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Social situation of women

Emma Goldman

1936

Human progress is very slow. It has been said that for every step forward, humanity has taken two steps toward slavery. Only over the centuries has it freed itself from its attitude of submissive worship of the Church, the divine right of kings, and the power of the ruling class. In reality, this calamitous trinity still reigns over countless millions of people in every country of the world; but it can now only rule with an iron fist and demand a certain amount of obedience in fascist countries. Although fascism has no historical existence except as a fleeting manifestation, beneath its Black Death, one senses the approaching storm and how its fury grows. It is in Spain that it will find its Waterloo, while protests against capitalist institutions are growing throughout the world.

But, in general, humankind, always ready to fight heroically for its emancipation, is far from thinking the same about that of the opposite sex.

Without a doubt, women in many countries have made a true revolution to achieve their social, political, and ethical rights. They have achieved them at the cost of many years of struggle and being defeated countless times, but they have achieved victory.

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Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of women in all countries. In Spain, for example, women are considered far inferior to men, as mere objects of pleasure and producers of children. I wouldn't be surprised if only the bourgeoisie thought this way, but it is incredible to see the same antediluvian concept among workers, even among our own comrades.

In no country in the world does the working class feel libertarian communism as the Spanish working class does. The great triumph of the Revolution that began in the days of July demonstrates the high revolutionary courage of the Spanish worker. It should be assumed that their passionate love for freedom includes the freedom of women. But far from this, the majority of Spanish men seem to fail to understand the meaning of true emancipation, or, in other words, prefer their wives to remain ignorant of it. The fact is that many men seem convinced that women prefer to continue living in their inferior position. It was also said that the black man was delighted to be the property of the plantation owner. But the truth is that true emancipation cannot exist as long as one individual predominates over another, or one class predominates over another. And the emancipation of the human race will be even less realistic as long as one sex dominates over the other.

Furthermore, the human family is made up of both sexes, and woman is the more important of the two, since the species is perpetuated within her, and the more perfect her moral and physical development, the more perfect the human race will be. This alone would be enough to prove the importance of women in society and in the social struggle; but there are other reasons. The most important of all is this: that women have realized that they have a perfect right to personality and that their needs and aspirations are as vitally important as those of men.

Those who still claim to have a firm grip on women will surely say that, yes, all this is very well, but that women's needs and aspirations are different because they are inferior. This only proves men's limitations, their pride, and their arro-

gance. They should know that what differentiates the two sexes tends to enrich life, both socially and individually.

On the other hand, the extraordinary achievements of women throughout history nullify the legend of inferiority. Those who insist on it do so because they cannot tolerate their authority being questioned. This is characteristic of every authoritarian approach, whether that of the master over his slaves or that of man over woman. Nevertheless, women everywhere strive to liberate themselves; they move forward, freely; they take their place in the struggle for economic, social, and ethical transformation. And it won't be long before Spanish women embark on the path of their emancipation. The problem of female emancipation is analogous to that of proletarian emancipation: those who wish to be free must take the first step.

The workers of Catalonia and all of Spain have already taken it; they have liberated themselves and are shedding their blood to secure this freedom. Now it is your turn, Spanish women. Break your chains. The time has come for you to elevate your dignity and your personality, to firmly demand your rights as women, as free individuals, as members of society, as comrades in the struggle against fascism and for the Social Revolution.

Only when you have freed yourselves from religious superstition, prejudice, current morality, and the enslaving obedience to a dead past will you become an invincible force in the anti-fascist struggle and a guarantee of the Social Revolution. Only then will you be worthy of collaborating in the creation of the new society in which all beings will be truly free.