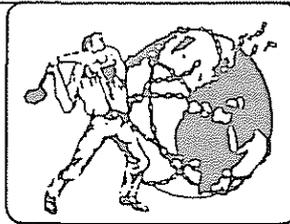


GEGEN DIE STROMUNG



Organ for the Building of the Marxist-Leninist Party of West Germany

March 1992

International Womens' Day, March 8:

Clara Zetkin - for the rights of proletarian women in the fight for communism

The living and working conditions of the great majority of women - women of the proletariat and other working women - are worsening more and more. West/German imperialists have almost completely restricted the prohibition against night-work for women. Possibilities for abortion have been massively restricted (the planned toughening of Paragraph 218). Ever more Kindergarten school places are being eliminated (especially in the ex-GDR). Working women are being dismissed by the hundreds of thousands and they find it increasingly difficult to find another job - except at home in front of the stove. And precisely those women already largely without rights, namely working women from other countries, are being increasingly exploited and oppressed.

On International Women's Day on March 8th, the spotlight is taken by those professionals at shooting their mouths off, who speak up for the capitalistic system: male and female politicians of bourgeois political parties, specialists of the labor unions, representatives of various so-called 'womens' organizations', etc. Precisely all those directly or indirectly responsible for the worsening situation of women, now hypocritically raise a hue and cry that they are for the equality of women and against their neglect.

It's clearly no coincidence that one of the true pioneering fighters for the equality of women, the firmly dedicated communist Clara Zetkin isn't mentioned with one word, is even ignored. For Clara Zetkin proved that the oppression of women is an inseparable part of all exploitative systems, but in particular of the system of capitalism and imperialism.

International Women's Day

International Women's Day was declared in 1910 at the II. International Socialistic Women's Conference in Copenhagen at the initiative of Clara Zetkin and other women comrades. It's goal was to pull wide masses of working women into the revolutionary movement for communism and for the complete and universal liberation of women.

Remembered thereby was the 8th of March, 1857, when New York working women protested against miserable working conditions in a large demonstration.

Clara Zetkin emphasized this day must carry "an international character". It should serve first of all as agitation for women's suffrage, whereby Clara Zetkin demanded that this demand must "be seen in its relation with the entire range of women's questions according to the socialistic view" (C. Zetkin, "International Women's Day", 1910, Selected Speeches and Writings, Vol I, pg. 479, German edition)

What is meant by "the entire range of women's questions according to the socialistic view"?

No Real Liberation for Women of the Proletariat in Capitalism!

Clara Zetkin rightfully emphasized:

"Even the most important and furthest-reaching demands for women's rights - the full political equality of genders, in particular that of recognizing the active and

passive right to vote - is in reality thoroughly inadequate to secure full rights and full freedom for women of no or few possessions." (C. Zetkin, "Guidelines for the communist women's movement", 1920, cited from: "Die Kommunistische Revolution und die Befreiung der Frau", MSLK Wien, pg. 99, German edition)

For the right to vote

"...doesn't abolish either private ownership of the means of production nor the class contradiction between bourgeois and proletariat; nor does it remove the causes of economic dependency and exploitation of the immense majority of women and men by the minority of women and men of property." (ibid, pg. 100)

Rather, it obscures much more this dependency and exploitation. Political equality and the right to vote are only one means among many for women of the proletariat

"To assemble and to school for the work and struggle to erect a social order which can be rescued from the dominance of private property over the people and thus, after the elimination of class contradictions between exploiters and exploited, to build a social order of free, equal and equally obligated workers." (ibid, pg. 100)

An improvement in the situation of working women under the conditions of capitalism and imperialism is possible and necessary. That can be achieved only by a committed struggle, by a strong movement of male and female workers. *Women's suffrage in Germany in 1918 was only won as a result of the November revolution!* But no illusions should be made about what's possible under the conditions of the dominant West/German imperialism. According to the situation and strength of the class strug-

"A certain bourgeois observer of the Paris Commune, writing to an English newspaper in May 1871, said: "If the French nation consisted entirely of women, what a terrible nation it would be!" Women and teen-age children fought in the Paris Commune side by side with the men. It won't be different in the coming battles for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Proletarian women will not look on passively as poorly armed or unarmed workers are shot down by the well-armed forces of the bourgeoisie. They will take to arms, as they did in 1871, and from the cowed nations of today - or more correctly, from the present-day labour movement, disorganised more by the opportunists than by the governments - there will undoubtedly arise, sooner or later, but with absolute certainty, an international league of the "terrible nations" of the revolutionary proletariat."

(Lenin, "Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution, 1916, Collected Works, Volume 23, pg. 82)



Clara Zetkin 1857 - 1933

Clara Zetkin's life work didn't exhaust itself in her decisive engagement for the rights of women of the proletariat. She was further an ardent defender of the socialistic Soviet Union under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even in the old school of social-democracy she'd led an energetic fight against opportunism and reformism. Chairwomen for many years of the Executive Committee of the International Red Aid, she offered an example for proletarian internationalism. And, not least, she was an embittered opponent of facism. In her opening speech on August 30, 1932, in her capacity as Representative of the German Communist Party and Elder's President of the Reichstag Parliament, she flung a declaration of war of the revolutionary proletariat against Nazi facists.

And even in 1923 she gave advice to anti-fascists that we can't take seriously enough today:

"Proletarian self-defense is the order of the day. We can't fight facism by the pattern of the reformists in Italy, who plead, "Don't do anything to me, I won't do anything to you!" No! Violence against violence! Not violence as individual terror - that would remain unsuccessful. But violence as the power of the revolutionary organized proletarian class struggle."

(Clara Zetkin, "The Struggle against Facism", report given at the extended plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, 1923. Selected Speeches and Writings, volume II, pg. 727, German edition)

"We must destroy the old male standpoint down to the last, finest root - in the Party and in the masses" (Lenin in conversation with C. Zetkin)

As long as working women and men see it as "completely normal" and patiently endure it when the fundamental principle of "Equal Pay for Equal Work" is stepped on and men receive more money, then they can't be won for such goals as socialism and communism. In this context we encounter a basic problem which is gladly speculated about and wrongly answered, but of which we must be conscious for the development of our work on women's questions. A great, indeed decisive part of the oppression of working women results directly through capitalism, is organized by the class enemy and its state. This must be put into proper relation to the consequences within the working masses themselves.

In a polemical way Engels concluded once that he himself, the working man, the "nourisher of the family", "is the bourgeoisie within the family. The woman represents the proletariat" (compare Engels "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State").

Engels shows the antagonism between men and women in relation to class differences:

"The first class antagonism that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male."

(*"The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State"*, 1884, pg. 75)

The struggle of working women against oppression often includes the very concrete conflict, the struggle against her husband, who himself is a worker and exploited and oppressed. On the one hand we must increase awareness for actual causes and propagate the necessary unity of women and men of the proletariat in the struggle for overthrowing capitalism. On the other hand, we can leave no doubt that we principally support the just struggle of women against oppression - even when it comes from her "own" husband. That is a very concrete "art" to be developed which will bring quite a few problems along with itself.

Two aspects were mentioned in the discussion for the compelling struggle against all backward ideologies which prevent full involvement of working women in revolutionary work:

One ensues from that about which Lenin once very clearly stated:

"We say that the emancipation of workers must be effected by the workers themselves and, in the exactly same way, the emancipation of working women is a matter for the working women themselves."

(Lenin, "The Tasks of the Working Women's Movement", 1919. Collected Works, Volume 30, pg. 44)

This means female workers *themselves* must fight and overcome their lack of self-trust and their passivity, particularly in political work. That's one side.

The other side is that male workers and especially communists must fight and discard their arrogance towards women, if they really desire to fight with revolutionary perspectives. Some men, who look at themselves as highly progressive and swear on "high goals", consider it beneath their dignity, for example, to dig in at home with supposed "women's work" and don't notice that their masculine point of view towards their own wives sabotages the struggle against capital, which can be led successfully only in common effort. Clara Zetkin wrote in her "Memories of Lenin" that Lenin did see here an aspect of revolutionary education and raising of consciousness. In conversation with her he emphasized:

"Our communist work among the masses of women, our political work among them, includes a large portion of educational work among men. We must destroy the old "male standpoint" down to the last, finest roots - in the Party and in the masses."

(Clara Zetkin, "Memories of Lenin", cited from: "Die kommunistische Revolution und die Befreiung der Frau", MLSK Wien, pg. 105)

(Excerpt from: Documents of the First Party Conference of "Gegen die Strömung" (4) - Report on the Course of Discussion Regarding the Programmatic Resolution of the First Party Conference, GDS No. 49, April, 1990, 40 pgs. 3DM/S2)

gle, the bourgeoisie can take back their concessions, the achievements of earlier struggles. That's the main reason why today, after decade-long struggles for improving the situation of working women, it's still (or once again) a question of basic demands raised by the proletariat more than a hundred years ago.

A genuine liberation of women under the conditions of capitalism isn't possible! Even with the greatest successes in the struggle for a formal equality within capitalism, working women are exploited and oppressed!

The Example of the Revolutionary Women of the Paris Commune

The entire history of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter, shows that women take part in revolutionary struggles, indeed, often played an especially decisive and courageous role.

The revolutionary women of the Paris Commune, who together with the workers of Paris defied the counterrevolution; the participation of women in the socialistic October Revolution; the armed struggle of anti-fascist women in European countries, who together with anti-fascist men drove back the occupying Nazis; the revolutionary women in struggle for liberation from imperialism and feudalism in oppressed countries give us inspiration in our own struggle.

And that at this moment in time when the western bourgeoisie celebrates its "victory over world communism" - that means in reality a victory over a bad copy of capitalism under "socialistic jackets". For the new masters, the Khrushchevs, Brezhnev and Gorbachovs, have destroyed all socialistic achievements of the October Revolution. Basic steps for the complete liberation of women in the socialistic Soviet Union under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin were undone.

More current than ever is Clara Zetkin's formulation:

"The victory of the proletariat by means of revolutionary mass actions and civil war is impossible without the purposeful and unerring, ready for any sacrifice, fighting and dedicated participation of women from workaday peoples... The conquering of political power by the proletariat must also be an act of firmly dedicated communist women of the proletariat."

(Clara Zetkin, "Guidelines for the communist women's movement", 1920)

As long as the imperialistic bourgeoisie succeeds in splitting male and female members of the proletariat; as long as working women are not active in struggles against the imperialistic system; *as long as women and men workers don't fight together against their common enemy*, the imperialistic bourgeoisie, against imperialism at all, they will never be able to achieve a decisive victory in this great struggle.

Only Communism Brings Real Liberation of Women!

The origin and development of oppression of women is closely linked with the origin of private ownership of the means of production, with the splitting of society into exploiter and exploited, is linked with the origin of the state as tool of the ruling exploiter class for holding down the oppressed classes.

All exploitive societies till now have been characterized by a special exploitation and oppression of women. Only in communism, after the elimination of the exploiter class and the disappearance of the remaining class differences, will the disadvantaging of women be completely eliminated.

But the road from a capitalistic exploitive society to communism is long and difficult. First with the overthrow of the imperialistic bourgeoisie in a proletarian

revolution, the violent shattering of the state apparatus and the achievement of the dominance of women and men workers, the dictatorship of the proletariat, will preconditions be created to systematically fight and eliminate oppression and unequal treatment of women.

Clara Zetkin says: in that communism

"eliminates private ownership by these means, it eliminates the causes of subjugation and exploitation of people by people, the social contradiction between rich and poor, exploiter and exploited, ruling and oppressed, and thus also the economic and social contradictions between men and women."

(C. Zetkin, "Guidelines for the communist women's movement", ibid. pg. 100)



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