

The Worker's Study Group Outline of Study
on
The Woman Question

Introduction

"Goldflower's Story." This is the heartmoving story of a woman who grew up in feudal China, how she was forced by the old ways into marrying a man she did not love, how the revolution came to China and helped millions of women like Goldflower to free themselves. "I do not wish to make a whole social or political philosophy out of the story of one girl like Gold Flower. She was not a type, but an individual in her own dramatic right. Yet her story has been multiplied to infinity throughout the length and breadth of rural China. The inhuman treatment of Chinese women is well known. But the social, political and religious implications of this treatment, along with its revolutionary significance, has not been given much attention." Jack Belden, who writes Goldflower's story was one of the few American reporters to tell the truth about China in the 1930's and 40's. After telling Goldflower's story the author has a short chapter called "Sex and Revolution" where he explains why women were oppressed in China and how. He wrote for a public who didn't get to hear him: "The fact that the pain, anguish and despair of Chinese womanhood has been transmitted by revolutionary fires into new feelings of joy, pride and hope is a phenomenon of tremendous significance for the world. The revolt of woman has shaken China to its very depths... yet political commentators ignore these peasant women as if they had no part in the drama now being enacted on the stage of world history."

First Part - Bourgeois View of Women's Liberation vs. the Proletarian View

1. "Lenin Speaks with Clara Zetkin on Why Communists Must Do Special Work Among Women." This is an excerpt of Lenin's talk with a leading woman communist. Lenin criticizes those who don't place importance on women's special problems. And he sets forth the Communist position on the emancipation of women, and how communists should view their work with women. Writing in the 1920's Zetkin quotes Lenin: "The domestic life of the woman is a daily sacrifice to a thousand insignificant trifles. The ancient rights of her husband, her lord and master, survive unnoticed. Objectively, his slave takes her revenge. Also in concealed form. Her backwardness and her lack of understanding for her husband's revolutionary ideas act as a drag on his fighting spirit, on his determination to fight. They are like tiny worms, gnawing and undermining imperceptibly, slowly but surely ...Our communist work among the masses of women, and our political work in general, involves considerable educational work among the men. We must root out the old slave-owner's point of view, both in the Party and among the masses. That is one of our political tasks, a task just as urgently necessary as the formation of a staff composed of comrades, men and women, with thorough theoretical and practical training for Party work among working women."
2. Le Duan, "Agitation Work Among Women Must be Fundamentally Based on Our Class Line." Le Duan is the first secretary of the Vietnam Workers Party since 1960 and a close comrade of Ho Chi Minh. This is an excerpt from his longer article "We Must View the Women's Question From a Class Standpoint." Le Duan explains in this excerpt that to approach the woman's question correctly we have to start from the position of the working class woman (the majority) and not from the position of the rich woman or the ruling class woman. He points out that the higher our class consciousness is, and that the better revolutionaries we get to be, the more attention we will pay to the woman's question and what women need.

3. Jessie Ashley, "Class and the Woman Question." Jessie Ashley was a woman socialist who helped in the right for the women's right to vote which was won in the U.S. only 50 years ago. In this article she explains how the "suffragettes" (women in favor of women's right to vote) were based in the middle class and never reached the working woman in the United States. They "come to the working class as outsiders. They do not show any knowledge whatsoever of working class interests. And, aside from futile argument, what do they do? Do they ever come forward with vigorous backing of purely working class legislation? Has there been a single protest from suffragists anywhere against the Mexican situation? Have suffragists ever shown themselves ready to support legislation that would help the workers, but would at the same time wipe out their own dividends?"
4. "We May Not Have Much But There's A Lot of Us" - An Interview Between Two Women." This is a discussion Between Two Women where one of the women who is 33 and has 7 kids explains her attitudes towards politics and especially towards women's liberation. This woman has a lot to say, for example: "I don't think that you can get a really good women's liberation movement without somehow or other involving men because in this kind of family, let's face it, if I want to get involved in something that's going to take a day, or two days, or two nights a week, who is going to babysit? Well, my husband. He has got to believe in what I'm doing or he's not going to spend all that time babysitting. If I argue with him and he says 'Oh, go' then what's going to happen., he's going to be miserable and who is going to pay for it? The kids...."
5. "Struggle: How the Problem of Women Should be Viewed." The main article here is from Red Flag, the magazine of the Communist Party of China. It points out that "the question of women is very often covered by a veil of sentiment, and people very often deviate from the class viewpoint over this question so that the spread of bourgeois thought is facilitated. For this reason, the implementation of the historical materialist viewpoint and of the method of class analysis in this realm to enable the question to be correctly understood and handled, has great significance for our socialist and communist work." Marxism says the main thing about a person is their class outlook - are they with the working class or not. In choosing a marriage partner political outlook should come before money or good looks. "In order to become a real proletarian revolutionist, a revolutionary woman cadre must first of all solve a problem of basic understanding and , through long revolutionary practice, set up a consolidated proletarian, communist world outlook. A world outlook means a general view of the whole world, the whole society, and the whole life. It decides one's attitude toward all kinds of concrete problems in work and livelihood. A revolutionary woman cadre who has the proletarian, communist world outlook, will offer all her energy to the revolutionary cause of the proletariat, and exert effort in the direction of self-training into a real communist...."
6. Debbie D'Amico., "To My White Working Class Sisters." A white working class woman's letter to her sisters explaining how she has been oppressed and why she is fighting back. "We are the poor and working-class white women of America, and we are cruelly and systematically ignored. All of our lives we have been told, sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly, that we are not worth very much....I think the time has come to speak out against these insults, and so I have decided to write about parts of my life and ideas. I am doing this for all my sisters who have been made to feel that they are not worth writing about, and for all those people who have to be convinced of poor white existence, those same people who told us that because we are all white our lives are the same as those of the middle and upper class."
7. "The Woman Question" from the pamphlet by the Black Workers Congress (BWC) The Black Liberation Struggle, the Black Workers Congress and Proletarian Revolution. A leading revolutionary organization in the United States explains its position on the woman question, why it is a question of what class the woman is from and why black women are "in many ways the most

exploited group in the U.S. Not only are they exploited as wage-slaves, but also as members of an oppressed nation and race, and what's more, as members of the oppressed sex!....That is why it has been no accident that black women have been found in the lead of every great revolutionary upsurge in imperialist America from Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, to Maggie Jones, the organizer of the largest Unemployment Councils in the State of Ohio during the thirties, to Rosa Parks, whose defiance and courage ignited the revolutionary flames of the modern black liberation struggle." The BWC explains what is wrong with the women's liberation movement: "Scared to death at the mass upsurge of the women's struggle, the bourgeoisie has made every effort to prevent black and working class women from joining, arousing and leading the so-called "Women's Lib Movement". They have used every conceivable maneuver to keep militant black and proletarian women alienated from this general women's struggle even to the point of sending their own wives to "lead" this struggle away from the revolutionary anti-imperialist movement as a whole. The so-called "Women's Lib" movement has been thoroughly co-opted by bourgeois and petty bourgeois 'feminist' forces, who have diverted the just struggle against women's oppression into channels favorable to the preservation of imperialism. Represented by some bourgeois organizations they run the absurd line that 'men' rather than capitalism are the problem of women." The BWC also discusses revisionism, male chauvinism and the role of communists within the women's liberation movement.

8. "Black Women Put Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought Into Practice by Analyzing Their Lives in U.S." "Black Women in Revolt." A group of black women who have recently become Marxist revolutionaries explain their lives growing up in the U.S. since World War II. "There was just "no way" for our world to be broken into and made real by connecting it to the economic system we lived in, which we now know as capitalism. Each apartment was a separate world. Each individual in the family was a separate world. The very word apartment describes the reality of apartness. Each member of the family lived for that day or, better said, each of us lived to get to Friday when we could party and get ourself a boyfriend. We were successfully cut off from each other and the world around us." "When the world moved, it moved on us separately and we dealt with that attack separately. Because we admired that world, depended on it for all our necessities like food, clothing, water, housing, education, and the 'goodies,' like fancy clothes and pretty furniture - yet we were constantly 'put down' by it.... Being in love with the master and the 'goodies' makes you very empty. It drives you into fantasy and dreams. I can dream I am in this place or that place. I can't read when I'm like this. I can't concentrate. I look at TV. It romanticizes me!" You have to have been in this predicament to know how difficult it is to come out of it with nothing waiting for you but political struggle with other women who are just like you were. They do everything not to hear you. But they know, like we knew, deep down. They just can't bear to know just yet."

Second Part - Special Problems of Women: Housework, Work and Children

1. "HELP WANTED: FEMALE 99.6 hours a week." A cartoonists' conception of women's exploitation as unpaid domestic workers.
2. Lenin, "Against Household Drudgery." Lenin explains that despite the progress they were making in Russia women were still slaves in the home and that the Communists were not paying enough attention to resolving this problem. "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...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."
3. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Working Women's Movement in the Soviet Republic." Here Lenin is explaining how he sees the main tasks of the women's movement in Russia after the working class has already gained power of the lands and factories.

Lenin says that "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." Lenin discusses what real equality is and points out 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."

4. Pat Mainardi, "The Politics of Housework." In an excerpt from her article a feminist and housewife explains the main arguments most men will use to try and get out of doing any housework. For example, one main argument is: "I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very well. We should each do the things we're best at." MEANING: Unfortunately I'm no good at things like washing dishes or cooking. What I do best is a little light carpentry, changing light bulbs, moving furniture (how often do you move furniture?) ALSO MEANING: Historically the lower classes (black men and us) have had hundreds of years experience doing menial jobs. It would be a waste of manpower to train someone else to do them now. ALSO MEANING: I don't like the dull stupid boring jobs, so you should do them."
5. "Between Husband and Wife." "What Attitude Should a Husband Take Towards His Wife." This is an article from China's main newspaper the People's Daily explaining that in socialism "love between husband and wife is built on the identity of political beliefs and on the foundation of struggling together for the revolutionary cause. "This is reflected in the attitude of regarding one's wife as a revolutionary comrade-in-arms in the common struggle in the political sphere, as a class sister with whom one labours together in production or work, and as a companion with whom one lives together at home, respecting and loving each other, helping each other, and encouraging each other in making progress together. This is the communist standard, morally speaking."
6. "Treat The Relationship Between Work, Children and Household Chores in a Revolutionary Spirit." This article summarizes some experiences of women in China. The two main points that the article deals with are 1. Which should come first: work or household chores? and 2. Is there any contradiction between work and household chores. Their conclusion is that a woman can get the housework done, take care of the children and be a revolutionary all at the same time if the correct conditions are present and the thinking is correct. "Many women cadres and women workers have rich experience. For example, in the knitting department of a department store in Shanghai, most of the 58 women comrades who have children without engaging a home-help at home still do a better job in taking care of the children as well as the household chores. Some of them have persisted in reading the Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung. Their way of handling children and household chores is: first, they know how to arrange time. Each day before and after work they clearly divide their work according to an orderly plan. In this way they can concentrate on their work. Outside of working hours they use their time in study and doing household chores. Second, all family members cooperate closely. If there is an elderly person among them, then they persuade him or her to look after the children and household chores. In general, the husband shares the household duties...Third, they cultivate the children to have a habit of labour in order to help their mother. Fourth, they use all service organisations such as office and street kindergartens and mess halls so as to lighten a part of the household work... Besides sending their children to the nurseries and getting their family members

to help, they also ask their relatives or neighbours to assist. Some of the comrades who have earned the profound affection of the masses just leave their children to their care. They treat the youngsters just like their own flesh and blood. In a word, there are many ways and means, but only when we have correct thinking can we find the suitable method."

7. "Working Among Women Workers in China: A Case Study: The Peking Bus Company." This is a report by Communist women in China about their work in the Peking Bus Company. This is considered a model of "advanced practice of Marxism" in China from which others try to learn lessons. The main conclusion of this report is that the main thing women must learn is the Marxist world outlook, the way of thinking, but that while this is happening "care must be shown and solutions found for actual difficulties in the day-to-day life of workers, and this must be done really as an important political task." Because of their social oppression under capitalism women workers will have special problems peculiar to themselves and a lot of work to do that makes it harder for women to become revolutionaries unless the communist organization pays attention to these problems, shows concern for the members who have them and make arrangements to help out.
8. "Mobile Chairs for Spinners." This is a short story of how the women spinners in a cotton mill in China needed to have chairs because they were walking about 9 miles a day and felt that this was unnecessary to do the job. They couldn't get much help for their problem even under socialism and had to make their own chairs because the maintenance department had more important things to do. To solve their problem the women combined theory and practice: they began making the mobile chairs themselves and they studied male supremacy and how to overcome it. By studying and using criticism of these old ideas about women they came to see "that spinners did not know much about mechanical work not because we were born stupid but because we lacked experience at it." By learning through practice, the women solved their problem. "In making them we not only liberated ourselves from a lot of strain, but, more important, we had freed ourselves from the old idea that there are things women can't do."
9. Lenin, "International Working Women's Day." Lenin repeats some of the points we have studied, explains why women can get their freedom only with socialist revolution. He says that the United States is the country where the capitalists have gone on the strongest rampage against the working class movement.
10. "The Family Code" of Cuba. Beginning July 26, 1975 Cuba has a new family code which requires that by law men must do 50% of the housework and childcare when women work. These excerpts about the Family Code explain a bit about this new law.

Third Part - Historical Materialism and the Woman Question: Why and How Women Became Oppressed and what is the Future of Marriage under Socialism

1. "Fascism and the Woman Question" by R. Palme Dutt. The author explains how the reactionaries want to keep women in the homes as slaves. This is part of the capitalist system which has laid the basis for freedom for women but is not able to free women because it refuses to free them from the housework and instead gives them two jobs instead of one. The capitalists save a lot of money this way. "Capitalism has taken over from the preceding period and adapted to its own purposes the social institutions built on the subjection of women. While revolutionizing and organizing production and trade on a gigantic scale throughout the world, it maintained, preserved and even intensified in a still more limited and narrow form the primitive and anarchic basis of the small-scale individual household of the family and its ties, and sought to make of this precapitalist institution its most powerful and conservative pillar of support."
2. "Working families beset by change, burdens," by Renee Blakkan. Renee Blakkan used to work for the revolutionary newspaper the Guardian and was probably their best writer on the Woman Question. Here she analyzes the information from the

United States Senate subcommittee hearings on "American Families: Trends and Pressures" held in Washington D.C. from Sept. 26-Oct. 1, 1973. She reports on the information revealed in the hearings and interprets them with a Marxist perspective. Among things discussed as pressures capitalism is exerting on the family are women's increasing employment, unemployment and underemployment, welfare, neglect of children, divorce. "This is why families today are under such pressures and why the democratic demands of women - for equal pay, daycare and control over reproductive functions - have a revolutionary aspect. Only socialism can free all women from household drudgery, fully integrate women into the labor force and do away completely with all the burdens presently on today's families."

3. "Women and Their Role in the Productive Forces: A Brief History" excerpts from a talk by the San Francisco Marxist-Leninist Organization. This speech shows the role women played in production in the history of the world and the history of the United States. It also gives a brief description of the role of working women in revolutions. It shows that the oppression of women arose with the rise of private property and the development of class society. A majority of women are now a part of the working class and can gain their freedom only in a working class revolution.
4. "Women and the Family. A Historical View" by Evelyn Reed. This is from a talk given by a forum sponsored by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1970. "One of the biggest stumbling blocks is the lack of factual information on the historical background of women and the family. This serves to keep women in ignorance and subservience to the myths that are propagated about them....Most women do not realize that their dilemma did not exist before class society came into existence and robbed them of the high position and equality they once enjoyed in primitive society....For these reasons my presentation on the 'woman question' will start with the early history of mankind." She demonstrates that women are not an inferior sex but in fact the main producers of the necessities of life in the history of mankind. She describes how woman lost the position they once had and no longer receive credit for lifting mankind out of the animal world through their labor. The author shows how the bourgeoisie has its "line" on all these questions and how the bourgeoisie bought off the anthropologists and teachers to disguise the true history of women. She shows how women were forced out of production, became dependant on the man and how they were both robbed. "Formerly it was the whole community that provided for and protected every individual, adults and children alike, from the cradle to the grave. But now this immense responsibility has been thrown upon each little family unit which must shift for itself as best it can. Far from being what it is said to be, the institution of marriage and the family has become an economic prison house in which the whole burden of support for a family of dependents is thrown upon one parent or perhaps both. Even worse, there is no guarantee whatever that the father or mother will always have the jobs or adequate pay to fulfill their obligations. Here, then, in this historical rundown, we can see the great importance of anthropology as a guide to the study of women and the family. It dispels many myths that have been propagated on the subject and gives us an insight into the true facts. Thus, according to the Old Testament, we are told that the world began some 5,000 years ago. In reality only the patriarchal world began around that time, and it was preceded by almost a million years of matriarchal history. Again, we are told that our society founded upon private property, with its discriminations, oppressions, selfishness and greed, has always existed, and that its evils are due to an unchanging 'human nature'. But from anthropology we learn that a totally different kind of human nature existed in primitive society, and precisely because it was a collectivist society. Finally, we are told that women have always been the inferior sex and this is due to their child-bearing functions. Mother Nature is made responsible for the degradation of the mothers of the human race. Here again, anthropology tells us just the opposite. It was not nature but class society which is responsible for sexual inequality. It was only when their own communal society was overthrown that these former governesses of society were defeated and sent,

dispersed and fragmentized, into individual households and the stifling life of kitchen and nursery chores."

5. "The Enslavement of Women" by Frederick Engels. This is mostly an excerpt from the classic Marxist work on women called "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State." Engels shows many of the same things as does Evelyn Reed. He shows how changes in the productive life, the way mankind makes a living have always meant changes in the family and in the life of women. He describes the different kinds of marriages in history, how the present one is based on economic considerations and subjugates one sex, how prostitution develops as a form of the man's supremacy and "adultery becomes a social institution impossible to repress." "With the rise of the inequality of property - already at the upper stage of barbarism, therefore - wage-labor appears sporadically side by side with slave labor, and at the same time, as its necessary correlate, the professional prostitution of free women side by side with the forced surrender of the slave. Thus the heritage which group marriage has bequeathed to civilization is double-edged, double-tongued, divided against itself, contradictory: here monogamy, there hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it continues the old sexual freedom - to the advantage of the men. Actually not merely tolerated, but gaily practiced, by the ruling classes particularly, it is condemned in words. But in reality this condemnation never falls on the men concerned, but only on the women; they are despised and outcast, in order that the unconditional supremacy of men over the female sex may be once more proclaimed as a fundamental law of society."
6. "The Relation of Sexes. The Future of Marriage." This is also an excerpt from The Origin of the Family by Engels. He discusses the different forms of marriage in history "which correspond broadly to the three principal stages of human development. "For the period of savagery, group marriage; for barbarism, pairing marriage; for civilization, monogamy, supplemented by adultery and prostitution." He shows that most people in history never had the chance to marry a person they "loved" and that this is still true for the ruling class especially. This is because of economic considerations. (See the example of Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis for example). "Full freedom of marriage can therefore only be generally established when the abolition of capitalist production and of the property relations created by it has removed all the accompanying economic considerations which still exert such a powerful influence on the choice of a marriage partner. For then there is no other motive left except mutual inclination." Engels states that the present form of marriage makes "the position of the women worse and the infidelities of the man easier." Under capitalism economic considerations hurt the woman worse and they have to sacrifice to survive and for their kids. Marriage will continue to exist under communism but men won't be supreme and marriage will be based on love and not on economic considerations. Engels says it is easier to see what will disappear in a new society than predict what there will be new. "That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual - and that will be the end of it."

DW for WSG
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Teach the Working Class to Know Itself
and Substitute Science for Dreams