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Woman must work

Madeleine Pelletier

1921

The Woman's Voice published the summary of an article from the Rote Fahne (The Red Flag) from Vienna on women's labour.

It offers the old Socialist idea of the situation of women; an idea which is primarily antifeminist since, by advocating to keep women at home, it perpetuates their slavery. However, we can see some progress. The Austrian Socialist understands that by closing the factory gates to women, he turns her into an enemy of socialism, and he concludes in favour of women's labour.

It is annoying to see that, in matters of women's rights, it is the working class who proves most reactionary. Workers might want to free themselves from the bourgeoisie, but they intend to remain masters of their wives, maintain her in her economic dependency, in such a way that she is forced to submit to sexual slavery in order not to starve. It is in progressive groups that we can most often hear the old clichés on women's intellectual inferiority, her "special nature" which would ban her from work, etc.

Women are weaker than men but this is of no concern for society. Far from protecting women's weakness, as it hypocritically pretends, society only increases this hypocrisy, by taking away from the female sex the means to live.

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Weak or strong, women are individuals who have the right to live as they wish.

During the massacre which just ended, we saw that only age-old prejudice banned women from some professions. By opening these jobs to them, we saw that they are able to do them. Their average ability did not equal those of men, but it does not matter. It was still far from null, since capitalists kept working women and even paid them wages as they had never had before.

We always remain focused on the issue of equality or inequality which, actually, does not have to be raised. Equality does not exist among men in intelligence or strength; there are strong people, weak people and average people in either domain.

Women will do what they can, and as long as the current society exists, working women must fight to make bosses pay her labour as dearly as possible.

Financial emancipation of women is not only justice, it is the real interest of men. If most men do not think so, it is because they are traditionalists. They want to live like their fathers and grandfathers. Revolutionary as far as society is concerned, they do not want revolution to enter their homes, but it must.

Housewives are the worst enemies of the revolution. Limited to their kitchens, they do not know anything about the outside world, and she has an instinctive fear of everything which threatens its peace and quiet. To have a man who brings back good weekly and monthly pays, but who doesn't drink too much, who doesn't hit her when the soup is not good, that is her ideal.

In politics, she is reactionary because she is attached to her "home", just like the bourgeoisie is attached to their capitals. She hates strikes and hates the unions who prepare them; she hates the groups which incite her husband to forge what she considers wild dreams. To her, an "honest man" is a quiet man, who doesn't go out, who likes to stay at home.

Superficial minds concluded from this very real psychology of the housewife that women are incorrigible reactionaries. House-

wives only have the mentality of their state. She is like the artisan of the old days who, confined at home where they worked on their own, had no idea about social change.

It is the factory which made Socialists and Anarchists. Factories and workshops will do to women what they did to men. And we will then see that women don't lag behind. The evolution which we indicate has already started actually. The industrialisation of women will bring about the revolution.