women are proof that we understand the position and interests of women and that we will take note of them under the proletarian dictatorship. Naturally, not as soporific and patronizing reformists. No, by no means. But as revolutionaries who call upon the women to take a hand as equals in the reconstruction of the economy and of the ideological superstructure.”

I assured Lenin that I was of the same opinion, but that it would no doubt be opposed. Uncertain and timid minds would reject it as suspicious opportunism. Nor could it be denied that our present demands for women might be incorrectly understood and interpreted.

“What of it?” Lenin exclaimed, somewhat annoyed. “This risk exists in everything we say and do. If we are going to let fear of this stop us from doing the advisable and necessary, we might as well turn into Indian stylites. We mustn’t budge, we mustn’t budge on any account, or we shall tumble from the lofty pillar of our principles! In our case it is not only a matter of what we demand, but also of how we demand. I believe I have made that sufficiently clear. It stands to reason that in our propaganda we must not make a fetish out of our demands for women. No, we must fight now for these and now for other demands, depending on the existing conditions, and naturally always in association with the general interests of the proletariat.

“Every tussle of this kind sets us at loggerheads with the respectable bourgeois clique and its no less respectable reformist lackeys. This compels the latter either to fight under our leadership – which they do not want – or to drop their disguise. Thus, the struggle fences us off from them and shows our communist face. It wins us the confidence of the mass of women, who feel themselves exploited, enslaved and crushed by the domination of the man, by the power of their employers and by bourgeois society as a whole. Betrayed and abandoned by all, working women come to realize that they must fight together with us. Must I avow, or make you

avow, that the struggle for women's rights must also be linked with our principal aim – the conquest of power and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat? At present, this is, and will continue to be, our alpha and omega. That is clear, absolutely clear. But the broad masses of working women will not feel irresistibly drawn to the struggle for state power if we harp on just this one demand, even though we may blare it forth on the trumpets of Jericho. No, a thousand times no! We must combine our appeal politically in the minds of the female masses with the sufferings, the needs and the wishes of the working women. They should all know what the proletarian dictatorship will mean to them – complete equality of rights with men, both legal and in practice, in the family, the state and in society, and that it also spells the annihilation of the power of the bourgeoisie.”

“Soviet Russia proves this,” I exclaimed. “This will be our great example!”

Lenin went on:

“Soviet Russia casts a new light on our demands for women. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat they are no longer an object of struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Once they are carried out, they serve as bricks for the building of communist society. This shows the women on the other side of the border the decisive importance of the conquest of power by the proletariat. The difference between their status here and there must be demonstrated in bold relief in order to win the support of the masses of women in the revolutionary class struggles of the proletariat. Mobilization of the female masses, carried out with a clear understanding of principles and on a firm organizational basis, is a vital question for the Communist Parties and their victories. But let us not deceive ourselves. Our national sections still lack the proper understanding of this question. They adopt a passive, wait-and-see attitude when it comes to creating a mass movement of working women under communist leadership. They do not realize that developing and leading such a mass movement is an important part of all Party activity, as much as half of all the Party work. Their occasional recognition of the need and value of a purposeful, strong and numerous communist women's movement is but platonic lip-service rather than a steady concern and task of the Party.

“They regard agitation and propaganda among women and the task of rousing and revolutionizing them as of secondary impor-

tance, as the job of just the women Communists. None but the latter are rebuked because the matter does not move ahead more quickly and strongly. This is wrong, fundamentally wrong! It is outright separatism. It is equality of women *à rebours*, as the French say, i.e., equality reversed. What is at the bottom of the incorrect attitude of our national sections? (I am not speaking of Soviet Russia.) In the final analysis, it is an underestimation of women and of their accomplishments. That's just what it is! Unfortunately, we may still say of many of our comrades, 'Scratch the Communist and a Philistine appears.' To be sure, you have to scratch the sensitive spots, such as their mentality regarding women. Could there be any more palpable proof than the common sight of a man calmly watching a woman wear herself out with trivial, monotonous, strength- and time-consuming work, such as her housework, and watching her spirit shrinking, her mind growing dull, her heartbeat growing faint, and her will growing slack? It goes without saying that I am not referring to the bourgeois ladies who dump all housework and the care for their children on the hired help. What I say applies to the vast majority of women, including the wives of workers, even if these spend the day at the factory and earn money.

"Very few husbands, not even the proletarians, think of how much they could lighten the burdens and worries of their wives, or relieve them entirely, if they lent a hand in this 'women's work'. But no, that would go against the 'privilege and dignity of the husband'. He demands that he have rest and comfort. The domestic life of the woman is a daily sacrifice of self to a thousand insignificant trifles. The ancient rights of her husband, her lord and master, survive unnoticed. Objectively, his slave takes her revenge. Also in concealed form. Her backwardness and her lack of understanding for her husband's revolutionary ideals act as a drag on his fighting spirit, on his determination to fight. They are like tiny worms, gnawing and undermining imperceptibly, slowly but surely. I know the life of the workers, and not only from books. Our communist work among the masses of women, and our political work in general, involves considerable educational work among the men. We must root out the old slave-owner's point of view, both in the Party and among the masses. That is one of our political tasks, a task just as urgently necessary as the formation of a staff composed of comrades, men and women, with thorough theoretical and practical training for Party work among working women."

To my question about present-day conditions in Soviet Russia, Lenin replied:

“The government of the proletarian dictatorship – jointly with the Communist Party and the trade unions of course – makes every effort to overcome the backward views of men and women and thus uproot the old, non-communist psychology. It goes without saying that men and women are absolutely equal before the law. A sincere desire to give effect to this equality is evident in all spheres. We are enlisting women to work in the economy, the administration, legislation and government. All courses and educational institutions are open to them, so that they can improve their professional and social training. We are organizing community kitchens and public dining-rooms, laundries and repair shops, crèches, kindergartens, children’s homes and educational institutions of every kind. In brief, we are quite in earnest about carrying out the requirements of our program to shift the functions of housekeeping and education from the individual household to society. Woman is thus being relieved from her old domestic slavery and all dependence on her husband. She is enabled to give her capabilities and inclinations full play in society. Children are offered better opportunities for their development than at home. We have the most progressive female labour legislation in the world, and it is enforced by authorized representatives of organized labour. We are establishing maternity homes, mother-and-child homes, mothers’ health centres, courses for infant and child care, exhibitions of mother and child care, and the like. We are making every effort to provide for needy and unemployed women.

“We know perfectly well that all this is still too little, considering the needs of the working women, and that it is still far from sufficient for their real emancipation. Yet it is an immense stride forward from what there was in tsarist and capitalist Russia. Moreover, it is a lot as compared with the state of affairs where capitalism still holds undivided sway. It is a good start in the right direction, and we shall continue to develop it consistently, and with all available energy, too. You abroad may rest assured. Because with each day that passes it becomes clearer that we cannot make progress without the millions of women. Think what this means in a country where the peasants comprise a solid 80% of the population. Small peasant farming implies individual housekeeping and the bondage of women. You will be far better off than we are in this respect, provided your proletarians at last grasp that the time is historically ripe

for seizure of power, for revolution. In the meantime, we are not giving way to despair, despite the great difficulties. Our forces grow as the latter increase. Practical necessity will also impel us to find new ways of emancipating the masses of women. In combination with the Soviet state, comradely solidarity will accomplish wonders. To be sure, I mean comradely solidarity in the communist, not in the bourgeois, sense, in which it is preached by the reformists, whose revolutionary enthusiasm has evaporated like the smell of cheap vinegar. Personal initiative, which grows into, and fuses with collective activity, should accompany comradely solidarity. Under the proletarian dictatorship the emancipation of women through the realization of communism will proceed also in the countryside. In this respect I expect much from the electrification of our industry and agriculture. That is a grand scheme! The difficulties in its way are great, monstrously great. Powerful forces latent in the masses will have to be released and trained to overcome them. Millions of women must take part in this.”

Someone had knocked twice in the last ten minutes, but Lenin had continued to speak. Now he opened the door and shouted:

“I’m coming!”

Turning in my direction, he added with a smile:

“You know, Clara, I am going to take advantage of the fact that I was conversing with a woman and will name the notorious female loquacity as the excuse for being late. Although this time it was the man and not the woman who did most of the talking. In general, I must say that you are really a good listener. But it was this that probably prompted me to talk so much.”

With this jocular remark Lenin helped me on with my coat.

“You should dress more warmly,” he suggested solicitously. “Moscow is not Stuttgart. You need someone to look after you. Don’t catch cold. Good-bye.”

He shook my hand firmly.

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I had another talk with Lenin on the women’s movement about a fortnight later. Lenin came to see me. As almost always, his visit was unexpected. It was an impromptu visit and occurred during an intermission in the gigantic burden of work accomplished by the leader of the victorious revolution. Lenin looked very tired and worried. Wrangel had not yet been crushed and the question of supply-



ing the big cities with food confronted the Soviet Government like an inexorable sphinx.

Lenin asked how the theses were coming along. I told him that a big commission had been in session, which all prominent women Communists then in Moscow had attended and where they had spoken their opinions. The theses were ready and were now to be discussed by a small committee. Lenin pointed out that we should strive to have the Third World Congresses examine the problem with due thoroughness. This fact alone would break down the prejudice of many comrades. Anyhow, the women Communists should be the first to take things in hand, and with vigour.

“Don’t twitter like a bunch of chatterboxes, but speak out loudly and clearly like fighters should,” Lenin exclaimed with animation. “A congress is not a parlour where women display their charm, as we read in novels. A congress is a battlefield in which we fight for the knowledge we need for revolutionary action. Show that you can fight. In the first place, of course, against our enemies, but also within the Party, should the need arise. After all, the broad masses of women are at stake. Our Russian Party will back all proposals and measures that will help to win these masses. If the women are not with us, the counter-revolutionaries may succeed in setting them against us. We must always bear this in mind.”

“We must win the mass of women over even if they are riveted to heaven by chains, as Stralsund puts it,” I said, pursuing Lenin’s idea. “Here, in the centre of the revolution with its richly seething life, with its strong, rapid pulse, a plan has occurred to me of a big, joint international action among the working women. It was prompted primarily by your big non-partisan women’s conferences and congresses. We should try to transform them from national into international ones. It is a fact that the world war and its aftermath have deeply shaken the bulk of the women of various classes and sections of society. They are in ferment. They have been set in motion. Their distressing worries about securing a livelihood and the search for the purpose of life confront them with problems which most of them had hardly suspected and only a small minority had grasped in the past. Bourgeois society is unable to provide a satisfactory answer to their questions. Only communism can do it. We must rouse the broad masses of women in the capitalist countries to consciousness and should for that purpose call a non-partisan international women’s congress.”

Lenin did not reply at once. He sat lost in thought, considering the problem, his lips pursed, the lower lip protruding slightly.

“Yes, we ought to do it,” he said finally. “The plan is good. But a good plan, even an excellent one, is worthless unless it is well executed. Have you thought about how it should be executed? What are your ideas on this score?”

I set out my ideas to Lenin in detail. To begin with, we ought to form a committee of Communist women from various countries in close and constant contact with our national sections. This committee would prepare, conduct and make use of the congress. It had to be decided whether it would be desirable for the committee to work openly and officially from the very beginning. At any rate, it would be the first task of the committee members to make contact with the leaders of the organized female workers in each country, the proletarian political women’s movement, bourgeois women’s organizations of every trend and description, and finally the prominent female physicians, teachers, writers, etc., and to form national nonpartisan preparatory committees. An international committee would be formed from among the members of these national committees to prepare and convene the international congress, to draw up its agenda and to pick the time and place for the congress.

In my opinion, the congress ought first to discuss the women’s right to engage in trades and professions. In doing so it should deal with the questions of unemployment, equal pay for equal work, legislation on the 8-hour day and labour protection for women, organization of trade unions, social care of mother and child, social measures to relieve housewives and mothers, etc. Furthermore, the agenda should deal with the status of women in marriage and family legislation and in public and political law. After substantiating these proposals I explained how the national committees in the various countries should thoroughly prepare the ground for the congress by a planned campaign at meetings and in the press. This campaign was particularly important in rousing the biggest possible number of women, to stimulate a serious study of the problems submitted for discussion, and to draw their attention to the congress and thereby to communism and the parties of the Communist International. The campaign had to reach the working women of all social strata. It would have to secure attendance and participation in the congress of representatives of all organizations concerned, and also of delegates

from public women's meetings. The congress was to be a "popular representative body" entirely different from a bourgeois parliament.

It went without saying that women Communists were to be not merely the motive but also the leading force in the preparatory work, and should have the energetic support of our sections. Naturally, the same applied also to the work of the international committee, the work of the congress itself, and to its extensive use. Communist theses and resolutions on all items on the agenda should be submitted to the congress. They should be carefully worded and well reasoned with scholarly mastery of the relevant social facts. These theses should be discussed and approved beforehand by the Executive Committee of the Comintern. The communist solutions and slogans should be the focal point on which the work of the congress and public attention would concentrate. After the congress they should be disseminated among the broad masses of women by means of agitation and propaganda, so that they may become determinative for international women's mass actions. Needless to say, all this requires as an essential condition that women Communists work in all the committees and at the congress itself as a firm, solid body and that they act together on a lucid and unshakeable plan. There should be no out-of-turn actions.

In the course of my explanation Lenin nodded several times in approval and interposed a few remarks.

"It seems to me, dear comrade," he said, "that you have considered the matter very thoroughly in the political sense, and also the main points of the organizational angle. I fully agree that such a congress could accomplish much in the present situation. It offers us the opportunity of winning over the broad masses of women, particularly women in the various trades and professions, the industrial women workers and home-workers, the teachers and other professional women. This would be wonderful. Think of the situation in the big economic struggles or political strikes. What a reinforcement the revolutionary proletariat would gain in the class-conscious masses of women. Provided, of course, that we are able to win them over and keep them on our side. Our gain would be great. It would be nothing short of immense. But what would you say to the following few questions? The authorities will probably frown very severely upon the idea of this congress and will try to prevent it. However they are not likely to dare suppress it by brute force. Whatever they do will not frighten you. But are you not afraid that

the women Communists will be overwhelmed in the committees and at the congress itself by the numerical superiority of the bourgeois and reformist delegates and their unquestionably greater experience? Besides, and most important, do you really have confidence in the Marxist schooling of our communist comrades, and are you sure that a shock group can be picked among them that will come out of the battle with honour?"

I told Lenin in reply that the authorities were not likely to use the mailed fist against the congress. Intrigues and boorish attacks against it would only act in its favour, and ours. We Communists could more than match the greater number and experience of the non-communist elements by the scientific superiority of historical materialism with its study and illumination of social problems, the perseverance with which we would demand that they be solved, and last but not least, by references to the victory of the proletarian revolution in Russia and its fundamental accomplishments in the work of emancipating the women. The weakness and lack of training of some of our comrades, their inexperience, could be compensated by planned preparation and teamwork. In this respect, I expect the very best from the Russian women comrades. They would form the iron core of our phalanx. In their company I would calmly brave much more hazardous clashes than the congress battles. Besides, even if we are outvoted, the very fact that we fought will put communism in the foreground and will have a big propaganda effect. Furthermore, it will give us points of departure for subsequent work.

Lenin laughed heartily.

"You are as enthusiastic as ever about the Russian women revolutionaries. Yes indeed, old love is not forgotten. I think you are right. Even defeat after a stubborn struggle would be a gain; it would prepare the ground for future gains among the working women. All things considered, it is a risk worth taking. It cannot possibly prove a total failure. But naturally, I hope for victory and wish you success from the bottom of my heart. It would considerably enhance our strength, it would widen and fortify our battlefield, it would put life into our ranks and set them in motion. That is always useful. Moreover, the congress would foment and increase unrest, uncertainty, contradictions and conflicts in the camp of the bourgeoisie and its reformist friends. One can just imagine who is going to sit down with the 'hyenas of the revolution', and, if things

go well, to deliberate under their leadership. It will be the brave, well-disciplined female Social-Democrats under the supreme guidance of Scheidemann, Dittmann and Legien; the pious Christian women blessed by the Pope or devoted to Luther; daughters of privy counsellors, wives of newly-appointed councillors of state, lady-like English pacifists and ardent French suffragettes. What a picture of chaos, of the decay of the bourgeois world the congress is bound to present! What a portrayal of its hopeless conditions! The congress would add to the division and thereby weaken the forces of the counter-revolution. Every weakening of the enemy is tantamount to a strengthening of our forces. I am in favour of the congress. You will get our vigorous support. So get started, and I wish you luck in the struggle.”

We spoke then about the situation in Germany, particularly the impending “Unity Congress” of the old Spartacists and the Left wing of the Independents. Thereupon, Lenin left in a hurry, exchanging friendly greetings with several comrades working in the room he had had to cross.

I set about the preparatory work with high hopes. However, the congress floundered, because it was opposed by the German and Bulgarian women comrades who were then leaders of the biggest communist women’s movements outside Soviet Russia. They were flatly against calling the congress.

When I informed Lenin of this he answered:

“It is a pity, a great pity! These comrades missed a splendid opportunity to give a new and better outlook of hope for the masses of women and thereby to draw them into the revolutionary struggles of the proletariat. Who can tell whether such a favourable opportunity will recur in the near future? One should strike while the iron is hot. But the task remains. You must look for a way to reach the masses of women whom capitalism has plunged into dire need. You must look for it on all accounts. There is no evading this imperative task. Without the organized activity of the masses under communist leadership there can be no victory over capitalism and no building of communism. And so the hitherto dormant masses of women must be finally set into motion.”

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The first year spent by the revolutionary proletariat without Lenin has passed. It has shown the strength of his cause. It has

proved the leader's great genius. It has shown how great and irreplaceable the loss has been. Salvoes mark the sad hour when Lenin closed his far-seeing, penetrating eyes forever, a year ago. I see an endless procession of mourning working people, as they go to Lenin's resting-place. Their mourning is my mourning, the mourning of the millions. My newly-awakened grief evokes overwhelming memories in me of the reality that makes the painful present recede. I hear again every word Lenin spoke in conversation with me. I see every change in his face.... Banners are lowered at Lenin's tomb. They are banners steeped in the blood of fighters for the revolution. Laurel wreaths are laid. Not one of them is superfluous. And I add to them these modest lines.