

Communist Work Among Women

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This seminal text examines the vital role of women in the Communist movement and outlines the essential principles for organizing women within Communist Parties. Clara Zetkin presents a comprehensive analysis of how Communist Parties should approach work among women, emphasizing that this is not a separate women's movement but an integral part of the broader Communist movement. The document articulates the importance of special Party bodies for women's work while maintaining that such work must remain firmly under Party leadership and direction. Through detailed examples from various countries, Zetkin examines both successful and problematic approaches to Communist organizing among women, providing crucial lessons for building a complete revolutionary movement.

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Comrades, sisters and brothers: The report on the activity of the Executive's International Women's Secretariat and the development of Communist work among women requires that I preface my remarks with a few brief comments. They might in themselves seem superfluous, for they merely repeat what is firmly established and decided. Nonetheless they are necessary, because we face the fact that misunderstandings regarding our work still prevail

in the ranks not only of our opponents but of our own comrades, both men and women. These misunderstandings concern the nature of Communist work among women and the related tasks that fall to bodies of the national sections and the International. These misunderstandings represent, in some cases, the obvious continuing effect of relics of an older, earlier outlook. But in many other cases they have been freely encouraged by those who in the final analysis are not sympathetic to the cause itself, and indeed in part reject it quite decidedly.

The International Women's Secretariat for Communist work among women is not, as some imagine, a combination of independent women's organizations and movements. It is rather an auxiliary body of the Comintern Executive. It carries out its work not only in constant contact with the Executive but under its immediate direction and leadership.

What we conventionally term the Communist Women's Movement is not at all an independent movement of women and has nothing in common with any women's rights currents. It signifies methodical Communist work among women for a double goal. First, with respect to women who already embrace the idea of communism, to integrate them ideologically and organizationally into the different

national sections of the Communist International and to make them into active and conscious collaborators in and contributors to the entire life and work of these sections. In addition, with regard to women not yet imbued with Communist ideas, it involves winning them and drawing them into all the actions and struggles of the proletariat. Masses of women producers must be mobilized and made effective in such struggles.¹

There is no work, no struggle of the Communist Parties in any country where we as women do not feel that our first and noblest duty is to share in labor and combat. What is more, we have the ambition to stand in the first ranks and to withstand the harshest hail of bullets in the labor and struggles of the Communist parties and the International that unites them, and moreover also to lead with enthusiasm in the most modest daily work. One thing has been clearly established. However much Communist work among women must be firmly

¹Here and elsewhere, “producers” translates the German word *Schaffende*, which means both “producers” and “creators”. The term is often used by Zetkin, who defined it in a 1923 speech as referring to “all those whose labor, be it with hand or brain, increases the material and cultural heritage of humankind, without exploiting the labor of others” — a definition that encompasses women working in the home. See *Puschnerat, Clara Zetkin: Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003), p. 346.

linked ideologically and organically to the life of each party, we nonetheless need special bodies to carry out this work. Of course Communist work among women must be not women's business, but the business of the totality, of the Communist Party of each country, of the Communist International. But if we wish to achieve this goal, it is necessary that Party committees be available everywhere to carry out and lead Communist work among women in a unified and methodical manner and maintain the focus on this goal — whether these bodies are called women's secretariats, women's divisions, or whatever.

Certainly we do not deny the possibility that under particularly favorable conditions a single strong personality, whether a male or female comrade, may be able to carry out such Communist work among women in a locality or an entire district. But however much we look with admiration on such individual achievements within the Party, we must also always be aware that if instead of the methodical work of an individual we have the methodical collaboration of several, it is beyond question that the outcome, the effectiveness for Communism, will be much greater. For that reason our method for Communist work among women must be the collaboration of many for a common goal inside the party and the International.

In this process, it has emerged as a requirement for expediency and for a practical division of labor inside the party that women should be called on first and most often for activity in the special committees for Communist work among women. The reasons for this are surely evident. There is no getting around the historical fact that the broad masses of women today still live and work under special social conditions. We cannot escape the historical fact that the special position of the female sex in society has also created a special female psychology. What nature has bequeathed as sex merges with what history has created in terms of social institutions and conditions. Just as we must reckon with the specific psychology of the masses of poor peasants, based on their specific living conditions, so we must also reckon with the special psychology of the broad masses of women.

It follows from this that in general — and I underline the phrase “in general” — women themselves are the quickest, most astute, and most effective in recognizing the key issues in the life of working women, where they begin their Communist work. In addition, women are also generally better at discovering the most promising methods and forms of Communist activity among the layers of women that are deeply oppressed and are striving upwards. Of course that is true only on a general level.

As Communists we consider it our duty and our right to take part in every Party activity, from the most inconspicuous work, like distributing leaflets, to immense and decisive battles, and we consider it an insult if anyone regards us as inferior in taking part in the entire broad, historical life of our party and the Communist International. In the same way, every man is welcome to take part in the special Communist work carried out among women. That applies to our committees as well as to our entire activity in its various expressions and arenas.

Comrades, brothers and sisters: During the past year the importance of women's committees for Communist work among women has been demonstrated both positively and negatively. The experience has been positive in countries where the Communist sections of the International have created these special bodies. This is the case in Bulgaria and Germany, where women's secretariats work to carry out the task of organizing and educating Communist women, and of mobilizing women producers and leading them in social struggles. Here the Communist women's movement has become a force and a strength of Communist Party activity as a whole.

There is no doubt that in these countries we have many women who belong to the Party and are active in it, and growing masses of women outside

the Party who are our comrades in struggle. The same is true in the country that I am naming last but which stands first in importance, Soviet Russia. Here the women's committees of the Communist Party, in constant collaboration with the Party and under its leadership, have shown how important and indispensable the collaboration of women is, particularly at this moment, a difficult time when economy and society are being transformed under Soviet power to Communism.

What our Russian women comrades have accomplished and are accomplishing through the women's committees, with the help and in accord with the Party and under its leadership, is extremely important. The masses of working women and peasant women are being drawn into all arenas of the economy and of social life. They are being drawn into collaboration in building new relationships and in overcoming the difficult challenges that arise, for example, with respect to unemployment or food shortages — problems that are bound up with social transformation under the given historical conditions. They are being drawn into collaboration in reorganizing society in a Communist direction. In my opinion, what the women's committees of the Communist Party of Soviet Russia have achieved and are achieving in work among women sets an example and indicates the direction we must take.

One thing we know. Soviet Russia is the first model we have before us as the agency of this colossal social transformation. The very challenges and tasks that arise there for the Communist Party and the proletariat will someday — and we hope it is quite soon — be the challenges and tasks, under other circumstances, of the Communist Parties and the proletariat in countries that today still suffer from capitalist class rule. That is why there is exceptional importance in what Comrade Smidovich will soon tell us of the work of the women's committees of the Communist Party of Russia.

Comrades, brothers and sisters: I will now speak of the negative examples that show how necessary it is for Communist Parties to have special bodies for work among women. These examples are found in the meager participation of women in Communist Party life and of the female proletariat in the struggles of their class in countries where women's secretariats do not exist or have been dissolved.

In Poland the Party has so far refused to create special bodies for work among women. The Communist Party there considered it enough that the most effective women fight in the rank and file and that women be present as participants in mass movements and strikes. But the conviction is growing that this approach is inadequate to enable

the Communist movement to reach the depths of the female proletariat. We hope that a women's secretariat will be created in Poland very soon, as the starting point for methodical work among the broadest layers of working women. Then women producers will play an entirely new and different role in the Communist Party of Poland, driving it forward in this country whose past is filled with such glorious struggles. The most recent parliamentary elections showed that the right wing and its deception of the masses had the greatest success among the masses of women who are not enlightened and have not embraced Communist ideas. That must not be repeated.

In Britain, Party bodies for the necessary and systematic activity among the female proletariat are almost completely absent. Making reference to the weakness of its material resources, the Communist Party of Britain during the past year has again and again abstained from or postponed establishing the structures required for systematic work among proletarian women. The stimulus and the warnings of the International Women's Secretariat in this regard have been in vain. No genuine women's secretariat was established, although one woman comrade was named as an overall Party agitator. Women comrades in Britain, acting on their own accord, have used their very modest means to hold events for the political

education of Communist women and to link them strongly to the Party. These events have achieved such good results that they should provide a model for the Communist Party in holding similar educational events. The conduct of the British Communist Party executive is explained in my opinion not merely by its financial weakness but in part also from its youth and the resulting organizational weaknesses. I will not enter into a criticism of the Party here, all the more since its most recent congress showed that it is firmly on the road, in firm unity with the Communist International, to advance both organizationally and politically, working and fighting to evolve into a revolutionary mass party.

We have evidence of the Communist Party's firm will and practical success in the form of its victories in the recent elections in Britain.² But this victory, and the political activity and reorganization now decided on by the Communist Party of Britain, is bringing it out of cramped little meeting rooms of a small Party oriented mainly to propaganda and into the masses of the working class. This

²In the 25 November British elections, Newbold won Motherwell riding with 33% of the vote; Labour did not contest the riding. Another Communist, Shapurji Saklatvala, won Battersea North as an official Labour candidate. Four other CP members and one CP sympathizer contested the election, two of them as official Labour candidates and two running with local but not national Labour support.

requires the party to take up the struggle for the soul of proletariat women. The British section of the International cannot ignore the fact that many millions of proletarian women there are organized in associations for women's rights, in old-style women's trade unions, in consumer and other cooperatives, and in the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party. The task of the Communist Party is to struggle with all these organizations for the mind, heart, will, and deed of proletarian women. For this reason the party will feel a need — growing over time — to create special working bodies through which it can organize Communist women, educate them, and win proletarian women outside its ranks as dedicated women fighters of their class. The International Women's Secretariat, as a delegated auxiliary body of the Executive, will, of course, help the Party in this task.

Special mention must be made of the dubious circumstances in France. The Marseilles congress [December 1921] took a great step forward in creating a revolutionary and proletarian women's movement. For the first time the revolutionary forces arising there in the world of women were drawn together organizationally, and this occurred in the Communist Party. The congress decided, as did the first conference of Communist women, also held in Marseilles, to incorporate women of Communist

views into the Party and create working bodies of the Communist women's movement: a women's secretariat linked to the Party leadership and a women's publication.

Comrades, sisters and brothers: Unfortunately, the Paris congress [October 1922] destroyed the beginnings that had been made. We hope this is only temporary. Because of the Party's internal crisis and its effects, the Party leadership decided to disband the women's secretariat and cease publication of *l'Ouvrière* [Woman Worker], the women's newspaper.

We are convinced that as the crisis in the French party is overcome, so too we will see a satisfactory resolution of the challenge of creating the special bodies needed by a vigorous and determined Communist Party to win the broadest layers of proletarian women to share in the work and struggle of our International.

In Italy during the past year, and without any great difficulty, women were incorporated into the Party, and the special bodies were created that are needed to lead broad and deep layers in the world of women – those without property and the exploited – into the influence of Communist thinking and the struggles of the proletariat.

Comrade Hertha Sturm will give you some specific information regarding what I have described in general terms, namely the present state of the necessary working bodies that we must have nationally and internationally in order to enable the Communist women, the proletarian women, to become the driving forces of the class struggle and the revolutionary upsurge of the exploited and oppressed masses.

Organizationally, we succeeded in the Netherlands, with the help of the international women's secretariat, in dissolving the separate women's organization that existed there. In addition to Communist women, it included anarchist and near-anarchist forces. The Communist members have joined the Communist Party of the Netherlands, and they are active in collaboration with the male comrades. In general our experience confirms that the integration of Communist women into the Party, their systematic party work, and their activity among the masses, has been successful and fruitful.

In Norway the recruitment of Communist women into the Party has not been carried through so completely as is indicated in the principles and guidelines of the Communist International. This results from the general character of Party activity in Norway. The separate organization of women

is related to the organizational structure of the Norwegian Communist Labour Party, which even today calls itself Social-Democratic. It is based organizationally not on individual membership, but on membership in the trade unions. We anticipate that with the reorganization of the Party, the separate organization of women will also come to an end, and forms of work will be found that permit us to spur on all women who are now striving to advance Communist ideas to greater activity and greater collaboration.

Much of this applies also to the Communist International's section in Sweden, although there is no crisis in the Party and the organizational structure is different. Here too there are still separate organizations of Communist women. By the way, in Norway as in Sweden these separate organizations are survivals from the past of the movement for women's rights, which was strong and to some degree had ongoing effects on the Social-Democratic movement. These organizations will disappear as the other ideological survivals of the Social-Democratic past are overcome and strictly Communist views prevail.

What, then, is the extent to which our Communist work has achieved influence among deep and extensive layers of exploited women? Has this work

expanded to a notable scope? I will begin my report on this point with a fact of extremely wide-reaching historical significance. In the Near and Far East the wives of the heavily burdened toilers are beginning to awaken and gather around the Communist banner. Comrades, brothers and sisters: We cannot overestimate the importance of this fact. What is the situation? The task there is to awaken and win masses of women weighed down by prejudices that are centuries and even thousands of years old. A long and deep-going capitalist development, which creates nothing new without destroying the old or bringing it to the point of death, has not yet fully destroyed these prejudices. It is true that capitalism has made its entry there and subjected the masses of women, above all, to its exploitation and subjugation. That is what we see in Japan, India, Transcaucasia [Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia], and also in China. Nonetheless, it has not destroyed the old social enslavement of women, but rather harnessed it to its purposes.

In the countries of the East, women live and work overwhelmingly under patriarchal and pre-capitalist forms of social life, bending under prejudices grey with age, oppressed by social institutions, by religion, customs, and habits. And yet despite all this, the women begin to awaken, begin to adopt a Communist mode of thinking, to revolt and to speak of liberation.

What does this tell us? That capitalism and its world are losing their last reserves, the countries with a pre-capitalist civilization or incomplete recent capitalist development, which are subjugated to the rule of immense capitalist states or are being stalked by capitalism's greed for exploitation as future colonial possessions.

These territories, with their rich and still poorly exploited potential, gave the bourgeoisie the resources — through despicable and inhuman plunder of the popular masses there — to throw rebellious workers in the old capitalist countries — wage slaves in mutiny — beggar's crusts of bread in the form of minor concessions and reforms. The impulse for freedom and the hate of capitalism and its rule is alive in these countries, and the women, the most oppressed of the oppressed, are rising up, striving to work and struggle under the Communist banner. All this is testimony to the fact that capitalism is approaching its end with giant strides. What Comrade Kasparova will tell us about the activity of the Executive's International Women's Secretariat in the East is thus particularly significant. In growing numbers and with devoted determination, the women of these countries are beginning to gather around the banner of Communism — subjugation.

In many countries, especially in Romanic countries, we are assured that no significant work can be done among women. The influence of the Church's outlook and of the traditions handed down in the family and society are too strong, too overpowering. In vain do we strive to bring the masses of women out of the grip of domesticity and lead them as fellow fighters onto the field of historical struggle between capital and labor.

Comrades, sisters and brothers: What is possible in the East is a signal to us in the West that we must not pass by this historical milieu thoughtlessly, but must devote our attention to it. These gains are also a sharp reminder of what can be achieved by the human will. Reference to the materialist conception of history is not always appropriate, when it is used to excuse weaknesses and deficiencies. The historical framework is mighty indeed, but not almighty. Our understanding and our will can master it and change it. If we did not have this conviction, we would not be Marxists and revolutionary fighters. What did Marx write in his debate with Feuerbach, which was the starting point for his conception of history? "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change

it”.³ In the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and, following their example, in Iran and Turkey, women are announcing that they are resolved on winning their freedom as Communists.⁴ Given this fact, I believe it is inappropriate to say that the difficulties of Communist work among women in the Romanic countries are virtually insuperable. No, when there is a will, there is a way. We have the will to world revolution, and we must therefore find the path to the broadest masses of exploited and enslaved women, regardless of the historical conditions that may obstruct this task.

During the period covered by this report, there has been great progress in reaching broad masses of women through agitation and propaganda and above all through the deed — through work and struggle. This is true both in the countries under capitalist rule and in the proletarian state of Soviet Russia and the other Soviet republics. Wherever the proletariat has set about the struggle to resist the general offensive

³See Theses on Feuerbach, in Marx and Engels Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 8.

⁴The Soviet republics of the Caucasus included the independent Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (in Transcaucasia), and also, in the North Caucasus, the Daghestan, Mountaineers’, and other autonomous republics within the Russian Soviet federation. In December 1922, the three Transcaucasian republics merged into a federal state, which then joined as a constitutive unit of the Soviet Union.

of the employers, wherever the masses have taken up the struggle against inflation, against the burden of taxes, against the lengthening of the working day, in a word against the worsening of proletarian living conditions; wherever the proletariat is standing up to the offensive of capitalism that aims to make the broad masses of exploited carry the costs of the war and reconstruction, women have taken part in these struggles to a gratifying extent and with vigor and energy.

Everywhere we see a growth in the masses of women who are helping to sustain the campaigns of the Communist International and its individual sections. Wherever they have been were summoned in the name of the Communist International, they have responded. That has been particularly evident in two international campaigns.

One of these is International Working-Women's Day. It took place this year to a much greater extent, with more unity, and including much broader masses of proletarian women than had been the case in the previous two years. And this celebration highlighted the fact that it is not a separate women's event, not a women's issue, but an issue for the Party, a Party campaign, a declaration of war by Communism against capitalism, a beginning of the struggle for which an army of millions of exploited and oppressed

must be gathered, armed, and made ready. Almost everywhere — more in some areas and less in others — it was carried out as a campaign of the Communist Party as a whole.

The same holds true from the other international campaign in which we were involved: the *International Workers' Aid for Soviet Russia*.⁵ This was carried out in every country with outstanding initiative and involvement of women. From Norway and Finland down to Switzerland and Italy, from the west to the east, it was the women, acting in accord with their Communist Party, who were the most vigorous propagandists, canvassers, and organizers of the International Workers' Aid. In this process, they demonstrated a consciousness of proletarian solidarity in a truly generous, skilled, and forceful manner.

One thing must be emphasized with regard to both International Working-Women's Day and the International Workers' Aid for Soviet Russia. In both campaigns the specific purpose provided a starting point for political activity and political goals. For International Working-Women's Day we linked up with special demands that women of the working people advance as housewives and mothers to combat

⁵See report on International Workers Aid, *Toward the United Front*, pp. 1069–71.

painful social afflictions. In the aid for Soviet Russia we linked up with proletarian solidarity. And in both of these cases we also pursued the goal of awakening broad masses of women to political thought and political activity. Both the demands of women for the protection of mothers and children and also the practice of solidarity with Soviet Russia were heightened into political action, political struggle. That is precisely the goal of Communist work among women. The economic and social afflictions of women and their demands for a culturally satisfying life are utilized as the starting points toward the most advanced activity possible, in conducting the most intense struggle possible against bourgeois society.

Communist women in each country, in accord with and under the leadership of their party, have, of course, utilized every opportunity and occasion to arouse the proletarian masses of women, to win them, and to lead them into struggle against the capitalist order. So, for example, in Germany the struggle against the so-called abortion paragraph provided the starting point for a very extensive and successful campaign against bourgeois class rule and class justice and against the bourgeois state.⁶ This

⁶Communists in Germany campaigned against paragraphs 218 and 219 of the criminal code, which illegalized abortion and punished women who underwent abortion. The Communist Women's Movement considered abortion as a symptom of

campaign won for us the sympathy and support of broad circles of women. Yet the question was approached not as a women's issue but as a political issue, a cause of the proletariat.

All our campaigns and actions have been carried out under the banner of the proletarian united front and of the slogan provided to us by the Third Congress of the Communist International: "To the masses".

Because we are inspired by the correctness and necessity of the proletarian united front, we recognize the full importance of developing heightened and more intensive work in the specific fields of the trade unions and the cooperative movement. In order to carry out such effective and systematic work in these two arenas, it is decisive that we be capable of involving the broadest layers of women and making them effective in struggle. For working women, this can be done through the trade unions;

social evils related to women's poverty and subjugation. But the movement held that the anti-abortion laws brutally punished innocent women, including through the dreadful toll of illegal abortions. They demanded women's protection by abolition of all anti-abortion laws. The Communist campaign is analyzed by Ketty Guttman in *Zum internationalen Kampf gegen die Bestrafung der Abtreibung, Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, 3, 5 (1923), pp. 959–68. See also Grossman, *German Communism and the New Women in Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women*, 1998.

for women who are not employed, for housewives, proletarian and petty-bourgeois women, through the cooperative movement.

Conditions are particularly favorable to bring together around the banner of Communism larger numbers of non-proletarian women, both employed and housewives, for the struggle against capitalism. The decay of capitalism has generated a small number of newly rich and an enormous mass of newly poor — not only in Germany but also in Britain and other bourgeois states. The middle class is proletarianized, or at least is headed more or less quickly in that direction. As a result, the distress of life strikes with dreadful cruelty at the purse and the heart of many women who until now had enjoyed somewhat secure and pleasant chances for existence under capitalist rule.

Thus female employees, especially intellectuals such as teachers and office workers of various types, are growing rebellious against this, the “best of all possible worlds.” Under the pressure of inflation, of the glaring discrepancy between income and the cost of living, more and more housewives, including bourgeois housewives, are awakening to a recognition that present conditions — the continued existence of capitalism — are incompatible with their most basic interests in life.

Comrades, brothers and sisters: We have to utilize the ferment, the motion, that is visible in these layers of women, arousing tired hopelessness into bright sparks of rebellion that will ultimately take fire in revolutionary understanding, will, and action. Our Communist work among women in the trade unions and cooperatives can make a very great contribution to these goals. In both fields women can not only be important contributors to the united front — no, they can do more, as pioneers of the united front in many movements.

I have referred to how pitilessly the attacks of life's sorrows are affecting the conditions of millions of women, so that they begin to awaken. Until now we have felt with distress the political backwardness and dullness of women in their masses. But under the pressure of enormous suffering, these characteristics can promote our cause and ease the path of awakening women into the Communist camp.

The soul of women is not as politically and socially defined as that of men. It is less adorned with the false and deceptive slogans of the Social-Democratic reformists, the bourgeois reformers, and the like. It is very often an unwritten page. It will therefore be relatively easier for us to pull the previously indifferent masses of women directly into our struggle, without passing through women's

rights, pacifist, or other reformist organizations. This will not immediately be in a struggle for the final goal of proletarian revolution — I would like to warn against that illusion — but will rather be in our defensive struggle, striking back against the bourgeoisie’s general offensive. They will surely take part in this, in large numbers and with great energy.

I believe that our comrades in Bulgaria, to whom we are grateful for all their stimulus and their effective work inside the Communist International, have shown us a path we can follow: during our defensive struggles we can establish organizational bastions among these masses of women for subsequent struggles with a more advanced content and more ambitious goals — in short, we can prepare for decisive struggles. Our Bulgarian women comrades have founded associations of women sympathizers. These groups do not merely supply preliminary schooling before entry into the Communist Party, but are also solid organizational strongholds that draw masses of women into all the party’s activity and campaigns.

Our women comrades in Italy have set out to follow this example. They have founded groups for “sympathizing women”, which include women who still have misgivings about joining a political party or attending political meetings. I am convinced that

this initiative will bear fruit. The example provided here deserves to be studied and applied by those who deal with Communist work among women in every country. This will not only result in a strengthening of the Communist sections of our International, but will have two other good effects: the extension of Communist influence among the broad proletarian and non-proletarian layers of the population, and also ferment, discord, and division in the ranks of the bourgeoisie, that is, a weakening of our deadly enemy. Every weakening of the bourgeoisie signifies a strengthening of the proletarian forces in struggle to bring down capitalism and overthrow bourgeois class rule.

Comrades, brothers and sisters: I will not go into the details here of how we conceive of Communist work to win women through the trade union and cooperative movements. This will be done by Comrade Hertha Sturm, who is speaking after me. I will say only that we must take care in our work not to awaken deceptive illusions. Rather we should destroy all illusions that the trade union and cooperative movements could, within the capitalist order, destroy the laws and preconditions for the existence of capitalism for the greater good of the proletariat. No, however useful and essential the achievements of trade unions and cooperatives may be, they are not capable of undermining and overthrowing

capitalism. They achieve full effectiveness only after the conquest of political power by the proletariat, after the establishment of its dictatorship. Then the trade unions and cooperatives will become not only a means of destroying the survivals of capitalism but also agencies to build the new and higher life of a Communist society.

In view of the decisive importance of proletarian dictatorship for the nature and activity of trade unions and cooperatives, we must again stress how this makes Communist work among women in the Soviet republics different from that in countries that are still ruled by capitalism. In countries under capitalist class rule, both organizations come to the fore as instruments for defense and struggle of the broadest masses. The trade unions do this for the masses as producers; the cooperative movement does so in the struggle against capital in commerce, lending, and the black market. In the Soviet countries, by contrast, the tasks of both types of organizations in education and construction are predominant.

Comrades, sisters and brothers: I must point out that our work in the past year has indicated the special importance of work to bring women under the influence of the Communist International and to win them as its supporters. Communist women and women sympathetic to them play this important role

wherever illegality is our only form of activity and struggle, as well as where underground organizations must function beside the legal associations working above ground.

In Finland, Poland, and other such countries, the collaboration of determined and devoted Communist women has proven to be extremely useful, indeed, I must say it is indispensable. It is now possible that the advance in many countries of blackest reaction, of fascism, will confront us with the need to struggle illegally, to respond to force with force, to answer the bourgeoisie's break with the rule of law with our own disregard and disdain for bourgeois legality. In such conditions the male comrades will not make headway unless they have the women at their side.

Proletarian women in Turin showed that where fascism grows strong, we can count on the support of women willing to make sacrifices. In the most recent large proletarian demonstration against fascism in Turin, armed proletarian women marched under a red banner with the inscription, "Rosa Luxemburg." This fact must have given pause to the bourgeoisie; it certainly raised the spirits and the readiness for struggle among the worker ranks.

Comrades, sisters and brothers: In order for our Communist work among women to fulfill all the tasks that I have indicated here only briefly, in general

outline, one thing is necessary. We and you must all pose ourselves the question: Are the Communist women in the International's sections sufficiently rich in knowledge, will, and efficiency, to carry out their duty to the fullest extent?

And we must not lose sight of the fact that both Communist women and also Communist men — for on average we are no worse and no more stupid than you — are often lacking in the necessary fundamental theoretical and practical education. The immaturity and weakness of women in the political movement is only a reflection of the immaturity and weakness of the Communists as a whole. It is caused above all by the newness of our sections. Serious work will overcome this weakness, one that we must take into account along with the many advantages of our movement's youthfulness.

It is extremely important, brothers and sisters, that we quickly overcome immaturity and weakness among those who are to carry out Communist work among the female proletariat. I therefore give you all an urgent warning: Take care that the women in your ranks are assigned to the Party's practical tasks in what I would like to call an individual fashion, bringing them in and assigning them personally. Take care that all possibilities for education and that all existing institutions for the theoretical and

practical education of the membership are open to them. Take care that where a common rounded education is not possible, the necessary educational vehicles for women are created in the form of courses, lectures, and appropriate publications and literature for women. Comrades, part of your own educational work is to assure the thorough and practical education of women as Communist colleagues in struggle. This is beyond any doubt an important and essential precondition for your success.

Especially now I consider it particularly necessary to be concerned with the clearest, deepest, and most fundamental education of women. In this transitional period, the ship of Communism will sail out over the broad ocean of decisive revolutionary struggles by the masses in all their strength for the conquest of political power and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Two dangers threaten us. On the left, the ship is in danger of breaking up on the reefs and cliffs of an adventurist and romantic putschist policy, while on the right lies the danger that the ship will run aground on reformist sandbanks and get stuck in the stinking and decaying waters of opportunism. There is only one thing that can overcome the dangers from both right and left. That is the greatest, heightened activity of the will, a will that becomes reality, that

is guided by clear insight into the historical situation, the nature of the present world crisis and the conditions for overcoming it — namely the conditions of revolutionary struggle.

Danton in his day called out to the vanguard fighters of the French revolution, “Audacity, audacity, and again audacity!”⁷ Yes, comrades, sisters and brothers, we want to say that every day to women who wish to struggle for Communism. Heretofore they have been to some extent a passive force, and everything is pressing them to become decidedly active. Therefore: Audacity, audacity, and again audacity! But we must add to these words others, called out again and again by Comrade Lenin: Clarity, clarity, and again clarity! Wisdom, wisdom, and again wisdom! Not as an expression of fear or of vacillation. No, rather as a precondition for carrying out the deadly blow against capitalism with a sure touch.

Comrades, sisters and brothers: We must take this to heart. Everything that you have heard so far at this congress has showed us how rightly the Communist International evaluated the world situation at its previous congress. All the signs of the times tell

⁷Georges Danton spoke the words, “*Il nous faut de l’audace, encore de l’audace, toujours de l’audace!*” (We must dare, dare again, and always dare) to the French National Assembly on 2 September 1792.

us that society is objectively ripe, indeed overripe for capitalism to be swept away and overthrown. In the past it has not been shown to be ripe in the historical sense of the proletariat's will, the will of the class that is called on to be the gravedigger of the capitalist order.

But, sisters and brothers, this historical situation is like a landscape in the Alps, where great masses of snow lie stored on high peaks, which have defied all storms for centuries and seem ready to defy the influence of sun, rain, and tempests for several hundreds of years to come. Yet despite all appearances they are hollowed out, worn down, and "ripe" to come cascading down.

It may be enough for a little bird to move its pinions and touch these snows with the tip of its wings, to bring the avalanche into motion and bury the valleys down below.

In the present situation we do not know how far we are as men and women from world revolution. That is why every hour and every minute must be utilized in work to make us ready for the world revolution and ready to carry it out.

World revolution means a worldwide act of destruction of capitalism, but it means also a worldwide act of creation, the creation of

Communism. Let us be imbued with the meaning of this word! Let us be ready, and let us make the proletarian masses ready, to be world creators of communism. (*Loud applause*)

Organizing Working Women

Comrades, before I begin my report on the activities of the International Women's Secretariat and the development of Communist activity among women, allow me a few short remarks. They are necessary because our work is still misunderstood not only by our opponents but even by our own comrades. This is with some the remains of an old view, and with others it is wilful prejudice because they do not sympathize with our cause, and even partly oppose it.

The International Women's Secretariat is a branch of the Executive of the Comintern. It conducts its activity not only in constant cooperation with the Executive, but under its immediate leadership. What we usually designate the Communist Women's Movement is not an independent women's movement. It exists for systematic Communist propaganda among women. This has a double purpose: First, to incorporate within the national sections of the Comintern those women who are already filled with the Communist ideal, making them

conscious co-workers in the activity of those sections. Second, to win over to the Communist ideal the indifferent women and draw them into the struggles of the proletariat.

The masses of working women should be mobilized for these fights. There is no work in the Party, no struggle of the movement in any country in which we women do not regard it as our first duty to participate. Moreover, we desire to take our place in the Communist Parties and in the International where the work is hardest and the bullets fly thickest, without shunning the most menial, most modest every-day work.

One thing has become apparent; we require special organs to carry on the Communist work of organization and education among women and to make it a part of the life of the Party. Communist agitation among women is not only a women's task, it is the task of the whole Communist Party of each country, of the Communist International. To accomplish our purpose it is necessary to set up Party organs, Women's Secretariats, Women's Departments, or whatever we may call them, to carry on this work.

Of course we do not deny the possibility that some strong personality, man or woman, might be able to do the same work in some local or district

organization, But however much we may admit such individual accomplishments in the Party, we must ask ourselves how much greater the benefits would have been if instead of the work of a single individual we had the cooperation of many forces. United action by many towards a common goal must be our slogan in the Party, in the International, and in our work with women.

As a matter of expediency, of practical division of labor, women are usually the best fitted to take part in the special organs for Communist work among women. We cannot escape the fact that the large masses of the women live and work today under special conditions. That is why, in general, women usually find the best and quickest method of approach to the working woman to begin Communist propaganda.

Just as we Communist women consider it as our right and duty to take part in every activity in the Party — from the most modest work of distributing leaflets to the final, tremendous, decisive fight — just as we would regard it as an insult to be considered unworthy of taking part in the great historical life of the Party and the Communist International, so do we not exclude any man from taking part in the special Communist work among women.

During the last year we have had evidence of the good and the bad sides of Communist work among women. We have seen the good sides in those countries where the Communist sections of the International have created bodies, as in Bulgaria and Germany where the Women's Secretariats have carried on the work of organizing the educating the women Communists, mobilizing the working women, and led them into the social struggle. In those countries, the Communist Women's movement has become one of the strong points of the general life of the Party. In those countries we have many women members and militants in the Party and still larger masses of women as comrades-in-arms outside the Party.

Where there's a will there's a way. We have the will to world revolution, therefore we must find the way to reach the masses of the exploited and the enslaved women, whether the historical conditions make it easy or difficult.

Let me give you a few examples of the bad effects of the lack of special organs for work among women in Communist Parties. Whenever there are no Women's Secretariats or similar bodies, we have observed a falling off in the participation of women in

the life of the Communist Party and the withdrawal of the feminine proletariat from the struggle of their class. In Poland, the Party has refused until now to set up special bodies for work among women. The Party was content to allow women to fight in its ranks, and participate in strikes and mass movements. However, we are beginning to realize that this is not sufficient to permeate to the feminine proletariat with the Communist ideal. The last elections to the Diet have proved that reaction finds its strongest support among the ignorant masses of women who have not yet been permeated by Communism. This should never happen again.

In England, organization for conducting systematic agitation among the feminine proletariat is altogether lacking, the Communist Party of Great Britain excused itself by its weakness, and has continually refused or postponed the setting up of a special body for systematic agitation among women. All the exhortation of the International Women's Secretariat have been in vain.

No Women's Secretariat has been established: the only thing that has been done is the appointment of a women comrade as general Party agitator. Our women comrades have organized various meetings for the political education of the Communist women out of their own feeble numbers. These meetings have

achieved such good results that the establishment of similar meetings must be encouraged by the Communist Party.

The attitude of the Executive of the Communist Party of Great Britain is, in my opinion, not only an outcome of its financial weakness, but partly also to its youth and the shortcomings resulting from it. I do not want to submit the Party to severe criticism here. The success of the British Communist Party at the last general election in Great Britain is proof of its strong determination and its practical success. However, this election victory, as well as the political activity and reorganization which were decided upon, make incumbent on the British Communist Party at a time when from being a small propagandist party, it goes right into the masses, to strive to organize the proletarian women.

The British section of the International cannot remain indifferent to the fact that in its country many millions of proletarian women are organized in women's suffrage societies, women's trade unions of the old type, in consumers' cooperatives, in the Labour Party and in the Independent Labour Party. It behooves the Communist Party to struggle with all these organizations for the capture of the minds, the hearts, the will power and the actions of the proletarian women. Therefore it will in the long run

realize the necessity for the organization of special organs by means of which it will be able to organize and train the Communist women within the Party, and make the proletarian women outside the Party willing fighters for the interests of their class.

In various countries, the Communist women, under the leadership of their Party, have used every opportunity to awaken the proletarian women and to lead them into the struggle against the capitalist system. Such was the case for instance in Germany in the fight against the so-called Abortion Law, which was used for a far-reaching and successful campaign against bourgeois class rule and the bourgeois State. This campaign secured for us the sympathy and adherence of large masses of women. It was presented, not as a women's question, but as a political question of the proletariat.

We fully realize the importance of spirited and thorough work in the trade unions and cooperatives. In order to carry on energetic and systematic work in these two fields, it is necessary that we gain influence over large sections of women and recruit them for the struggle. This we shall do by influencing working women through their trade unions, and proletarian and petty bourgeois house wives through the co-operative movement. However, I want to point out that in our work we must

not raise false illusions. We must, on the contrary, do our utmost to destroy the illusion that the trade union movement and cooperative movements within the capitalist system are capable of bringing about legislation for the benefit of the proletariat and of destroying the foundations of capitalism. However useful and indispensable the work of trade unions and cooperatives they cannot undermine the overthrow capitalism.

The conditions are especially favorable for rallying also non-proletarian women around the banner of Communism. The capitalist decay has created in Great Britain, in Germany and other bourgeois states a large new class of new rich as well as a large class of new poor. The middle class is being proletarianized. Consequently the exigencies of life are pulling at the heart strings as well as the purse strings of many women who hitherto had a terribly secure and happy existence under the capitalist system. Many professional women, especially the intellectuals, such as teachers, civil servants and office employees of all kinds are getting rebellious and are pressed into the struggle against capitalism. Comrades, we must take advantage of the ferment in these women's circles and fan their resigned hopelessness into a flame of indignation that will lead to revolutionary consciousness and action.

What about the conditions that can make this possible? I have already mentioned what pitiless inroads present day conditions make into the lives of millions of women, causing many of them to awaken from their torpor. All that has hampered us previously, the political backwardness and the indifference of women in general, can, under the pressure of unbearable suffering, bring adult women into the Communist camp. Their mentality is less affected by the false and deceptive watchword of the Social-Democratic reformists, or the bourgeois reformers. Their mentality is frequently like a blank sheet, so we shall subsequently find it easier to bring the hitherto indifferent female masses into our struggle without the preliminary transition through suffrage, pacifist and other reformist organizations. However, I want to sound a note of warning. We must not be too sanguine and expect that the women will join immediately in the struggle for our final aims, but we may depend on them in our defensive struggle against the general offensive of the bourgeoisie.

I believe that our women comrades in Bulgaria have shown us a good way to organize women. They have established Unions of sympathizing women. These unions are not only preparatory training centers for entry into the Communist Party, but are also effective rallying points for the attraction of the female masses to all the activities and actions of

the Party. Our Italian women comrades have begun to follow this example. They have also established groups of sympathizing women, including women who are still loath to enter political parties, or attend political meetings. The example must not only receive the recognition of all those who do Communist work among women in all countries, but must also be followed.

Comrades, are the Communist women within the sections of the International endowed with the consciousness, the will and energy required for this work among the female masses? We must not conceal the fact that the women as well as the men Communists (for on the whole we are not worse, or more stupid than you are), frequently lack the necessary fundamental, theoretical and practical training. The backwardness and weakness of the women in the political movement only reflects the backwardness and the weakness in the Communist ranks in general.

It is of the greatest importance to overcome as quickly as possible the lack of training and weakness of those who are to carry out the Communist work among the female proletariat. Therefore I enjoin you all to take care that the Communist women within your ranks are individually made responsible for the carrying out of the practical

tasks of the Party. See to it that they have all the educational opportunities possible. Comrades, the fundamental and practical training of women into valuable Communist workers in the Communist struggle is part of your own educational work, and is an important and indispensable prerequisite for your success.

All the signs of the times show us that society is objectively ripe, nay even over-ripe for the overthrow of capitalism. But we have had no proof that the will of the proletariat, the will of the class destined to be the grave-digger of the capitalist order is ripe in the historical sense of the word. But Comrades, this historic situation is like an alpine landscape in which the gigantic masses of snow repose on the mountain tops for centuries, seemingly impervious to sun, rain or storm. But despite appearances they are undermined, they have grown soft and are “ripe” to be hurled down.

Perhaps the beating of a little bird’s wings will be enough to move this avalanche which will bury the valleys under its weight. We do not know how soon we, men and women, will be faced with the world revolution. Therefore, we must not lose a single hour, nay, let a single minute pass without working for the world revolution. World revolution does not only mean world destruction and the destruction of

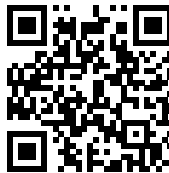
capitalism. It also means world construction and the creation of Communism. Let us get our inspiration from the real meaning of the word: let us be ready, and let us make the masses ready, in order that they might become the world creators of Communism.



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