

Marxism on Women's Question

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Proletarians of all countries, unite!

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We consider it being of utmost importance that the International Communist Movement unifies in the women's question on the Marxist standpoint more and more. It is necessary to wage a relentless and irreconcilable struggle against various form of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois deviations, also on this field. The Marxist standpoint on the women's question in its most developed form is established in the document "MARXISM, MARIATEGUI AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT" of the Communist Party of Peru. This is what is to be embodied and creatively applied. We consider the 8th of March a very fitting occasion to publish the following excerpts with our commentaries.

The document highlights the weight of the women's question and its connection to the communist movement at the very beginning. And it points out immediate duties:

"The woman question is an important question for the popular struggle and its importance is greater today because actions are intensifying which tend to mobilize women; a necessary and fruitful mobilization from the working class viewpoint and in the service of the masses of the people, but which promoted by and for the benefit of the exploiting classes, acts as an element which divides and fetters the people's struggle."

“In this new period of politicization of the masses of women in which we now evolve, with its base in a greater economic participation by women in the country, it is indispensable to pay serious attention to the woman question as regards study and research, political incorporation and consistent organizing work.”

The document continues with explaining precise and comprehensive (including a lot of examples we exclude here) the process of the conditions of women in class society:

“Through the centuries the exploiting classes have sustained and imposed the pseudo-theory of the “deficient feminine nature,” that has served to justify the oppression which up to now women experience in societies in which exploitation continues to prevail.”

“... throughout time the exploiting classes have preached the “deficient feminine nature.” Sustaining themselves in idealist concepts they have reiterated the existence of a “feminine nature” independent of social conditions, which is part of the anti-scientific “human nature” thesis; but this so-called “feminine nature,” eternal and invariable essence, is also called “deficient” to show that the condition of women and their oppression and patronage is the result of their “natural inferiority compared to man.” With this pseudo-theory it is intended to maintain and “justify” the submission of women.”

It is very important to understand that idealism, however it takes shape, is directly opposed to the emancipation of women. Revolutionaries, Communist, Maoists have to combat it fiercely in every single aspect.

“The development of capitalism will incorporate women into labor, providing the basis and conditions for her to develop; that way, with their incorporation into the productive process, women will have the chance of more directly joining

the class struggle and combative action. Capitalism carried out the bourgeois revolutions and in this forge, the feminine masses, especially working women, advanced.”

“In the French Revolution we can already see clearly how the advance of women and their setbacks are linked to the advances and setbacks of the people and the revolution. This is an important lesson: The identity of interests of the feminist movement and the people’s struggle, how the former is part of the latter.”

“Also this bourgeois revolution shows how the ideas about women follow a process similar to the political process; once the revolutionary upsurge was fought and halted, reactionary ideas re-emerged about women.”

“The French Revolution raised its three principles of liberty, equality and fraternity and promised justice and to meet the demands of the people. Very soon it showed its limits and that its principled declarations were but formal declarations, at the same time its class interests were counterpoised to those of the masses; misery, hunger and injustice kept on prevailing, except under new forms.”

“Utopian socialists also condemned the condition of women under capitalism. Fourier, representing this position, pointed out: “The change of an historical age can always be determined by the progress of women ... the degree of emancipation of woman constitutes the natural path for general emancipation.” Confronted with this great assertion it’s worth counterpoising the thought of the anarchist Proudhon about women, and keep in mind his ideas when there are attempts today to propagate anarchism to the four winds, presenting them as examples of revolutionary vision and consequence. Proudhon maintained that woman was inferior to man physically, intellectually and morally, and that represented together numerically, women have a value of $\frac{8}{27}$ the value of man. So for this hero a woman represents less than a third of the value of a man; which is

but an expression of the petty-bourgeois thought of its author, a root common to all anarchists.”

“Throughout the 19th century, with their increasing incorporation into the productive process, women continued to develop their struggle for their own demands joining the workers’ unions and revolutionary movements of the proletariat. ... But the feminist movement in general oriented itself towards suffragism, to the struggle to get the right to vote for women, in pursuit of the false idea that in getting the vote and parliamentary positions their rights would be respected; that way feminist actions were channeled towards parliamentary cretinism. However it is good to remember that the vote was not achieved for free but that during the last century and the start of this century women fought openly and determinedly to get it. The struggle for the feminine vote and its achievement show once more that, while this indeed was a conquest, it is not the means allowing a genuine transformation of the condition of women.”

“The 20th century implies a greater development of the feminist economic action, ... women enter into all fields of activity. In this process world wars have great importance because they incorporated millions of women into the economy to substitute for the men mobilized to the front. All this pushed the mobilization, organization and politicization of women; ...”

“In conclusion, through the economic incorporation of women, capitalism set the basis for their economic autonomy; but capitalism by itself is not capable of giving formal legal equality to women; in no way can it emancipate them; ... Further on, the later development of the bourgeois revolutionary processes and the 20th century show not only that the bourgeoisie is incapable emancipating the masses of women, but with the development of imperialism the bourgeois concept as regards the feminine condition becomes more reactionary as time goes on and in fact confirms the social, economic,

political and ideological oppression of women, even if it disguises and paints it in myriad ways.”

No ruling class, that based itself on the endurance of private property, was able to emancipate the women. There was progress in the period when the class that dominates the society was new and revolutionary but turned into regression when this very same class became reactionary.

The document is very explicit and extensive when it comes to Marxism regarding the women’s question:

“Marxism, the ideology of the working class, conceives the human being as a set of social relations that change as a function of the social process. Thus, Marxism is absolutely opposed to the thesis of “human nature” as an eternal, immutable reality outside the frame of social conditions; this thesis belongs to idealism and reaction. The Marxist position also implies the overcoming of mechanical materialism (of the old materialists, before Marx and Engels) who were incapable of understanding the historical social character of the human being as a transformer of reality, so irrationally it had to rely on metaphysical or spiritual conditions, such as the case of Feuerbach.”

“Just as Marxism considers the human being as a concrete reality historically generated by society, it does not accept either the thesis of “feminine nature,” which is but a complement of the so-called “human nature” and therefore a reiteration that woman has an eternal and unchanging nature; aggravated, as we saw, because what idealism and reaction understand by “feminine nature” is a “deficient and inferior nature” compared to man.”

“For Marxism, women, as much as men, are but a set of social relations, historically adapted and changing as a function of the changes of society in its development process. Woman then is a social product, and her transformation demands the

transformation of society.”

“When Marxism focuses on the woman question, therefore, it does so from a materialist and dialectical viewpoint, from a scientific conception which indeed allows a complete understanding. In the study, research and understanding of women and their condition, Marxism treats the woman question with respect to property, family and State, since throughout history the condition and historical place of women is intimately linked to those three factors. An extraordinary example of concrete analysis of the woman question, from this viewpoint, is seen in *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, by F. Engels, who, pointing to the substitution of mother right by father right as the start of the submission of women, wrote:

“Thus, the riches, as they went on increasing, on one hand provided man with a more important position than woman in the family, and on the other planted in him the idea of taking advantage of this importance to modify the established order of inheritance for the benefit of his children That revolution—one of the most profound humanity has known—had no need to touch even one of the living members of the gens. All its members could go on being what they had been up to then. It merely sufficed to say that in the future the descendants of the male line would remain in the gens, but those of the female line would leave it, going to the gens of their father. That way maternal affiliation and inheritance by mother right were abolished, replaced by masculine affiliation and inheritance by father right. We know nothing of how this revolution took place in the cultured peoples, since it took place in prehistoric times *The overthrowing of mother right was THE GREAT HISTORIC DEFEAT OF THE FEMALE SEX THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. Man also grabbed the reigns of the house; woman saw herself degraded, turned into a servant, into the slave of man’s lasciviousness, in a mere instrument of reproduction.*”
(Our emphasis.)

This paragraph by Engels sets the fundamental thesis of Marxism about the woman question: the condition of women is sustained in property relations, in the form of ownership exercised over the means of production and in the productive relations arising from them. This thesis of Marxism is extremely important because it establishes that the oppression attached to the female condition has as its roots the formation, appearance and development of the right to ownership over the means of production, and therefore that its emancipation is linked to the destruction of said right. It is indispensable, in order to have a Marxist understanding of the woman question, to start from this great thesis, and more than ever today when supposed revolutionaries and even self-proclaimed Marxists pretend to have feminine oppression arising not from the formation and appearance of private property but from the simple division of labor as a function of sex which had attributed less important chores to women than those of men, reducing her to the sphere of the home. This proposal, despite all the propaganda and efforts to present it as revolutionary, is but the substitution for the Marxist position on the emancipation of women, with bourgeois proposals which in essence are but variations of the supposed immutable "feminine nature."

Developing this materialist dialectical starting point, Engels teaches how on this basis the monogamous family was instituted, about which he says: *"It was the first form of family not based on natural but on economic conditions, and concretely on the triumph of private property over spontaneously originated, common primitive property."* And: *"Therefore, monogamy in no way appears in history as a reconciliation between man and woman, and even less as a higher form of marriage. Quite the contrary, it enters the scene under the form of the enslavement of one sex by the other, as the proclamation of a war between the sexes, up to then unknown in prehistory."*

After establishing that private property sustains the monogamous family form, which sanctions the oppression of women, Engels establishes the correspondence of the three fundamental forms of marriage with the three great stages of human evolution: savagery and marriage by groups; barbarism and pairing marriage; civilization and monogamy, "with its complements, adultery and prostitution." That way the Marxist classics developed the thesis about the historically variable social condition of woman and her place in society ..."

Every since the emergence of the damned private property women were subordinated to men in order to prevail the men's private property. Ergo: private property has to be wiped out. If you do not get rid of the roots of the poisonous weeds they will come back, supposedly blooming stronger than before.

"All this carries us to a conclusion, the need to firmly adhere to the working class positions and apply them to understand the woman question, participate in its solution, and reject, constantly and decisively, the distortions of Marxist theses on the subject and the so-called superior developments which are but attempts to substitute bourgeois ideas for proletarian concepts on this front, to disorient the women's movement on the march."

"... the POLITICIZATION OF WOMEN. We already highlighted how the French Revolution pushed forward the political and organizational development of women and how, by uniting them, mobilizing them and forcing them to fight, it set the basis for the feminist movement; ... with all the positive aspects that the incorporation of women into the French Revolution had, the resulting politicization of women was but elementary, restricted and very small compared to the major advance represented by the politicization of women by the working classes. What does this politicization imply? When capitalism massively incorporates women into the economic process, it wrest them away from inside of the home, to attract them

mostly to factory exploitation, making industrial workers out of them; that way women are forged and developed as an integral part of the most advanced and latest class in history; women initiate their radical process of politicization through their incorporation into the workers' union struggle ... A woman arrives at more advanced forms of organization, which goes on building her up and shaping her ideologically for the proletarian concepts, and finally she arrives at superior forms of struggle and political organization by incorporating herself, through her best representatives, into the ranks of the Party of the working class, to serve the people in all forms and fronts of struggle organized and led by the working class through its political vanguard. This politicization process which only the proletariat is capable of producing and the new type of women fighters it generates has materialized in the many glorious women fighters whose names are recorded in history: Luisa Michel, N. Krupskaya, Rosa Luxemburg, Liu Ju-lan and others whose memory the people and the proletariat keep."

"... the politicization of women is the key issue in her emancipation, and the classics dedicated special attention to it. Marx taught: "Anyone who knows something of history knows that the great social changes are impossible without the feminist ferment. Social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the weak sex." ... And to Lenin the participation of women was more much urgent and important to the revolution:"*The experience of all the liberation movements confirms that the success of the revolution depends on the degree in which women participate.*"

"... We must educate those women we have managed to wrest away from passivity, we must recruit them and arm them for the struggle, not just the proletarian women who work in the factories or toil in the home, but also the peasant women, the women in the various layers of the petty-bourgeoisie. They too are victims of capitalism."

“Mao Tse-tung’s thesis: “The emancipation of women is an integral part of the liberation of the proletariat.””

“... the classics analyzed the problem of whether the incorporation of women to the productive process, which capitalism began, was capable of making men and women truly equal. The concise and powerful answer was given once more by Mao Tse-tung in the 1950s: “TRUE EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED IN THE PROCESS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION OF THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY.””

“Lenin researched the situation of women in bourgeois society and compared it with how it was under the dictatorship of the proletariat; an analysis which led him to establish: “From remote times, the representatives of all the movements of liberation in western Europe, not for decades, but during centuries, proposed the abolition of these antiquated laws and demanded the legal equality of women and men, but no democratic European State, not even the most advanced republics, have managed to achieve this, *because wherever capitalism exists, wherever private ownership of the factories is maintained, wherever the power of capital is maintained, men go on enjoying privileges.*” “From the first months of its existence, Soviet power, as the power of workers, realized the most decisive and radical legislative change with respect to women. In the Soviet Republic no stone was left unturned which kept women in a position of dependence. ...””

“... only the revolution which places the working class in power in alliance with the peasantry is capable of sanctioning the true judicial legal equality between men and women, and even further, of enforcing it. However, as Lenin himself taught, this true legal equality initiated by the revolution is but the beginning of a protracted struggle for the full and complete equality in life of men and women: “However, the more we rid ourselves of the burden of old bourgeois laws and institutions, the more clearly we see that we have barely cleared the terrain for construction, yet construction itself

has not begun.””

“... there is an identity of struggle between the revolutionary feminist movement and the working class struggle for the construction of a new society; and, besides, it helps to understand the sense of Lenin’s words calling women workers to develop the institutions and means which the revolution placed at their disposal: “We say that the emancipation of workers must be the work of the workers themselves and likewise THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN WORKERS MUST BE THE WORK OF WOMEN WORKERS THEMSELVES.””

Nota bene:

1. THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN WORKERS MUST BE THE WORK OF WOMEN WORKERS THEMSELVES!

2. TRUE EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED IN THE PROCESS OF THE SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION OF THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY!

In other words: Unleash the fury of women as a mighty weapon for revolution! In this sense the emancipation of women as part of the emancipation of whole mankind will be become reality only through revolution based on workers-peasants-alliance under the leadership of the proletariat, concreted by its vanguard, the Communist Party.

The CPP gets very concrete in its document and the described status quo is very similar to many countries in the world today. So this part of the document should be taken as directives of Marxism raised to its highest peak until today by Chairman Gonzalo.

“At present we have a multitude of organizations of varying extension and levels, and what is more important, sprouting old seeds, ... a gamut of organizations being formed which support the current regime for the benefit of its

corporativist process, ... under its concept of “participation of women,” part of their “fully participatory democracy,” which obscures that the root of women’s oppression is private property and the subjugation of women that began with it ...”

“... a serious investigation of the woman question and a class analysis of the organizations that exist or are being formed, so the camps can define themselves in order to establish, as in other fields, the two lines on the woman question: The counterrevolutionary line commanded by imperialism and the middle bourgeois, and the revolutionary line whose command and center is the proletariat. That will help the organizational development of the PEOPLE’S WOMEN’S MOVEMENT, which of necessity requires its construction to be unleashed amidst the two-line struggle, the expression of the class struggle and of the similar and conflicting interests of the contending classes ... it must not be forgotten that within each line there are variations and differences in operation according to the classes grouped around each line. From there the problem consists of establishing the two contrary lines and, within each one the variations and nuances of the line; establishing which position is in command of each line, and, depending on the class each represents, gives each of the lines in struggle a revolutionary or counterrevolutionary character.”

“... the necessity of ... a movement generated by the proletariat among the masses of women, with the following characteristics:

1. Adherence to the thought of Mariátegui; [in more general terms: today adherence to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, with the universally valid contributions by Chairman Gonzalo, Gonzalo Thought; ci-ic.org]
2. Class conscious organization of the masses;
3. Subject to democratic centralism

The construction of such a MOVEMENT sets forth for us two problems:

1. Ideological-political construction, which necessarily implies providing it with Principles and Programme;
2. Organic construction, which we can serve by forming cores or groups of activists for carrying the Principles and Program to the masses of women-workers, peasants, professionals, university and secondary school students, etc.—They would work toward the politicization of women, mobilizing them through their struggles and organizing them to adhere to the political struggle, in harmony with the orientation and politics of the proletariat.”

This is the most developed Marxist standpoint on the women’s question. We were quite short with our commentaries, because we intended to bring this aspect forward. We strongly believe, it is up to those who oppose this, to explain their opposition. It is not right to rebel against everything, it is not right to rebel against Marxism, the almighty since true, becoming ever more true, scientific ideology of the proletariat. Are we wrong? Is Marxism mistaking? Prove it.



