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WOMEN
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By V·I·LENIN



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WOMEN AND SOCIETY

By
V. I. LENIN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
N. KRUPSKAYA



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FROM THE SOVIET CONSTITUTION

Article 122: Women in the U.S.S.R. are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life.

The possibility of exercising these rights of women is ensured by affording women equally with men the right to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by state protection of the interests of mother and child, maternity leave with pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.

Article 137: Women have the right to elect and be elected on equal terms with men.

INTRODUCTION

By N. KRUPSKAYA

THE Stalin Constitution is the constitution of the land of socialism. For forty years, since its foundation in 1898, our Party has fought for socialism, for a system that will know no exploitation, poverty, ignorance, desolation and neglect; it has fought for a plentiful, healthy, bright and enlightened life for all.

Our Party is the offspring of the international working-class movement, and we regard our victory as the victory of the working people of the world. From Marx and Engels, from the experience of revolutions in every country, we learned the right way to fight, the right road to follow. Life has proved how correct is the teaching of Marx. The Russia of yore, ignorant, backward, poverty-stricken, devastated by the imperialist war, a country where the landlords and capitalists ruled unchecked, where the crudest forms of exploitation and national oppression prevailed,—has become the mighty Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It has become so owing to the leadership of the Party of Lenin and Stalin, owing to the heroic, selfless struggle of the workers, who succeeded in securing the following of the peasantry, the following of all working people. We shall never let the banner of socialism out of our hands. We know that it will soar over the world.

Equal rights for women are not a new question. Our Party has fought for them all the time. From the very outset, women have taken part in the revolutionary struggle. From the very outset working women have fought shoulder to shoulder with their husbands and brothers. From the very outset our Party has devoted a great deal of attention to the emancipation of women, exposing the economic and political roots of women's inequality.

When the working class seized power in October 1917, one of its first measures was to abolish the legal inequality of women. Speaking at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-Party Women Workers on September 23, 1919, Lenin said:

“The Soviet government has applied democracy to a greater extent than any other country, even the most advanced, by the fact that

in its laws not the slightest hint of any inferiority of women is left. I repeat, not a single state and no democratic legislation has done even half of what the Soviet government did for women in the very first months of its existence.”

But Lenin always said that this is only the beginning in the emancipation of women; that in reality women will be finally emancipated only when the whole of society is reorganized on the principles of socialism; that to make the victory of socialism durable, prolonged organizational work will be necessary, into which millions and millions of working women must be drawn.

Ever since the beginning of Soviet rule, equal rights for women have been an object of interest not only for women, but for men as well—young men, Red Army men. I remember how surprised Mirbach, the German Ambassador, was when, while paying an official call to Lenin in 1918, he saw one of the Red Army men who acted as Lenin's guard sitting at a table reading a book. He wanted to know what the book was and asked to have the title translated. It turned out that the guard was reading a translation of *Woman and Socialism* by Bebel.*

Women took an active part in the civil war. Those were hard years. The Whites spared neither women nor children; women who were Red Partisans or mothers of Red Partisans, peasant women, teachers were whipped and shot down; so were children. Can this ever be forgotten? The civil war opened the eyes of the working people; it showed them who was friend and who was foe. Reading now of the atrocities committed by the fascists, the women who took part in our civil war cannot but recall what they went through: they cannot read without emotion about events in Spain and China today.

When the civil war was over in our Land of Soviets, working women began to take an ever more active part in public affairs, to develop in this sphere and learn the art of administration.

At first this work proceeded slowly, for women were handicapped by the ignorance that had been their lot under tsarism; they were handicapped by household drudgery, by the isolation of petty individual farming, by survivals of the old views regarding women.

Soviet women enjoyed every right; but they did not always know how to use their rights. As late as 1926 only 28 per cent of the women entitled to do so voted in the elections to the village soviets,

* August Bebel (1840-1913); one of the outstanding leaders of the German labor movement.—Ed.

and only 43 per cent in the elections to the city soviets. There was a core of active women, it is true, but many millions of working women had not yet been fully drawn into political life, into socialist construction.

After restoring the economic system and reinforcing heavy industry, the Soviets launched a widespread campaign of agitation for collective farms. The collective farm movement, the reorganization of farming on a collective basis, did much to enhance the political consciousness and activity of Soviet women. In 1934-35, 90.4 per cent of the women electors in the cities voted in the elections to the city soviets, and 80.3 per cent in the elections to the village soviets.

The Stalin Constitution records what has been achieved in twenty years of Soviet rule. The discussion of this constitution, which registers the full rights of women, plainly demonstrated that the rights of citizens are inseparably bound up with the reorganization of the whole system of society. This discussion of the Stalin Constitution by the entire population served still more to enhance the political understanding and activity of women.

The elections to the Supreme Soviet* fully proved it. Nearly every woman elector voted in the elections; the activity displayed by housewives, by collective farm women and women belonging to the national minorities was particularly marked. The elections demonstrated the friendship among the nations of the Soviet Union, the confidence they place in the Party of Lenin and Stalin, which is the object of such vicious hatred on the part of the fascists. In the course of the election campaign the Party became still more closely welded with the masses of non-Party people.

The elections showed what a powerful organization, what an enormous force our Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has become; they showed that the U.S.S.R. is the true home of women, beloved by them.

During the election campaign we women recalled to mind the women comrades who have worked actively to build socialism in our Land of Soviets. During the campaign we also frequently spoke of the civil war in Spain, of Dolores Ibarruri and the other heroines of Spain, and thought of the unknown heroines of China. What they are going through now is so close to the hearts of our women, who fought heroically against the White Guards and lost their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons in the civil war. During the

* Held December 12, 1937.—Ed.

election campaign we recalled Clara Zetkin, whose name is known to every enlightened woman in the world.

Clara Zetkin in 1910 initiated the celebration of March 8 as International Women's Day.* On March 8, 1933, shortly before her death, she was awarded the Order of Lenin. She spent her last years in the U.S.S.R. and was greatly loved by our working and collective farm women. She was frequently visited by women's delegations. She was filled with joy at the development of Soviet women. It was a painful blow to her that Germany had fallen into the hands of the fascists. Though she never for a moment doubted that fascism is the last agony of dying capitalism, that fascism is doomed, it is natural that events in Germany should so deeply have agitated her. At the age of 75, though seriously ill, she went to Germany to exercise her right of opening the Reichstag as its oldest member. In doing so she risked her life, she risked falling into the hands of the fascists and being tortured to death. On August 30, 1932, she opened the Reichstag ** with a long speech against fascist dictatorship, and concluded with a fiery appeal for a united revolutionary front.

Clara Zetkin was chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Labor Defense and issued an appeal against fascism. "Look at Germany, where dying capitalism is seeking salvation in fascism," she wrote. "Fascism has established a regime of physical and spiritual destruction, a regime of barbarism whose atrocities exceed even the horrors of the Middle Ages. The entire world is filled with indignation over the brutality of the fascist reign of terror. . . .

"Working women, remember that fascism deprives you of the rights you have won in bitter struggle and denies you the right to independent work. Remember that the 'Third Empire' wants to turn you into your husbands' servants and child-bearing machines. Do not forget the brave women fighters who have been tortured to death by fascism or are languishing in its dungeons. . . .

* On March 8, 1908, the Socialist women of New York organized, in contradistinction to the bourgeois suffrage movement, a mass participation of proletarian women in the movement for woman suffrage. The success of the New York demonstration led to the establishment of March 8 as Women's Day on a national scale. The International Socialist Congress in 1910 made March 8 international.—*Ed.*

** At the last convocation of the German parliament before the Nazis usurped complete state power.—*Ed.*

"Scientists, artists, teachers, writers, professional people! Do not forget that the fascists make *auto-da-fés* of the works of culture which you created and carefully protected, and whose destruction is depriving mankind of one of the sources of human development. . . .

"How vile is the baiting by fascists of representatives of other races; and, in particular, how vile are their Jewish pogroms! . . .

"Enemies of fascism in all countries! Not a single one of us should rest at ease until fascism, which brings in its train bloody oppression, terror, starvation and war, has been destroyed."

So Clara Zetkin wrote. She died on June 20, 1933. During the years that have passed since her death, fascism has become ever more arrogant; it has come more and more to rely on the jingoist elements, to provoke national animosity and to exploit the unenlightened section of the petty bourgeoisie. The example of Germany has been followed in a number of other countries. Now fascism has become an international phenomenon; it is raging ever more arrogantly and brutally in a number of countries, is making open and secret connections in all countries, is not only hatching imperialist war but already waging it in Spain and China.

The memory of the imperialist war still lives in every mind; the working people have not forgotten it. They all know how the capitalists made profits out of this war, how they plundered the weaker countries. The fascists are taking account of the lessons of the imperialist war, they are using them for their own ends, exploiting the achievements of science. But the fascists also know that war rouses the class-consciousness of the masses, that it organizes the masses; they know that the October Revolution was born in the fires of imperialist war. And they are making haste.

The trial is now proceeding of the "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites," those traitors to the cause of the working class, the cause of socialism. A feeling of disgust mounts in one as one reads the statements of these traitors, who for years passed themselves off as leaders of the working class, builders of socialism, while in fact they were mortal enemies of the workers, and deceived and betrayed the Land of Soviets, and sold themselves to the fascists. . . . History has never known such baseness, such monstrous betrayal.

Now we must rally for concerted action.

The Party of Lenin and Stalin is filled with profound confidence in the strength, might and organization of the working people not only of our own Soviet land, but of the world. It never doubts that

the working women of all countries will offer concerted resistance to fascism, which relies for support in every country on White Guards, on double-dealers like those of the "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites," whose purpose is to make capital, make careers at the expense of the working people's blood.

The experience of the October Revolution already attracts the attention of the broad masses in the capitalist countries; and this experience cannot be burned in an *auto-da-fé*. It is not fortuitous that in 1934 an international women's congress was held in Paris against war and against fascism, which is doing everything to kindle a world war. It is not fortuitous that in a number of countries women's committees exist for combating war and fascism. Nor are these committees made up of Communists alone; they are gaining ever more support among women who know how much grief and suffering war will bring.

The events in Spain and China show that the war which the fascists are so eagerly kindling will hit the masses of working people much harder than the last imperialist war.

This is clear not only to the women of Spain, China, Italy, Germany and Japan; it is clear to the women of all countries.

Ten million people were killed in the World War and over twenty million wounded. Poverty and devastation are what this war brought the working people; human lives were counted as nothing; millions of children were orphaned; long years of suffering fell to the lot of those who lost their eyesight, were crippled or went mad; and with them suffered their kith and kin, their mothers, wives and sisters.

The events in Spain and China show that the war started by the fascists is even more brutal, many times more so; it is spreading to new countries and bringing unparalleled destruction.

The working people of all countries must rally ever more closely in a united front of action in order by their concerted effort to frustrate the fascists' designs.

On March 8, the day of the international solidarity of women, the women of all countries should march in the front ranks of the united front, in the ranks of those who are fighting for peace and against war.

For peace! For friendship among the peoples!

February, 1938.

SPEECH AT THE FIRST ALL-RUSSIAN CONGRESS OF WOMEN WORKERS *

COMRADES, in a certain respect this congress of the feminine section of the proletarian army is of particularly great significance, since in all countries women have been the slowest to stir. There can be no socialist revolution, unless a vast section of the toiling women takes an important part in it.

In all civilized countries, even the most advanced, the position of women is such as justifies their being called domestic slaves. Not in a single capitalist country, not even in the freest republic, do women enjoy complete equality.

The aim of the Soviet Republic is to abolish, in the first place, all restrictions of the rights of women. The Soviet government has completely abolished the source of bourgeois filth, repression and humiliation—divorce proceedings.

For nearly a year now our completely free divorce laws have been in force. We issued a decree abolishing the difference in the status of children born in wedlock and those born out of wedlock, and also the various political disabilities. In no other country have the toiling women achieved such complete freedom and equality.

We know that the entire burden of the obsolete rules is borne by the women of the working class.

Our law wiped out, for the first time in history, all that made women inferior. But it is not a matter of law. In our cities and factory settlements this law on the complete freedom of marriage is taking root, but in the countryside it very frequently exists only on paper. There, church marriage still predominates. This is due to the influence of the priests, and it is more difficult to fight this evil than the old laws.

Religious prejudices must be fought very cautiously; a lot of

* This congress, called by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), was attended by over 1,000 delegates. The congress approved the foreign policy of the Soviet government and called upon all working and peasant women to support and defend it. It also approved the proposal for drawing non-Party working women into socialist construction through delegates' meetings. This congress marked the beginning of widespread work by the Party among working and peasant women.—*Ed.*

harm is caused by those who carry on this struggle in such a way as to offend religious feelings. The struggle must be carried on by means of propaganda, by means of enlightenment. By introducing acrimony into the struggle we may antagonize the masses; this kind of struggle contributes to the division of the masses according to religion,* but our strength is in unity. The deepest source of religious prejudice is poverty and ignorance; it is with these evils that we must contend.

Up to the present the position of women has been such that it is called a position of slavery. Women are crushed by their domestic drudgery, and only socialism can relieve them from this drudgery, when we shall pass on from small household economy to social economy and to social tilling of the soil.

Only then will women be fully free and emancipated. It is a difficult task. Committees of poor peasants are now being formed,** and the time is at hand when the socialist revolution will be consolidated.

It is only now that the poorer section of the population in the villages is organizing, and in these organizations of the poor peasants socialism is acquiring a firm foundation.

It has often happened before that the cities became revolutionary and the countryside took action afterwards.

The present revolution has the countryside to rely on, and therein is its significance and strength. It has been observed in the experience of all liberation movements that the success of a revolution depends on the extent to which women take part in it. The Soviet government is doing everything to enable women to carry on their proletarian socialist activity independently.

The position of the Soviet government is difficult inasmuch as the imperialists of all countries hate Soviet Russia and are preparing

* The tsarist government and the reactionary bourgeoisie did everything to kindle national and religious animosity, inciting Christians against Jews, Moslems against Christians; they organized Jewish pogroms and Armenian massacres. This was done to divert the attention of the masses from the vital problems of economics and politics, from the revolutionary class struggle. The Communists unite the working people of all nationalities, irrespective of religion, to fight against their oppressors.—*Ed.*

** The Committees of Poor Peasants were established by decree of the Soviet government of June 11, 1918. They were charged with the task of breaking the kulaks' resistance and curbing the kulaks and profiteers in the countryside, freeing the laboring peasants from their influence and ensuring the maintenance of the grain monopoly and the supply of grain to the cities and the Red Army.—*Ed.*

to wage war against her for the reason that she has kindled the flame of revolution in a number of countries and that she has made resolute steps towards socialism. At present, while they are bent on defeating revolutionary Russia, the ground is beginning to get hot under their feet in their own countries. You know that the revolutionary movement is gaining momentum in Germany, that in Denmark a struggle is going on between the workers and the government, and Holland is about to be transformed into a Soviet republic. The revolutionary movement in these small countries has no independent significance, but it is particularly symptomatic because of the fact that these countries have not been at war and that they have maintained a perfectly "lawful" democratic order. When countries such as these are getting into motion, that is an assurance that the revolutionary movement is embracing the whole world.

Up to the present not a single republic has been capable of emancipating the women. The Soviet government will help them. Our cause is invincible, for in all countries the invincible working class is rising. This movement signifies the growth of the invincible socialist revolution.

November 19, 1918.

A GREAT BEGINNING

. . . TAKE the position of women. Not a single democratic party in the world, not even in any of the most advanced bourgeois republics, has done in this sphere in tens of years a hundredth part of what we did in the very first year we were in power. In the literal sense, we did not leave a single brick standing of the despicable laws which placed women in a state of inferiority compared with men, of the laws restricting divorce, of the disgusting formalities attending divorce proceedings, of the laws on illegitimate children and on searching for their fathers, etc. To the shame of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, be it said, numerous survivals of these laws exist in all civilized countries. We have the right a thousand times to be proud of what we have done in this sphere. But the more *thoroughly* we have cleared the ground of the lumber of the old, bourgeois, laws and institutions, the more apparent has it become to us that we have only cleared the ground for the structure; the structure itself has not been built as yet.

Notwithstanding all the liberating laws that have been passed, woman continues to be a *domestic slave*, because *petty housework* crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real *emancipation of women*, real Communism, will begin only when a mass struggle (led by the proletariat which is in power) is started against this petty domestic economy, or rather when it is *transformed on a mass scale* into large-scale socialist economy.

Do we in practice devote sufficient attention to this question, which, theoretically, is indisputable for every Communist? Of course not. Do we devote sufficient care to the *young shoots* of Communism which have already sprung up in this sphere? Again we must say emphatically, No! Public dining rooms, *crèches*, kindergartens—these are examples of the shoots, the simple everyday means, which assume nothing pompous, grandiloquent or solemn, but which can *in fact emancipate women*, which can in fact lessen and abolish their inferiority to men in regard to their role in social production and in social life. These means are not new, they (like all the material prerequisites for socialism) were created by large-scale capitalism; but under capitalism they remained, first, a rarity, and second, and what is particularly important, either *profit-making* enterprises, with all the worst features of speculation, profiteering, cheating and fraud, or the “acrobatics of bourgeois philanthropy,” which the best workers quite rightly hated and despised.

There is no doubt that the number of these institutions in our country has greatly increased and that they are *beginning* to change in character. There is no doubt that there is far more *organizing talent* among the working women and peasant women than we are aware of, people who are able to organize in a practical way and enlist large numbers of workers, and a still larger number of consumers, for this purpose without the abundance of phrases, fuss, squabbling and chatter about plans, systems, etc., which our swelled-headed “intelligentsia” or half-baked “Communists” always suffer from. But we do not *nurse* these new shoots with sufficient care.

Look at the bourgeoisie! How well it is able to advertise what it requires! See how what the capitalists regard as “model” enterprises are praised in millions of copies of *their* newspapers; see how “model” bourgeois enterprises are transformed into objects of national pride! Our press does not take the trouble, or hardly

takes the trouble, to describe the best dining rooms or *crèches*, to secure by daily exhortation the transformation of some of them into models. It does not give them enough publicity, does not describe in detail what saving in human labor, what conveniences for the consumer, what a saving in products, what emancipation of women from domestic slavery and what an improvement in sanitary conditions can be achieved with *exemplary Communist labor* for the whole of society, for all the toilers.

June 28, 1919.

THE TASKS OF THE WORKING WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE SOVIET REPUBLIC

. . . I SHOULD like to say a few words about the general tasks of the working women's movement in the Soviet Republic; the tasks connected with the transition to socialism in general, as well as those which are so persistently forcing their way to the forefront at the present time. Comrades, the question of the position of women was raised by the Soviet government from the very outset. In my opinion, the task of every workers' state that is passing to socialism will be of a two-fold character. The first part of this task is comparatively simple and easy. It concerns the old laws which placed women in an inferior position as compared with men.

The representatives of all liberation movements in Western Europe not only for decades but for centuries have demanded the abolition of these obsolete laws and the establishment of legal equality between men and women. But not a single European democratic state, not one of the most advanced republics, has succeeded in achieving this, because where capitalism exists, where the private ownership of the land, the private ownership of factories and works is preserved, where the power of capital is preserved, men will retain their privileges. We succeeded in achieving this in Russia only because on November 7, 1917, the power of the workers was established in this country. From the very outset the Soviet government set itself the aim of existing as the government of the toilers opposed to all exploitation. It set itself the aim of destroying the possibility of landlords and capitalists exploiting the toilers, of

destroying the rule of capital. The aim of the Soviet government was to create the conditions in which the toilers could build their own lives without the private ownership of the land, without the private ownership of the factories and works, without that private ownership which everywhere, all over the world, even where complete political liberty reigns, even in the most democratic republics, has actually placed the toilers in conditions of poverty and wage slavery, and women in a position of double slavery.

The Soviet government, as the government of the toilers, during the very first months of its existence, brought about a complete revolution in the laws affecting women. Of the laws which placed women in a subordinate position not a trace has been left in the Soviet Republic. I speak precisely of those laws which particularly took advantage of woman's weaker position and put her in an inferior and often even in a degrading position; I refer to the divorce laws, the laws concerning children born out of wedlock, the right of a woman to sue the father of her child for maintenance.

It is precisely in this sphere that in bourgeois law, it must be said, even in the most advanced countries, advantage is taken of woman's weaker position to make her inferior and to degrade her; and it is precisely in this sphere that the Soviet government has destroyed every trace of the old unjust laws, which were intolerable for the representatives of the toiling masses. And we can now proudly say without the slightest exaggeration that except for Soviet Russia there is not a single country in the world in which there is complete equality between men and women and in which women are not placed in a degraded position, which is particularly felt in everyday family life. This was one of our first and most important tasks.

If you happen to come in contact with parties which are hostile to the Bolsheviki, or if Russian newspapers published in the regions occupied by Kolchak or Denikin happen to fall into your hands, or if you happen to speak with people who share the views of these newspapers, you will often hear accusations to the effect that the Soviet government has violated democracy.

We, the representatives of the Soviet government, the Bolshevik Communists and adherents of Soviet government, are constantly being accused of having violated democracy, and the evidence advanced to prove this is that the Soviet government dispersed the

Constituent Assembly.* Our usual reply to these charges is: We have no use for the kind of democracy and Constituent Assembly which arose under the system of private ownership of land, when people were not equal, when those who owned capital were the masters and the rest worked for them, were their wage slaves. This kind of democracy has served as a screen to conceal slavery even in the most advanced states. We socialists are adherents of democracy only to the extent that it alleviates the position of the toilers and oppressed. All over the world socialism pursues the aim of fighting against all exploitation of man by man. We attach real significance to the democracy which serves the exploited, those who are placed in a position of inferiority. If non-toilers are deprived of the franchise, that is real equality. He who does not work shall not eat. In reply to these accusations we say that the question that should be put is: How is democracy carried out in this or that state? We see that equality is proclaimed in all democratic republics: but in civil law, and in the laws governing the position of woman, her position in the family and in regard to divorce, we see inequality and the degradation of women at every step. And we say: This is violation of democracy, and precisely in regard to the oppressed. The Soviet government has applied democracy to a greater extent than any other country, even the most advanced, by the fact that in its laws not the slightest hint to any inferiority of women is left. I repeat, not a single state and no democratic legislation has done even half of what the Soviet government did for women in the very first months of its existence.

Of course, laws are not enough, and we cannot under any circumstances be satisfied merely with what we say in our laws; but we have done all that was expected of us to make women equal with men, and we have a right to be proud of what we have done. The position of women in Soviet Russia is now an ideal position

* The Constituent Assembly was convened by the Soviet government on January 18, 1918. The majority of the Assembly represented the interests of the bourgeoisie and the rich peasants, and consequently refused to discuss the "Declaration of Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People" proposed by the Bolsheviki and to ratify the decrees on peace and on the land adopted by the Second Congress of Soviets. The Bolsheviki, after reading their declaration, withdrew from the Constituent Assembly, which had plainly demonstrated that it was opposed to the genuine interests of the working people. On January 20, 1918, the Constituent Assembly was dissolved by decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.—*Ed.*

from the point of view of the most advanced states. But we say to ourselves: Of course this is only a beginning.

As long as women are engaged in housework their position is still a restricted one. In order to achieve the complete emancipation of women and to make them really equal with men, we must have social economy, and the participation of women in general productive labor. Then women will occupy the same position as men.

This, of course, does not mean that women must be exactly equal with men in productivity of labor, amount of labor, its duration, conditions of labor, etc. But it does mean that women shall not be in an oppressed economic position compared with men. You all know that even with the fullest equality, women are still in an actual position of inferiority because all housework is thrust upon them. Most of this housework is highly unproductive, most barbarous and most arduous, and it is performed by women. This labor is extremely petty and contains nothing that would in the slightest degree facilitate the development of women.

In pursuit of our socialist ideals we want to fight for the complete realization of socialism, and here a wide field of work is opened up for women. We are now seriously preparing to clear the ground for socialist construction; and the construction of socialist society will commence only when we, having achieved the complete equality of women, take up our new work together with women who have been emancipated from petty, stultifying, unproductive work. This work is sufficient to last us for many, many years. This work cannot produce such quick results and will not create such a striking effect.

We are establishing model institutions, dining rooms and *crèches*, which will liberate women from housework. And it is precisely the women primarily who must undertake the work of building all these institutions. It must be said that at present there are very few such institutions in Russia that could help the women to liberate themselves from their state of domestic slavery. The number is insignificant, and the conditions in which the Soviet Republic is now placed—the military and food conditions about which the other comrades have spoken to you at length—hinder us in this work. Nevertheless, it must be said that such institutions, which liberate women from their position of domestic slavery, are springing up wherever there is the slightest possibility for them to do so. We say that the emancipation of the workers must be brought

about by the workers themselves, and similarly, the emancipation of women workers must be brought about by the women workers themselves. Women workers themselves should see to the development of such institutions; and their activities in this field will lead to a complete change from the position they formerly occupied in capitalist society.

In order to engage in politics in the old capitalist society, special training was required; that is why women's participation in politics, even in the most advanced and free capitalist countries, is insignificant. Our task is to make politics accessible to every toiling woman. From the moment the private ownership of land and factories was abolished and the power of the landlords and capitalists was overthrown, the tasks of politics became simple, clear and quite accessible to all the toiling masses, and to the toiling women. In capitalist society women are placed in such an inferior position that their participation in politics is insignificant compared with that of men. In order to change this state of affairs the rule of the toilers is required, and when that is achieved the principal tasks of politics will consist of all that which directly concerns the fate of the toilers themselves.

And here the participation of the women workers, not only of Party and class conscious women workers, but also of non-Party and the least class conscious, is necessary. In this respect, the Soviet government opens up a wide field of activity for women workers.

We have experienced very hard times in the struggle against the forces hostile to Soviet Russia which are marching against us. It has been very hard for us to fight in the military field against these forces which are waging war against the rule of the toilers, and in the food field against the profiteers, because the number of people, of toilers, who come forward wholeheartedly to help us by their labor, is not yet sufficiently large. And so the Soviet government prizes nothing so highly as the assistance of the broad masses of non-Party working women. Let them know that perhaps in the old bourgeois society a complicated training was required in order to engage in political activity, and that this was inaccessible to women. But the principal aim of political activity in the Soviet Republic is to fight against the landlords and the capitalists, to fight for the abolition of exploitation; and this opens for the women workers in the Soviet Republic a field for political activity

which will consist of utilizing their organizing ability to help the men.

We not only need organizational work on a scale affecting millions, we also need organizational work on the smallest scale that women will also be able to engage in. Women can work amidst war conditions as well, when it is a matter of helping the army, of carrying on agitation in its ranks. Women must take an active part in this, so that the Red Army may see that it is being cared for and looked after. Women may also work in the food field, in distributing food, in improving the work of catering for the masses, in setting up more dining rooms, such as have now been opened on so wide a scale in Petrograd.

It is in these fields that the activity of the working women acquires real organizational significance. The participation of women is also required in the organization of large experimental enterprises and in supervising them so that this shall not be the work of isolated individuals. Without the participation of a large number of toiling women in this work, it cannot be accomplished. And working women are quite competent in this field for such work as supervising the distribution of food and seeing that provisions are more easily obtained. This is work that non-Party working women can easily do, and at the same time it is work that will help most of all firmly to establish socialist society.

Having abolished the private ownership of land and having almost entirely abolished the private ownership of factories and works, the Soviet government strives to enlist all toilers, not only Party, but also non-Party, not only men, but also women, in the work of economic construction. This work begun by the Soviet government can be advanced only when, instead of hundreds of women, we have millions and millions of women, all over Russia, taking part in it. When that is the case, we are convinced, the work of socialist construction will be firmly established. Then the toilers will show that they can live and administer without landlords and capitalists. Then socialist construction will be so firmly established in Russia that the Soviet Republic will have no cause to fear any external enemies in other countries, or enemies within Russia.

Speech delivered at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-Party Women Workers, September 23, 1919.

SOVIET POWER AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

THE second anniversary of the Soviet power is a fitting occasion for us to review what has, in general, been accomplished during this period, and to probe into the significance and aims of the revolution which we accomplished.

The bourgeoisie and its supporters accuse us of violating democracy. We maintain that the Soviet revolution has given an unprecedented stimulus to the development of democracy both in depth and breadth, of democracy, moreover, distinctly for the toiling masses, which had been oppressed under capitalism; consequently, of democracy for the vast majority of the people, of socialist democracy (for the toilers) as distinguished from bourgeois democracy (for the exploiters, the capitalists, the rich).

Who is right?

To probe deeply into this question and to understand it well will mean studying the experience of these two years and being better prepared to further follow up this experience.

The position of women furnishes a particularly graphic elucidation of the difference between bourgeois and socialist democracy, it furnishes a particularly graphic answer to the posed question.

In no bourgeois republic (*i.e.*, where there is private ownership of the land, factories, works, shares, etc.), be it even the most democratic republic, *nowhere in the world, not even in the most advanced country*, have women gained a position of complete equality. And this, notwithstanding the fact that more than one and a quarter centuries have elapsed since the Great French (bourgeois-democratic) Revolution.*

In words, bourgeois democracy promises equality and liberty. In fact, *not a single bourgeois republic, not even the most advanced one, has given* the feminine half of the human race either full legal equality with men or freedom from the guardianship and oppression of men.

Bourgeois democracy is democracy of pompous phrases, solemn

* Lenin is referring to the Great French Revolution of 1789, the purpose of which was to abolish the monarchy and the rule of the landlord nobility. The revolution reached its zenith in 1793, when power passed to the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie, the Jacobin party, which established a revolutionary dictatorship, abolished the rule of the king and the domination of the landlord-nobility, and crushed the home and foreign counter-revolutionaries. Marx and Lenin highly valued the revolutionary initiative of the Jacobins, who succeeded in rousing the masses to crush the representatives of the old order.—*Ed.*

words, exuberant promises and the high-sounding slogans of *freedom and equality*. But, in fact, it screens the non-freedom and inferiority of women, the non-freedom and inferiority of the toilers and exploited.

Soviet, or socialist, democracy sweeps aside the pompous, but lying, words, declares ruthless war on the hypocrisy of the “democrats,” the landlords, capitalists or well-fed peasants who are making money by selling their surplus bread to hungry workers at profiteering prices.

Down with this contemptible fraud! There cannot be, nor is there or will there ever be “equality” between the oppressed and the oppressors, between the exploited and the exploiters. There cannot be, nor is there or will there ever be real “freedom” as long as there is no freedom for women from the privileges which the law grants to men, as long as there is no freedom for the workers from the yoke of capital, and no freedom for the toiling peasants from the yoke of the capitalists, landlords and merchants.

Let the liars and hypocrites, the dull-witted and blind, the bourgeois and their supporters hoodwink the people with talk about freedom in general, about equality in general, about democracy in general.

We say to the workers and peasants: Tear the masks from the faces of these liars, open the eyes of these blind ones. Ask them:

“Equality between what sex and what other sex?”

“Between what nation and what other nation?”

“*Between what class and what other class?*”

“Freedom from what yoke, or from the yoke of what class? Freedom for what class?”

Whoever speaks of politics, of democracy, of liberty, of equality, of socialism, and does not at the same time *ask* these questions, does not put them in the foreground, does not fight against concealing, hushing up and glossing over these questions, is of the worst enemies of the toilers, is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, is a bitter opponent of the workers and peasants, is a servant of the landlords, tsars, capitalists.

In the course of two years Soviet power in one of the most backward countries of Europe did more to emancipate women and to make their status equal to that of the “strong” sex than all the advanced, enlightened, “democratic” republics of the world did in the course of 130 years.

Enlightenment, culture, civilization, liberty—in all capitalist, bourgeois republics of the world all these fine words are combined with extremely infamous, disgustingly filthy and brutally coarse laws in which woman is treated as an inferior being, laws dealing with marriage rights and divorce, with the inferior status of a child born out of wedlock as compared with that of a “legitimate” child, laws granting privileges to men, laws that are humiliating and insulting to women.

The yoke of capital, the tyranny of “sacred private property,” the despotism of philistine stupidity, the greed of petty proprietors—these are the things that prevented the most democratic bourgeois republics from infringing upon those filthy and infamous laws.

The Soviet Republic, the republic of workers and peasants, promptly wiped out these laws and left not a stone in the structure of bourgeois fraud and bourgeois hypocrisy.

Down with this fraud! Down with the liars who are talking of freedom and equality *for all*, while there is an oppressed sex, while there are oppressor classes, while there is private ownership of capital, of shares, while there are the well-fed with their surplus of bread who keep the hungry in bondage. Not freedom for all, not equality for all, but a *fight* against the oppressors and exploiters, the *abolition of every possibility* of oppression and exploitation—that is our slogan!

Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex!

Freedom and equality for the workers, for the toiling peasants!

A fight against the oppressors, a fight against the capitalists, a fight against the profiteering kulaks!

That is our fighting slogan, that is our proletarian truth, the truth of the struggle against capital, the truth which we flung in the face of the world of capital with its honeyed, hypocritical, pompous phrases about freedom and equality *in general*, about freedom and equality *for all*.

And for the very reason that we have torn down the mask of this hypocrisy, that we are introducing with revolutionary energy freedom and equality for the oppressed and for the toilers, against the oppressors, against the capitalists, against the kulaks—for this very reason the Soviet government has become so dear to the hearts of workers of the whole world.

It is for this very reason that, on the second anniversary of the Soviet power, the sympathies of the masses of the workers, the sym-

pathies of the oppressed and exploited in every country of the world, are with us.

It is for this very reason that, on this second anniversary of the Soviet power, despite hunger and cold, despite all our tribulations, which have been caused by the imperialists' invasion of the Russian Soviet Republic, we are full of firm faith in the justice of our cause, of firm faith in the inevitable victory of Soviet power all over the world.

Pravda, November 6, 1919.

FROM A LETTER TO JOSEPH STALIN ON DRAWING UP REGULATIONS FOR THE WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' INSPECTION

On the basis of the instructions given by the Central Committee I think the three drafts should be worked up into one.

I think the following should be added:

1. The "Department" of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection of the State Control should be a temporary one. Its function should be to introduce the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection in *all* the departments of the State Control, and it should then cease to exist as a separate department.

2. Object: to enlist all the toilers, men, *and particularly women*, in the work of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection.

3. For this purpose the local authorities should compile lists (according to the constitution), exclude office employees, etc.—all the rest to take part in the work of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection *in rotation*.

4. Participation in this work should assume various forms in accordance with the abilities of the participants—from the function of "informer," witness, or learner, or pupil, in the case of illiterate and uneducated workers and peasants, to all rights (or nearly all rights) for the literate, the educated, those who have been *tested* in one way or another.

5. To pay special attention to (and to draw up very strict rules for)—and the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection to exercise *wider* control over—the accounting of products, *goods*, stores, tools, materials, fuel, etc., etc. (particularly dining rooms, etc.).

Women, all women should be enlisted for this purpose, *without fail*.

January 24, 1920.

TO WOMEN WORKERS

COMRADES, the elections to the Moscow Soviet show that the Party of the Communists is gaining strength among the working class.

It is essential that women workers take a greater part in the elections. The Soviet government was the first and only government in the world that abolished completely all the old, bourgeois, infamous laws which placed women in an inferior position compared with men and which granted privileges to men, as, for instance, in the sphere of marriage laws or in the sphere of the legal attitude to children. The Soviet government was the first and only government in the world which, as a government of the toilers, abolished all the privileges connected with property, which men retained in the family laws of all bourgeois republics, even the most democratic.

Where there are landlords, capitalists and merchants, there can be no equality between women and men even in law.

Where there are no landlords, capitalists and merchants, where the government of the toilers is building a new life without these exploiters, there equality between women and men exists in law.

But that is not enough.

It is a far cry from equality in law to equality in life.

We want women workers to achieve equality with men workers not only in law, but in life as well. For this, it is essential that women workers take an ever increasing part in the administration of public enterprises and in the administration of the state.

By engaging in the work of administration women will learn quickly and they will catch up with the men.

Therefore, elect more women workers, both Communist and non-Party, to the Soviet. If one is only an honest woman worker who is capable of managing work sensibly and conscientiously, it makes no difference if she is not a member of the Party—elect her to the Moscow Soviet.

Let there be more women workers in the Moscow Soviet! Let the Moscow proletariat show that it is prepared to do and is doing

everything for the fight to victory, for the fight against the old inequality, against the old, bourgeois, humiliation of women!

The proletariat cannot achieve complete freedom, unless it achieves complete freedom for women.

February 21, 1920.

INTERNATIONAL WORKING WOMEN'S DAY, 1920

CAPITALISM combines formal equality with economic and, consequently, social inequality. This is one of the principal distinguishing features of capitalism, one that is mendaciously screened by the supporters of the bourgeoisie, the liberals, and that is not understood by the petty-bourgeois democrats. Out of this distinguishing feature of capitalism, by the way, the necessity arises, while fighting resolutely for economic equality, openly to recognize capitalist inequality and, under certain conditions, even to include this open recognition of inequality as a basis for the proletarian state organization (the Soviet constitution).

But capitalism *cannot* be consistent even with regard to formal equality (equality before the law, "equality" between the well-fed and the hungry, between the property-owner and the propertyless). And one of the most flagrant manifestations of this inconsistency is the *inferior position* of woman compared with man. Not a single bourgeois state, not even the most progressive, republican democratic state, has brought about complete equality of rights.

But the Soviet Republic of Russia promptly wiped out, *without any exception*, every trace of inequality in the legal status of woman, and secured her complete equality in its laws.

It is said that the level of culture is best characterized by the legal status of woman. There is a grain of profound truth in this saying. From this point of view, only the dictatorship of the proletariat, only the socialist state, could achieve and did achieve a higher level of culture.

Therefore, the foundation (and consolidation) of the first Soviet Republic—and alongside and in connection with this, the Communist International—inevitably lends a new, unparalleled, powerful impetus to the working women's movement.

For, when we speak of those who, under capitalism, were directly or indirectly, wholly or partially oppressed, it is precisely the Soviet

system, and the Soviet system only, that secures democracy. This is clearly demonstrated by the position of the working class and the poor peasants. It is clearly demonstrated by the position of women.

But the Soviet system represents the final decisive conflict for the *abolition of classes*, for economic and social equality. *For us*, democracy, even democracy for those who were oppressed under capitalism, including democracy for the oppressed sex, *is inadequate*.

The working women's movement has for its object the fight for the economic and social, and not merely formal, equality of woman. The main task is to draw the women into socially productive labor, extricate them from "domestic slavery," free them of their stultifying and humiliating resignation to the perpetual and exclusive atmosphere of the kitchen and nursery.

It is a long struggle, requiring a radical remaking both of social technique and of customs. But this struggle will end with the complete triumph of communism.

March 4, 1920.

GREETINGS TO THE ALL RUSSIAN CONFERENCE OF PROVINCE WOMEN'S DEPARTMENTS

COMRADES, I regret deeply that I had no chance to attend your conference. Please convey to all participants, women and men, my sincere greetings and wishes for the best success.

The participation of women in Party and Soviet work is assuming tremendous importance precisely at present, when the war is over and peaceful organization work has taken the forefront, for a long time to come, I hope; in this work women must play a leading part and, of course, they will play it.

A telephone message, December 6, 1920.

INTERNATIONAL WORKING WOMEN'S DAY, 1921

THE main and fundamental thing in Bolshevism and in the Russian October Revolution is the drawing into politics of precisely those who were most oppressed under capitalism. These were oppressed, deceived and robbed by the capitalists under a monarchy as well as in democratic bourgeois republics. This oppression, this de-

ception and this filching the toil of the people by the capitalists were inevitable as long as the private ownership of the land, the factories and works existed.

The essence of Bolshevism, the essence of Soviet power, lies in exposing the fraud and hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy, in abolishing the private ownership of the land, the factories and works, and in concentrating all political power in the hands of the toilers and the exploited masses. These masses are taking politics, *i.e.*, the work of building the new society, into their own hands. This is a difficult task; the masses are downtrodden and oppressed by capitalism; but there is no other way out of wage slavery, of slavery to the capitalists, nor can there be any other way out.

And it is impossible to draw the masses into politics without also drawing in the women; for under capitalism, the female half of the human race suffers under a double yoke. The working woman and peasant woman are oppressed by capital; but in addition to that, even in the most democratic of bourgeois republics, they are, first, in an inferior position because the law denies them equality with men, and secondly, and this is most important, they are "in domestic slavery," they are "domestic slaves," crushed by the most petty, most menial, most arduous and most stultifying work in the kitchen, and by isolated domestic, family economy in general.

The Bolshevik, Soviet Revolution cuts at the root of the oppression and inferiority of women more deeply than any party or any revolution in the world has dared to do. Not a trace of inequality between men and women before the law has been left in Soviet Russia. The particularly base, despicable and hypocritical inequality of marital and family rights, inequality in relation to the child, has been completely abolished by the Soviet government.

This is only the first step towards the emancipation of women. But not a single bourgeois republic, even the most democratic, has dared to take even this first step. They dared not do so out of fear of "the sacred right of private property."

The second and principal step was the abolition of the private ownership of the land, the factories and works. This, and this alone, opens the way for the complete and real emancipation of women, their emancipation from "domestic slavery," by passing from petty, individual, domestic economy to large-scale social economy.

This transition is a difficult one, for it is a matter of remolding the most deep-rooted, habitual, case-hardened and ossified "system"

(it would be more true to say, "outrage and barbarism" and not "system"). But the transition has been started. Things have begun to move, we have started out on the new path.

On International Working Women's Day, in all countries in the world, at innumerable meetings of working women, greetings will be addressed to Soviet Russia, which has started on unprecedentedly difficult and arduous, but great, universally great, and really liberating work. Encouraging appeals will be made not to lose heart in face of the raging and often brutal bourgeois reaction. The more "free" or "democratic" the bourgeois country is, the more the gang of capitalists rave and commit their brutalities against the workers' revolution. An example of this is the democratic republic of the United States of America. But the masses of the workers have already awakened. The imperialist war has finally roused these slumbering, half-asleep, conservative masses in America, in Europe and backward Asia.

The ice has broken in all parts of the world.

The emancipation of the peoples from the yoke of imperialism, the emancipation of the workers, men and women, from the yoke of capital, is moving irresistibly forward. This cause is being advanced by scores and hundreds of millions of working men and women and peasant men and women. That is why this cause of the emancipation of labor from the yoke of capital will triumph the world over.

March 4, 1921.

GREETINGS TO THE CONFERENCE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF WOMEN'S DEPARTMENTS AMONG THE EASTERN PEOPLES OF SOVIET REGIONS AND REPUBLICS

To my deep regret, urgent work is keeping me from attending your conference. I greet you warmly and send my best wishes for success in the work, particularly in the work of preparing for the coming first All-Union non-Party congress of the women of the East, which, if properly prepared and conducted, will undoubtedly play a tremendous role *in awakening the consciousness of the women of the East and in uniting them organizationally.*

Pravda, April 10, 1921.

GREETINGS TO THE CONFERENCE OF NON-PARTY
WOMEN WORKERS AND PEASANTS OF MOSCOW
AND MOSCOW PROVINCE

DEAR Comrades, I thank you heartily for your good wishes and greetings. I am very sorry that I cannot attend personally. I congratulate you, on the fifth anniversary of the Revolution, and wish your conference every success.

November 6, 1922.

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR
COMBATING PROSTITUTION

RECENTLY the fifth international congress for combating the white slave traffic was held in London.

Duchesses, countesses, bishops, parsons, rabbis, police officials and all sorts of bourgeois philanthropists displayed themselves at this congress. There was no end of ceremonial banquets and sumptuous official receptions. There was no end of solemn speeches on the harm and shame of prostitution.

But what were the means of struggle which the elegant bourgeois delegates demanded at the congress? The main two means were: religion and the police. These, they said, were the surest and safest means against prostitution. According to a report by the London correspondent of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, an English delegate boasted of the fact that he had introduced in Parliament a bill providing for *corporal punishment* for pandering. There he is, the modern "civilized" champion of the fight against prostitution!

A certain Canadian lady expressed her enthusiasm for the police and for the women police surveillance over "fallen" women; as for raising wages, however, she remarked that working women do not deserve better pay.

A German parson fulminated against modern materialism which, he said, was spreading among the people to an ever greater extent and contributing to the spread of free love.

When the Austrian delegate Gertner ventured to mention the social causes of prostitution, the want and misery of working class families, the exploitation of child labor, the unbearable housing conditions, etc., the speaker was silenced by hostile shouts!

On the other hand, instructive and solemn stories were told among the delegates concerning various high personages. For instance, that when the German empress is about to visit a lying-in hospital in Berlin the mothers of "illegitimate" children *have rings put on their fingers*, so as to spare the high personage the shocking sight of unwedded mothers!

From this one can judge what disgusting bourgeois hypocrisy reigns at these aristocratic-bourgeois congresses. The mountebanks of charity and the police protectors of mockery at want and misery foregather to "fight against prostitution," which is maintained precisely by the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie. . . .

Rabochaya Pravda, July 26, 1913.

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