

Women's and Children's Liberation

Andrew McLaverty-Robinson

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This piece, translated for the Contradictions special issue on Central/Eastern European anarchisms, is the first English translation (by Maria Reiding) of a piece by Luisa Landová-Štychová, who was a Czech anarchist, feminist, and later communist. The article is a transcript of a lecture organized by anarchists in 1912, later published in the anarchist journal *Záduha*, and is only eight pages long. She was also a neo-Malthusian (i.e. an advocate of birth control close to the eugenics movement) and a “socialist monist” (rather than a materialist), and this makes the overall mix of ideas rather strange. In this piece, she argues that religion, capitalism, housework, and romantic love all alienate women from their interests and pursuit of justice.

The introduction by Kristina Andělová and Ondřej Slačálek provides a biographical background. Landová-Štychová had first been active in the campaign for women's suffrage, then in the Social Democratic Party. However, she viewed the latter as simply a reformist tool for more revolutionary aspirations. She was part of the anarchist-communist resistance during World War 1, which fused into the wider nationalist resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the war and national independence, she was one of four anarchists who held seats in the Czech parliament. She controversially proposed legalizing abortion, and also fell out with the other nationalist/socialist representatives. She later joined the Communist party and was involved in anti-fascist activities, going on to be a ‘secondary communist functionary’ after World War 2. Her works focus on gender rather than class, and include socialist-feminist themes from very early on. Her anarchist period runs up to about 1918, after which she uses socialist frameworks. Her activism focused on ‘free love’ and the critique of marriage, as well as birth control as an aspect of working-class women's liberation.

Luisa Landová-Štychová's speech/article follows Engels in locating the origins of women's subjugation in the transition from primitive communal societies to private property, arguing that the enclosure of land by men logically extended to the appropriation of women themselves as bearers of heirs. This foundational act of ownership, she contends, established marriage, whether legally imposed or free, as an institution fundamentally based on possessing another human being. Men seek sexual pleasure because of poverty and alcohol, but this reinforces misery. She criticizes the idea of a union of souls in marriage, which submerges weaker-willed women into their husbands to the point where they become ‘caricatures.’ A ‘noble’ woman (in Nietzsche's sense) neither wishes to enslave nor to be enslaved by anyone.

The author situates women's oppression as the hidden foundation supporting the trinity of capital, militarism, and clericalism, noting that the family unit makes workers more willing to accept exploitation for the sake of their children's miserable existence, while simultaneously driving women into the arms of the church for solace. This analysis frames marriage and the family not as private arrangements but as the most powerful, though seemingly negligible, supports of the entire system of domination.

The critique extends deeply into the intimate sphere of daily life, where Landová-Štychová meticulously documents how housework functions as an invisible and unending form of exploitation that "sucks the freshness out of faces, joy out of life, it breaks pride, and makes mules out of women." She exposes the hypocrisy of male revolutionaries who speak eloquently of freedom and equality while expecting their wives to clean their shoes and care for their children, drawing a direct parallel between the bourgeois who blames workers for mismanaging insufficient wages and the husband who tells his exhausted wife to better organize her time. Men are also oppressed by being incapacitated from performing simple household tasks, putting them in a childlike position at home.

The sexual economy of marriage is laid bare in her description of women performing "intimate marital duty" while deathly tired, fearing pregnancy, yet finding some solace in the man's "casual faithfulness," a meager reward for constant, grinding suffering that numbs like a persistent rain that makes one forget the sun still shines. People marry only because of a dread of solitude. Pregnancy is a sickness and experience of bodily pain imposed as a duty.

Landová-Štychová also turns her critical gaze upon maternal love itself, which she identifies as an offshoot of private ownership and a primary obstacle to human emancipation. She argues that maternal love, through its untimely tolerance and senile willfulness, crushes young souls' longing for free flight, teaching them to prefer unhealthy warmth over fresh air and to misunderstand Nietzsche's call to "live one's life fully" as mere indulgence. Children are treated as a 'puppet' or a 'burden' rather than a future free human being. People never come to live fully and experience the joys of nature.

This critique leads her to propose the radical separation of motherhood from child-rearing, arguing that children belong among children in communal arrangements where trained educators, those with a genuine artistic understanding of the child's soul, can raise them without the possessiveness that makes a mother see her child as an extension of herself. The teachers should specifically be people who see every child like their own, who feel a need to live with children and give of the beauty of their own souls, and see in each child someone who will take much of what is given. On the other hand, children should spend much of their time interacting with other children, experiencing 'the joy and pain of a broad, communal life.' She opposes the view that collective child-rearing has to be a 'barracks education' and argues that what she seeks is nothing like then-current orphanages or mainstream schooling. Children would spend much of their time playing outdoors and 'the child will himself [sic] choose and listen to the one he understands best.'

Such arrangements would free women either to pursue their own development in science, labor, or art, or to choose motherhood without sacrificing their other capacities. The essay culminates in a vision of liberation grounded in science and technology, which Landová-Štychová presents as a "hitherto silent revolutionary" that will fundamentally transform human existence. Doctors will become teachers of health rather than butchers of corpses; chemistry will free humans from vulgar gratifications and the emotional coarsening involved in slaughter; technology

will eliminate exhausting labor; and astronomy will offer "dizzying and yet much more subtle enjoyment" than the digestive and reproductive systems. In this future, humans will eat to be healthy and have sex to relieve excess juices or consciously create new life, rendering erotic obsession as obsolete as dueling. She concludes with a striking inversion of Nietzsche: the very women he mocked and dismissed – the mother and the sex worker, the silent sufferers – hold in their hands the fate of the overman, for his beautiful dream cannot be realized if women remain sexually and maternally enslaved, their souls made dark and vengeful, poisoning the blood of any liberation project that excludes them.

What it means for radicals: It's an interesting read, with an unusual mixture of influences (Nietzschean, feminist, anarcho-communist, neo-Malthusian) feeding into a highly transformative critique and proposal. Landová-Štychová is ahead of her time in raising issues which would later become staples of socialist-feminism, such as the role of housework in capitalism and the effects of the family in undermining radicalism among men. In other ways, she prefigures Simone de Beauvoir in her denunciation of love-as-fusion as alienating for both parties. Her critique of marriage and the family are also similar to Stirner's. The theme of parental power over children as part of the structure of oppression, perhaps even its root, is also before its time. Her educational proposals are similar to those of A.S. Neill; Ferrer would be another point of comparison. She writes very much within a modernist vision which involves enthusiasm for technology and science; this puts her analysis at odds with many emerging from ecological, poststructuralist, and other later positions. The most disturbing aspect of this modernism is the apparent influence of eugenics and public health ideology on aspects of her discourse.

The model of marriage Landová-Štychová criticizes has partly broken down, and been replaced by a type of serial monogamy which is a transactional version of the free love ideal. This hasn't affected distributions of childcare and housework very much, and there's a lot of other problems with serial monogamy, ranging from widespread loneliness to cases of serial abuse. However, the current form takes place within a context where the wider social environment brings out the worst in the arrangement, with neoliberal ideology encouraging transactional and instrumental attitudes towards partners, states surveilling and intruding in damaging ways, work and other stress eating into people's capacity for relationships, mediation (such as by dating apps) introducing the Spectacle at a very fundamental level, and pressures or desires for traditional marriages producing countervailing pressures. My own view is that erotic and romantic desires involve underlying cathexes of libido, and do not necessarily combine into a single complex. In practice, a lot comes down to finding compatibilities around sites of intense passion, something which to a degree happens spontaneously in relatively free conditions, but which does not happen very much today because of social conditions.

While empowered by powerful passions and giving off a vibe of living energy, this piece is also strangely alienated from aspects of desire. The idea of sensuous pleasure – that people might deepen their experience of life through sex, romance, altered states of consciousness (e.g. drunkenness), or even through food – seems to produce in the author a sense of horror. She loathes passionate sex, alcohol, and romantic love, which she takes to be automatically alienated. On the other hand, she is very much in favour of what Freud called *sublimated* pleasures, particularly those of art, science, and physical activity. I suspect Landová-Štychová was rather character-armoured, having some of the traits criticized by Theweleit. I would not be surprised if she was a skin-muscle erotist, i.e. someone who gets libidinally cathected enjoyment mainly from non-penetrative physical activities; this enjoyment is probably what differentiated her from

Theweleit's fascists. She seems to believe that this is the natural, healthy human condition which should if possible be brought about in everyone, and is evidently very into "healthy living" as conceived from a certain point of view. This complex of views would not hold very long against psychoanalytic evidence, and the 1960s-70s revolts involved rather different ideas.

It's unfortunate that Landová-Štychová hadn't encountered (or else had rejected) psychoanalytic ideas as late as 1912, because psychoanalytic concepts would be very useful for dealing with the issue of parental "love" which smothers, incapacitates, or controls. I think this kind of attachment is still very common, and that it finds its apotheosis in so-called authoritative parenting methods. The trend today is for children to never be allowed outside unaccompanied, if indeed they live anywhere near a suitable play-space, but instead to be confined to houses and gardens because of various dangers. This reflects parents' neuroses and the use of liability to turn parents into conscript cops, as well as reflecting real and imagined dangers (cars, police, predators, bullying, moral corruption, etc.).

As I already mentioned, Landová-Štychová's proposals for child-rearing/education are similar to Neill's, although Neill was more aware of psychoanalysis. Neill's ideas have been tried out concretely, and work well with neurotic children, but not so much with psychological formations arising under neoliberalism. They're still vastly superior to anything found in conventional educational thinking or today's "radical pedagogies." Landová-Štychová goes further than Neill in that she wishes to extend systems of this kind from birth; something like this was attempted in early kibbutzim and in certain early Soviet experiments. There may be a problem in that communal child-rearing does not produce stable attachments and therefore secure attachment styles; there are also dangers that the system could be captured by the wrong kind of people or turned barracks-like if under-resourced. I think that greater child freedom (including access to safer play-spaces) would undermine parental power in practice, but parental power has some of its roots in economics and the work-system, in greater physical strength, and in manipulation of children's intelligence. The teacher/parents in Landová-Štychová's model would presumably neutralize these problems on their own side, and the whole approach is presumably meant to take place within an anarcho-communist society. Otherwise, the big difficulty would be how to sustain the entire system, freeing up time for a sufficient number of teacher/parents to take on the role full-time; the adult-child ratio would have to be much lower than in contemporary education.

The teacher-image Landová-Štychová proposes is basically a Kleinian good-mother (or good-breast) archetype, and questions could be asked about whether such people exist and if so how they could be selected. If they exist, then giving them the main role in children's development might well be a good idea. I suspect dynamics of this kind happen to some degree in village and band settings, based on children's self-selection of who to spend time with. There are limits to Landová-Štychová's proposals in that she does not seem to have considered disability, learning difficulties, or what was then called infantile psychosis. Not every child seeks, or flourishes in, the company of other children; some are avoidant and anxious for psychodynamic reasons, some are bullied by other children, some are excluded from group activities or social discourse because of various incapacities.

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