



**Communism
and the
Family**
**Alexandra
Kollantai**

Introduction

During the early years of the 20th century Alexandra Kollontai studied Marxism with a group of young writers, including Lenin. As her ideas on socialism developed, she was influenced by Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg and she became a Bolshevik. Her special interest was in the social and economic position of women and the growth of the bourgeois feminist movement inspired her to develop a revolutionary analysis of the need for women's emancipation – this was presented in *The Basis of the Woman Question*, published in 1906. Whilst in exile she carried out detailed studies of the situation of women in Russian Society and both she and Klara Zetkin worked to make the emancipation of women an essential part of the Bolshevik Party's programme.

Kollontai's ideas about the liberation of women became outstanding because of the way in which she regarded Communism and Feminism as inextricably linked. In two articles which are extremely valuable for background information and for their analysis of Kollontai's work, Sheila Rowbotham describes the context of political development in which Kollontai came to combine these philosophies:

The emancipation of women was one of the aims of the radical intelligentsia, feminism appeared naturally within the body of theory, which developed in the successive phases of the Russian political opposition movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Organisationally, women achieved, too, a degree of respect and independence, playing a heroic and exceptionally prominent part in the struggle against the Tsar. No separate liberal feminist movement in the sense of the suffragettes developed until long after the feminist influences had had considerable effect within the general movement for social revolution.*

Communism and the Family was published in 1920 and first appeared in Britain in January of that year. By permission of the Soviet Bureau, New York, it was published in three successive issues of *The Worker*, the paper of the Scottish Workers' Committee, published in Glasgow. It appeared under the title 'The family and the Communist State'. Two months later, the Workers' Socialist Federation published it as a pamphlet under the title of *Communism and the Family*. The W S F had grown out of Sylvia Pankhurst's Women's Suffrage Federation, a working class group based in the East End of London, who from 1914 to 1923 produced the paper *The Women's Dreadnought* (which became *The Workers' Dreadnought* in 1917) under Sylvia Pankhurst's editorship. A short review of the new pamphlet appeared in the *Dreadnought* on March 20th, 1920:

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We hear much of the Proletarian Dictatorship of the Soviet system, the successes of the Red Army, and the fight to exterminate capitalism in Russia, but little of the home life in the Communist Republic. Women, especially, are eager to know how Communism affects the home and the family. Therefore, the admirable pamphlet by Alexandra Kollontay, Russian Soviet Commissary for Social Welfare, entitled *Communism and the Family*, which is just published by the Workers' Socialist Federation, will be read with special interest. Kollontay shows how the family, from the early genetic period, and on through capitalism has been steadily evolving towards Communism. At one time the housewife and the family produced, within the home, all that the family required. Then the factory came to supercede the household production, and gradually the housewife was herself driven by economic pressure to leave the home and work in the factory, till the family more and more accustomed itself to doing without home life, home work, and home comfort, and the mother and housewife struggled on under an unbearable load, and the children were brought up by the street. From the chaotic misery and discomfort wrought by capitalism, the human race is developing collective housekeeping and community responsibility for the education and upbringing of the children. In Communist Russia the Communist tendency has received tremendous impetus.

* 'Alexandra Kollontai: Woman's Liberation and Revolutionary Love', *The Spokesman*, Nos. 4 & 5.

The pamphlet met with considerable interest and was widely read (the first edition was completely sold out by the summer of 1921). It was written in the immediate post-revolutionary period in Russia, a time at which there was undoubtedly a great process of change in personal relationships taking place, together with a transformation of the way in which women were regarded. Women were achieving a new freedom, and legislation was introduced which drastically altered the marriage laws and the overall treatment of mothers and children. However, the process was incomplete – there was still a need for a change in consciousness amongst women in order to change the nature of the family. There gradually emerged the tendency which we know well today, for the State to produce statistics illustrating the new part being played by women at all levels in production. Sheila Rowbotham writes of this tendency: ‘The real failing of the Bolshevik orthodoxy was the inability to criticise particular manifestations of the sexual movement, while retaining a positive and affirmative approach towards the liberation of personal relationships’.

Kollontai wrote *Communism and the Family* as part of her continual struggle to point out the need for a change in consciousness amongst men and women in order to transform social relationships. Here she is most concerned with the need for family structure to be transformed, together with the personal relationships implied by that structure. This, she knew, was an essential part of the general political and economic change brought about by revolution and still remained to be achieved in Russia. She traces the development of the family over time as affected by changes in methods of production and analyses the changes which it should undergo in the movement towards a communist society. She foresaw the need for collective housekeeping, collective responsibility for children and, most important of all, a new form of personal relationship between the sexes. She believed the process of change to be already under way: ‘... on the ruins of the former family we shall soon behold rising a new form which will involve altogether different relations between men and women, and which will be a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal persons of the Communist Society, both of them free, both of them independent, both of them workers’.

At this time Kollontai felt a great joy in the revolution and a great optimism for the future. At the same time she was already beginning to see that some aspects of Party strategy and attitude were wrong. In 1921 she wrote a letter to Dora Montefiore (at one time an active suffragette and tax resister, and later a founder, with Sylvia Pankhurst, of the British Communist Party). This letter was pub-

lished in *The Workers' Dreadnought* in January, 1921, and is reprinted here as an appendix. This letter shows her feelings about the situation in Russia at the time and illustrates both her optimism and her misgivings. Her views about the need to transform the family became a source of embarrassment to the Party leadership and as her ideas on sex-relations and morality developed they began to campaign against her. She was finally denounced by Lenin after the part she played in the Workers' Opposition.

Her work had a considerable impact on the men and women working with Sylvia Pankhurst and the W.S.F. During the years of struggling to organise working-class women and to fight the ideas of the bourgeois feminist movement they had begun to develop their own views on the need to change traditional family life. This pamphlet by Kollontai came as a welcome contribution to the growth of their theory. Their interest in her ideas is clear – over the next year several articles by Kollontai appeared in *The Workers' Dreadnought* – a long article on 'International Solidarity and the Proletarian Woman of Today' on 30th April, 1921; a two-part article on 'The Fight against Prostitution' on 27th August and 24th September, 1921; and on 3rd September, 1921, an article on the Workers' Opposition.

Communism and the Family has a contribution to make today, when the movement for Women's Liberation is growing. It is important for women to know their own history – by no means an easy task – and the history of their theory. *Communism and the Family* forms an important part of the growth of socialist theory during and after the Russian revolution and has an important role today, when socialists are attempting to develop their understanding of the need for a revolution in social relationships.

Communism and the Family

The Woman No Longer Dependent on the Man

Will the family be maintained in the Communist State? Will it be just as it is today? That is a question which is tormenting the women of the working class, and which is likewise receiving attention from their comrades, the men. In recent days this problem has particularly been agitating all minds among the working women, and this should not astonish us: Life is changing under our very eyes; former habits and customs are gradually disappearing; the entire existence of the proletarian family is being organised in a manner that is so new, so unaccustomed, so 'bizarre', as to have been impossible to foresee. That which makes women at the present day all the more perplexed is the fact that divorce has been rendered easier in Soviet Russia. As a matter of fact, by virtue of the decree of the People's Commissaires of 18th December, 1919, divorce has ceased to be a luxury accessible only to the rich; henceforth the working woman will not have to petition for months, or even for years, for a separate credential, entitling her to make herself independent of a brutish or drunken husband, accustomed to beat her. Henceforth, divorce may be amic-

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

From the Genetic Family to the Present Day

There is no reason for concealing the truth from ourselves: the normal family of former days, in which the man was everything and the woman nothing – since she had no will of her own, nor money of her own, nor time of her own – this family is being modified day by day; it is almost a thing of the past. But we should not be frightened by this condition. Either through error or through ignorance we are quite ready to believe that everything about us may remain immutable while everything is changing. *It has always been so and it will always be so.* There is nothing more erroneous than this proverb! We have only to read how people lived in the past, and we shall learn immediately that everything is subject to change and that there are no customs, nor political organisations, nor morals, which remain fixed and inviolable. And the family in the various epochs in the life of humanity has frequently changed in form; it was once quite different from what we are accustomed to behold to-day.

There was a time when only one form of family was considered normal, namely, *the genetic family*; that is to say, a family with an *old mother* at its head, around whom were grouped, in common life and common work, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. The *patriarchal* family was also once considered the sole norm; it was presided over by a father-master of the family; even in our days, such peasant families may well be found in Russian villages. In fact, in those places the morals and the family laws are not those of the city worker; in the country there still are a large number of customs no longer found in the family of a city proletarian. The form of the family, its customs, vary according to race. There are peoples, such as, for instance, the Turks, Arabs, Persians, among whom it is permitted by law for a husband to have many wives. There have been and there still are at present, tribes which tolerate the contrary custom of permitting a wife to have several husbands. The habitual morality

of the present-day man permits him to demand of a young girl that she remain a virgin until legitimate marriage; but there were tribes among whom the woman, on the contrary, made it a matter of pride to have had many lovers, decorating her arms and legs with rings to indicate their number. . . . Such practices, which could not but astonish us, practices which we might even qualify as immoral, are found among other peoples to have the sanction of holiness, peoples who in their turn consider our laws and customs to be 'sinful'.

Therefore there is no reason for our becoming terrified at the fact that the family is undergoing a modification, that gradually the traces of the past which have become outlived are being discarded, and that new relations are being introduced between man and woman. We have only to ask: 'What is it that has become outlived in our family system and what, in the relations of the working man and working woman and the peasant and peasant woman, are their respective rights and duties which would best harmonise with the conditions of life in the new Russia, in the worker's Russia which our Soviet Russia now is?' Everything compatible with this new condition would be maintained; all the rest, all the superannuated rubbish which has been bequeathed to us by the cursed epoch of servitude and domination which was characteristic of the landed proprietors and the capitalists, all this shall be swept aside together with the exploited class itself, with these enemies of the proletariat and of the poor.

Capitalism Destroyed the Old Family Life

The family in its present form is also simply one of the legacies of the past. Formerly solid, compact in itself, indissoluble – for such was considered to be the character of marriage that had been sanctified by the priest in person – the family was equally necessary to all its members. Were it not for the family, who would have nourished, clothed, and trained the children, who would have guided them in life? The orphan's lot in those days was the worst that could befall one. In the family such as we have become accustomed to it, it is the husband who earns and supports wife and children. The wife, on her part, is occupied with the housekeeping and the bringing up of the children, as she understands it. But already for a century this customary form of the family has been undergoing a progressive destruction in all the countries in which capital is dominant, in which the number of factories is rapidly growing, as well as other capitalist enterprises which employ working men. The family customs

and morals are being transformed simultaneously with the general conditions of the life surrounding them. What contributed most of all to change the family customs in a radical manner was without doubt the *universal spread of wage labour on the part of woman*. Formerly it was only the man who was considered to be the support of the family. But for the past fifty or sixty years we have beheld in Russia (in other countries even somewhat earlier) the capitalist regime obliging women to seek remunerative work outside of the family, outside of the house.

30 Million Women Bearing a Double Burden

The wages of the 'providing' man being insufficient to provide for the needs of the family, the wife in her turn found herself obliged to look for work that was paid for; the mother was obliged also to knock at the door of the factory offices. And year by year the number of women of the working class who left their homes in order to swell the ranks of the factory workers, to take up work as day labourers, saleswomen, office help, washerwomen, servants, increased day by day. According to an enumeration made before the beginning of the world war, in the countries of Europe and America, there were counted about sixty million women earning a living by their own work. During the war this number increased considerably. Almost half of these women are married, but it is easy to see what sort of family life they must have – a family life in which the wife (mother) goes to work outside of the house for eight hours a day, ten if you include the trip both ways! Her home is necessarily neglected, the children grow up without any maternal care, left to themselves and all the dangerous risks of the street, in which they spend the greater part of their time.

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

been more unfortunate, more desperate than that of millions of working women under the capitalist yoke to-day, while industry is in its period of greatest expansion. . . .

Workers Learn to Exist Without the Family Life

The more widespread becomes the wage labour of woman, the further progresses the decomposition of the family. What a family life, in which man and wife work in the factory in different departments! In which the wife has not even the time to prepare a decent meal for her off-spring! What a family life when father and mother out of the twenty-four hours of the day, most of which are spent at hard labour, cannot even spend a few minutes with their children! It was quite different formerly; the mother, the mistress of the house, remained at home, occupied with her household duties and her children, whom she did not cease to watch with her attentive eye – to-day, from early in the morning until the factory whistle blows, the working woman hastens to her work, and when evening has come, again at the sound of the whistle, she hurries home to prepare the family's soup and to do the most pressing of her household duties; after an all too scant sleep, she begins on the next day her regular grind. It is a real workhouse, this life of the married working woman! There is nothing surprising, therefore, in the fact that under these conditions the family ties loosen more. Little by little all that formerly made the family a solid whole is disappearing, together with its stable foundations. *The family is ceasing to be a necessity for its members as well as for the state.* The ancient forms of the family are becoming merely a hindrance.

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

Household Work Ceasing to be a Necessity

There was a time when the entire life of women in the poorer class, in the city as well as in the country, was passed in the bosom of the family. Beyond the threshold of her own house, the woman knew nothing, and doubtless hardly wished to know anything. To compensate for this, she had within her own house a most varied group of occupations, of a most necessary and useful kind, not only to the family itself, but also to the entire state. The woman did everything that is now done by any working woman or peasant woman; she cooked, she washed, she cleaned the house, she went over and mended the family clothing; but she not only did that. She had also to discharge a great number of duties which are no longer done by the woman of to-day: she spun wool and linen; she wove cloth and garments, she knitted stockings, she made lace, and she took up, as far as her resources permitted, the pickling and smoking of preserved foods; she made beverages for the household; she moulded her own candles. How manifold were the duties of the woman of earlier times! That is how the life of our mothers and our grandmothers passed. Even in our own days, in certain remote villages way off in the country, far from the railroads and the big rivers, you may still run across little spots where this mode of life of the good old time has been preserved in all its purity, in which the mistress of the house is overburdened with labours of which the working woman in the big cities and of the populous industrial regions have for a long time had no idea.

The Industrial Work of Woman in the Home

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

It is true that in the time of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers their labour was not estimated in terms of money. But every man, whether he was a peasant or a worker, sought for a wife a woman with 'hands of gold', as is still the proverbial saying among the people. For the resources of man alone, 'without the domestic work of woman', would have been insufficient to keep their future household going. But on this point the interests of the state, the interests of the nation, coincided with those of the husband: the more active the woman turned out to be in the bosom of her family, the more she created products of all kinds: cloth, leather, wool, the surplus of which was sold in the neighbouring market; and thus the economic prosperity of the country as a whole was increased.

The Married Woman and the Factory

But capitalism has changed all this ancient mode of living. All that was formerly produced in the bosom of the family is now being manufactured in quantity in workshops and factories. The machine has supplanted the active fingers of the wife. What housekeeper would now occupy herself in moulding candles, spinning wool, weaving cloth? All these products can be bought in the shop next door. Formerly, every young girl would learn to knit stockings. Do you ever see a young working woman now knitting her own stockings? In the first place she would not have the time. Time is money, and no one wants to waste money in an unproductive manner, that is without getting some profit from it. Now, every housekeeper who is also a working woman is more interested in buying her stockings ready-made than losing her time by making them herself. Few and far between are the working women who would take up their time in pickling cucumbers or in making preserves when they remember that the grocery store next door has pickles and preserves to sell.

Even if the product sold in the store is of an inferior quality, and even though the factory preserves are not as good as those made at home by the hands of an economical housekeeper, the working woman nevertheless has neither the time nor the strength which must be applied in any extensive operations of this kind for her own household. She is before all other things a wage worker who is obliged to neglect her household. However this may be, the fact is that the contemporary family is becoming more and more liberated from all domestic labours, without which concern our grandmothers could

hardly have imagined a family. What was formerly produced in the bosom of the family is now produced by the common labour of working men and working women in factories and shops.

Individual Housekeeping Doomed

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

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

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

The Dawn of Collective Housekeeping

The individual household has passed its zenith. It is being replaced more and more by collective housekeeping. The working woman will

sooner or later need to take care of her own dwelling no longer; in the communist society of to-morrow this work will be carried on by a special category of working women who will do nothing else. The wives of the rich have long been freed from these annoying and tiring duties. Why should the working woman continue to carry out these painful duties? In Soviet Russia the life of the working woman should be surrounded with the same ease, with the same brightness, with the same hygiene, with the same beauty, which has thus far surrounded the women of the richer classes. In a communist society the working women will no longer have to spend her few, alas, too few hours of leisure, in cooking, since *there will be in communist society public restaurants and central kitchens to which everybody may come to take their meals.*

These establishments have already been on the increase in all countries, even under the capitalist regime. In fact, for half a century the number of restaurants and cafes in all the great cities of Europe increased day by day; they sprung up like mushrooms after an autumn rain. But while under the capitalist system only people with well-larded purses could afford to take their meals in a restaurant, in the communist city anyone who likes may come to eat in the central kitchens and restaurants. The case will be the same with washing and other work: the working woman will no longer be obliged to sink in an ocean of filth or to ruin her eyes in darning her stockings or mending her linen: she will simply carry these things to the *central laundries* each week, and take them out again each week already washed and ironed. The working woman will have one care less to face. Also, special clothes-mending shops will give the working women the opportunity to devote their evenings to instructive readings, to healthy recreations, instead of spending them as at present in exhausting labour. Therefore the four last duties still remaining to burden our women, as we have seen above, will soon also disappear under the triumphant communist regime. And the working women will surely have no cause to regret this. Communist society will only have broken the domestic yoke of woman in order to render her life richer, completer, happier and freer.

The Child's Upbringing Under Capitalism

But what will remain for the family after all these labours of individual housekeeping have disappeared? We still have the children to

deal with. But here also the state of the working comrades will come to the rescue of the family by substituting for the family: society will gradually take charge of all that formerly was on parents. Under the capitalist regime, *the instruction of the child has ceased to be the duty of the parents*. The children were taught in schools. Once the child had attained school age, the parents breathed more freely. Beginning with this moment the intellectual development of their child ceased to be an affair of theirs. But all the obligations of the family toward the child were not therefore finished. There was still the duty of feeding the child, buying it shoes, clothing it, making skilled and honest workers of them, who might be able when the time came to live by themselves and to feed and support their parents in their old age.

However, it was very unusual when a workers' family was able to fulfil entirely these obligations towards their children: their low wages did not permit them even to give the children enough to eat, while lack of leisure prevented the parents from devoting to the education of the rising generation the full attention which is demanded for this duty. The family was supposed to bring up the children. But did it really? As a matter of fact, it is the street which brings up the children of the proletariat. The children of the proletarians are ignorant of the amenities of family life, pleasures which we still shared with our own fathers and mothers.

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

The Child and the Communist State

Here also the communist society will come to the aid of their parents.

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

The care of children by the parents consisted of three distinct parts: 1 the care necessarily devoted to the very young babies; 2 the bringing up of the child; 3 the instruction of the child. As for the instruction of children in primary schools and later in gymnasiums and universities, it has become a duty of the state, even in capitalist society. The other occupations of the working class, its conditions of life, imperatively dictated, even to capitalist society, the creation for the purposes of the young, of play-grounds, infants' schools, homes, etc. etc. The more the workers became conscious of their rights, the better they were organised in any specific state, the more society would show itself to be concerned with relieving the family of the care of the children.

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

Contrary to the practice of capitalist society, which has not been able to transform the education of youth into a truly social function, a state work, communist society will consider the social education of the rising generation as the very basis of its laws and customs, as the corner-stone of the new edifice. Not the family of the past, petty and narrow, with its quarrels between the parents, with its exclusive interests in its own offspring, will mould for us the man of the society of to-morrow. Our new man, in our new society, is to be moulded

by socialist organisations such as play-grounds, gardens, homes, and many other such institutions, in which the child will pass the greater part of the day and where intelligent educators will make of him a communist who is conscious of the greatness of this sacred motto: solidarity, comradeship, mutual aid, devotion to the collective life. . . .

The Mother's Livelihood Assured

But now with the bringing-up gone, and with the instruction gone, what will remain of the obligations of the family toward its children, particularly after it has been relieved also of the greater portion of the material cares involved in having a child, except for the care of a very small baby while it still needs its mother's attention, while it is still learning to walk, clinging to its mother's skirts. Here again the communist State hastens to the aid of the working mother. No longer shall the child-mother be bowed down with a baby in her arms! The Workers' State charges itself with the duty of assuring a livelihood to every mother, whether she be legitimately married or not, as long as she is suckling her child, of creating all over maternity houses, of establishing in all the cities and all the villages day nurseries and other similar institutions in order thus to permit the woman to serve the state in a useful manner and simultaneously to be a mother.

Marriage No Longer a Chain

Let the working mothers be reassured: The communist society is not intending to take the children away from the parents nor to tear the baby from the breast of its mother; nor has it any intention of resorting to violence in order to destroy the family as such. No such thing! Such are not the aims of the communist society. What do we observe to-day? The outworn family is breaking. It is gradually freeing itself from all the domestic labours which formerly were as so many pillars supporting the family as a social unit. Housekeeping? It also appears to have outlived its usefulness. The children? The parent-proletarians are already unable to take care of them; they can assure them neither subsistence nor education. This is the situation from which both parents and children suffer in equal measure.

Communist society therefore approaches the working woman and the working man and says to them: 'You are young, you love each other. Everyone has the right to happiness. Therefore live your life. Do not flee happiness. . . . Do not fear marriage, even though marriage was truly a chain for the working man and woman of capitalist society. Above all do not fear, young and healthy as you are, to give to your country new workers, new citizen-children. The society of the workers is in need of new working forces; it hails the arrival of every newborn child in the world. Nor should you be concerned because of the future of your child; your child will know neither hunger nor cold. It will not be unhappy nor abandoned to its fate as would have been the case in capitalist society. A subsistence ration and solicitous care are assured to the child and to the mother by the communist society, by the Workers' State, as soon as the child arrives in the world. The child will be fed, it will be brought up, it will be educated by the cares of the communist fatherland; but this fatherland will by no means undertake to tear the child away from such parents as may desire to participate in the education of their little ones. The communist society will take upon itself all the duties involved in the education of the child, but the paternal joys, the maternal satisfaction – such will not be taken away from those who show themselves capable of appreciating and understanding these joys.' Can this called a destruction of the family by means of violence or a forcible separation of child and mother?

The Family a Union of Affection and Comradeship

There is no escaping the fact: the old type of family has seen its day. It is not the fault of the Communist State, it is the result of the new conditions of life. *The family is ceasing to be a necessity to the state, as it was in the past; on the contrary, it is worse than useless, since it needlessly holds back the female workers from a more productive and far more serious work. Nor is it any longer necessary to the members of the family themselves, since the task of bringing up the children, which was formerly that of the family, is passing more and more into the hands of the collectivity. But, on the ruins of the former family we shall soon behold rising a new form which will involve altogether different relations between men and women, and which will be a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal persons of the communist society, both of them free, both of them independent, both of them workers.*

No more domestic 'servitude' for women. No more inequality within the family! No more fear on the part of the woman to remain without support or aid with little ones in her arms if her husband should desert her. The woman in the communist city no longer depends on her husband but on her work. It is not her husband, but it is her robust arms which will support her. There will be no more anxiety as to the fate of her children. The State of the Workers will assume responsibility for these. Marriage will be purified of all its material elements, of all money evaluations, which constitute a hideous blemish on family life in our days. Marriage is henceforth to be transformed into a sublime union of two souls in love with each other, each having faith in the other; this union promises to each working man and to each working woman simultaneously, the most complete happiness, the maximum of satisfaction which can be the lot of creatures who are conscious of themselves and of the life which surrounds them. This free union, which is strong in the comradeship with which it is inspired, *instead of the conjugal slavery of the past – that is what the communist society of to-morrow offers to both men and women.*

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

No More Prostitution

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

Therefore let the woman of the working class not worry over the fact that the family as at present constituted is doomed to disappear. They will do much better to hail with joy the dawn of a new society which will liberate the woman from her domestic servitude, which will lighten the burden of motherhood for woman, and in which, finally, we shall see disappear the most terrible of the curses weighing upon women, known as prostitution.

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

Social Equality of Men and Women

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

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

Appendix

SUCCESS TO 'OUR' WORK

Letter by Comrade Alexandra Kollontai (People's Commissar for Propaganda) to Comrade Dora B M Montefiore.

Moscow: 26th January, 1921.

Dearest Comrade and Friend,

It was quite a treat to hear at last from you, dear Comrade Montefiore. How happy I should be if I could show you all the revolutionary and really constructive work that has been done in these last three years. Only three years! Sometimes it seems as if centuries have passed, the change all around is so great. Not only in the institutions, but especially in the psychology. For instance: In the bourgeois Capitalist States one regards a commercial man, a merchant, as 'a decent' citizen, who does not commit a crime if he sells or buys at 'normal' prices. How different it is now in Soviet Russia! We have no dealers, no merchants, no shopkeepers as a normal and legal thing; and if people do speculate, and sell and buy, they do it secretly, knowing that commerce is a crime, not only by law, but as a moral or social *principle*. Here we have the great change! It would have needed a hundred years or more without the

revolution to make people understand that only *labour*, productive labour, is regarded as being normal and is esteemed by social opinion; now we have this evolution of mind accomplished in three years' time!

Relations Between Men and Women

And many other examples show the same thing. Especially is this taking place in family life and in the relations between men and women. The women are getting more independent and more sound; new and healthy relations, based on solidarity between men and women are establishing themselves in our first workers' republic of the world.

Nationalisation of Women

We laugh at the stories which the bourgeois papers publish about Russia, especially about the 'nationalisation' of women! . . . Poor bourgeois correspondents! They have no idea how the Russian working and peasant women have grown in these last few years, of their self activity in a new Workers' State, where the woman is regarded as an equal! Who could venture to 'nationalise' a free, independent, and politically, as well as economically, active citizen woman of our Soviet Russia?

I should like to see the faces of the liars who tell such stupid stories about us, if they asked a Russian working-girl if she was 'nationalised'! The women play such an active part in our revolution that all old prejudices against the sex are dying out little by little.

Women in the Government

We have women not only as Soviet members, but also as presidents in local Soviets. Many women act as commissars in all branches of social and State life, and at the front. One has even been decorated with the Red Star for her work as Political Commissar at the front during the these years. We have had even one People's Commissar,* and hundreds of Communist Women are at the head of different State departments, especially in the Commissariat of Public Health, of Social Welfare, Public Education and Public Feeding (organisation of communal kitchens and rationing the goods to the population according to our labour card system).

Our Party is doing good work amongst the working women. We have a special women's section in each local party committee.

* Myself, as you know. I was twice People's Commissar of Public Welfare from October 1917 and then in the Ukraine as People's Commissar for Propaganda.

I am now at the head of the whole work. We have about 400,000 organised women, the majority of whom are Communists belonging to the Party (no sex divisions, no special organisation of women in the Party itself). The rest are grouped around our Soviet work, controlled by our Communist Women's Department.

Our work is much harder when we try to get at the peasant women! But little by little we succeed in gaining their sympathy for Communism!

Methods of Propaganda

A very good method of enlightening the women, is by the so-called 'non-party' conferences, where we, the Communist Women's Department, invite delegates from all villages, factories, workshops and housewives (elected in Town-District Conferences). Political and Economic questions are discussed, and generally the 'non-party' conferences end by passing all our Communist resolutions!

Our tactics are: less agitation, more deeds! More practical work to help the working women, who have to suffer much under the hard conditions of a transitory, historical and economic period.

Women's Papers

We have 74 weekly papers for working women (a paper in each Government-Province), a monthly paper, a weekly official bulletin. The work is growing fast. Under our influence we are now working out a law on prostitution.

Mothers and Children

But what I would like you to see is our children's social education! The institutions are not new as regards organisation – but the spirit that prevails there is new and inspiring! And the children are so happy in our homes for babies, or children's homes! You must not think that we take the children by force from the mothers! Nothing of the kind. We only try to help our working women who are overburdened with work at home, and with professional work, and use their labour energy more productively for the sake of their own prosperity and the prosperity of their children and all children of the Soviet Republic! Our cry is Mothers, learn to be loving mothers not only towards your own children, but towards all children of our Workers' Republic! But there is a lack of homes; we have not plenty

of clothes for our 9 million children; we have not paper enough for our school books etc. That means our task is double as hard. And still, we do all we can to feed the children and help the mother. All children in the towns up to sixteen years of age are fed by the State.

Dear Comrade, I could write for hours about our 'fairy-tale' land, where the sunny side of creative work is darkened often by many shady sides of our life and tactics. I am not always in favour of many of the tactical methods of our Party; I know how far we are from real Communism; but I feel we are on the way to it.

No Private Property

The biggest obstacle is removed, we have no private property, no capitalists to fight against! And if we suffer, we suffer more because the production in the whole world is disorganised; the productive forces have not developed during these terrible years of war. But we are going forward; we are beginning to organise our industry on new, communistic lines, and I believe we, sooner than any capitalist country, will enter into a period of prosperity. We work for the benefit of the social body – and we work hard, with enthusiasm.

If only the scoundrels, the capitalists of Great Britain, America, etc. would not always be doing destructive work, attacking Soviet Russia! But we see that their end is near. The workers of England and other countries are no longer fools; they know who their enemy is. And the movement is growing. I am sure your comrades all understand. Against unemployment, no other methods can help except the putting aside of all the gentlemen, the Capitalists who **DISORGANISE PRODUCTION** by anarchistic methods of ruling industry and by means of never-ending competition!

I wish you success in your, or rather **OUR** work!

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