

Revolution is the Only Solution for Women's Oppression

Peru People's Movement (MPP)

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“The women's struggle for their emancipation is linked to the triumph of the revolution.”

“Unemployment, hunger and misery is what the old order has to offer to millions of women.”

Under the instructions of his Yankee advisors, Fujimori has created an entity known as the “Ministry for Women,” that endeavors to contain with demagoguery the increasing number of women involved in the sharpening of the class struggle in Peru. This highlights the central problem of the politicization of women, as an integral and indispensable part of the People's War led by the PCP.

Besides its ideological strength, one of the things that distinguishes the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) from other liberation movements throughout the world, is the active organization and incorporation of women into the revolutionary struggle. Over half of the PCP Central Committee established by the First Congress in 1988 was women, as is still the case today! This is just one example, of the significant part women play in the leadership of the Peruvian Revolution.

The “senderologists,” those self-proclaimed “experts in the affairs of Shining Path” (as all reactionary scum call the PCP), from the beginning of the People's War, have made speculations about the participation of women in the armed struggle. Among other ridiculous things they have said, is that the massive participation of women was due to “President Gonzalo representing for them some sort of idealized father figure” and from the beginning, they tried to convince us how the Party was really a “cult” dedicated to violence.

These speculations are the shortsighted reactionary conceptions of these individuals, who apparently cannot accept the idea of women in leadership positions, having their own rational thoughts, and not acting as appendages of men. They reflect a concept of women as motivated by feelings, and not by logic, letting themselves be used at will by men, for the furtherance of their interests.

The fact of the matter is that Peruvian women take an active part in the revolutionary struggle, including the armed struggle, out of a conscious realization, that the PCP is the only Party which today, genuinely represents, the just demands of the people and the full emancipation of women.

1 WHAT IS THE PCP'S POSITION ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS?

The political line of the PCP is based on the ideology of the proletariat, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Gonzalo Thought, which upholds that without the massive participation of women, the proletarian revolution is not possible. Chairman Mao restates this position when he says: "The emancipation of women is part of the emancipation of the proletariat." But he also leaves out any doubt that the emancipation of women must be won by women themselves, who constitute half of heaven and therefore must help to conquer it.

Analyzing the historical process, Engels established the fundamental thesis that the place of women in society, depends on the property relations of the means of production, how the right to property is exerted, and the relations of production derived therefrom. He defines the great historical defeat of women that took place thousands of years ago, when kinship affiliation and inheritance through the father, replaced affiliation and inheritance through the mother.

Thus, women lost their position as heads of their families, their control over communal property and their participation in public life; and they became economically, politically and ideologically subject to men. This occurred when paternity of children had to be clearly established, due to the development of private ownership of the means of production in the hands of men. This replaced communal rights to the productive forces, thus opening the way for the exploitation of man by man, and for the formation of the first

states to impose, through organized violence, the interests of the exploiters against those of the exploited. At the same time, the group marriage of primitive communal society was replaced with marriage systems of paternal affiliation (headed by the man who often could have several wives). Later this was replaced by the monogamous family of the bourgeois era.

In this manner, Engels exposed the intimate link between private property, the family and the state. He clearly defines that the material base for the oppression of women is found in the private ownership of the means of production, and not in the division of labor, as many supposed revolutionaries and self-proclaimed Marxists have held by twisting the thesis of Engels. The emancipation of women can only be achieved by abolition of private property, which will lead to the disappearance of the monogamous bourgeois-style family, and finally to the withering away of the state, since neither of these would serve any further useful function. Thus, the objective interests of women are identical to those of the proletariat.

Marxism defends the demand for the “emancipation of women” and opposes the thesis of “liberation of women”, which is a product of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois feminism, and leads to the counterpoising of men and women, hiding the true causes of the oppression of women. The emancipation of women cannot be achieved by destroying “patriarchal society,” but only through ending exploitative society as a whole.

2 THE SITUATION AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN PERUVIAN SOCIETY

The PCP analyzes the situation of women in Peruvian society from a Marxist viewpoint. José Carlos Mariátegui, the founder of the PCP, paid special attention to the struggles of women, and established the foundations of the specific line of the Party on the woman question. To determine the women’s situation, he first defined the general characteristics of Peruvian society, defining it as semi-feudal and semi-colonial, characterized by backwardness and bureaucratic capitalism.

The base of Peruvian society is made up of semi-feudalism in the countryside, characterized by private and state latifundia (large land holdings), which sustain themselves by serfdom and free labor, producing mainly for export. Minifundia (small plots of land) tended by poor peasants using very

rudimentary means, whose products are mainly for self-consumption, or at most reach the local market, many times lack any legal protection since they have no titles of property. Even though each reactionary regime has put an “agrarian reform plan” in place, and distributes a token number of titles to land, the fact remains that the political power of the landowners is fundamentally maintained on this economic base.

In the cities, capitalism has developed based on feudalism, and completely subject to the needs of imperialist capital. It is decrepit and parasitic, that is, bureaucratic capitalism. It is only able to develop those sectors of production which benefit imperialism, which means that it's based on the exploitation of cheap raw materials, and maintains the country in complete submission economically, politically, ideologically and militarily to imperialism, mainly US imperialism.

The state is a dictatorship of the big bourgeoisie and landowners, who are the ones benefitting from the current relations of exploitation; thus it uses all means at its disposal, to preserve their interests. The social foundation of this society is the family, which fulfills both social and economic tasks (many of which in imperialist countries are fulfilled by society as a whole, such as supporting its members in case of sickness, unemployment, old age or unforeseen calamities, and financing the education of the children). In the ruling classes, the family also helps maintain the concentration of power in the hands of a relatively small number of influential families, whose members and in-laws share important positions in the economy, politics and the armed forces.

The role of women in society is influenced above all by their functions in the family, as mothers, transmitters of traditional moral values, and domestic laborers. This traditional role fulfills important functions in the upkeep of the old system. Women “should” seek to “marry well,” and their education is tailored to that end. Ruling class women study in the best schools and universities, improving their value in the matrimonial market. Many times women of the middle classes also see their education in this light. In addition, today women of the highest classes have the possibilities of professional careers, because it is well-known that in Peru, such positions are allotted based on nepotism and political trustworthiness, making no major difference whether it's a man or woman. Thus, it's no longer rare to find women in important positions in the economic and political fields.

On the other hand, women of the popular classes generally receive an education which prepares them for domestic work, in order for them to be

able to contribute to the support of the family, easing the burden of the man as head of the family. For them, employment is understood to be a period of transition between school and marriage, although many women continue to work outside the home after marriage, to complement the meager salary of the husband. A typical case would be a peasant girl in the shanty towns surrounding a major city, who, before marriage, works as a household maid in exchange for room and board, and sometimes a tip, and after marriage she contributes to the family income, as an ambulatory vendor or by cleaning houses.

In the imperialist countries the employment of women generally allows for the lowering of wages of workers and laborers, since the capitalists pay their workers the bare minimum to sustain their labor power and assure the subsistence of the family. In other words, salaried work by women and their contribution to the family earnings, permit cutting down salaries in general, because their incorporation into the productive process sharpens competition in the labor market.

In Peru, during the prolonged economic crisis of today, wages have been cut considerably and the average wage of a worker is much below the minimum necessary for subsistence. The situation of the middle class is similar. Today, no family of the people is able to survive with only one salary. Generally, not only the father and mother work, but the children also contribute to the family income. For this reason, close family ties persist both in the countryside and in the city, because they serve as the only social "safety net." So, only in exceptional cases does the incorporation of women into the productive process, lead to economic independence from husband or parents.

The situation of women in the countryside is determined even more by family ties. Little girls from peasant origin, at a very early age assume their share of the tasks in the home and the family plot, and after marrying, as a rule very young, they continue the same chores at their husband's property. Very few women from poor families, who are the vast majority, go beyond the most elementary education. Many times they speak very little Spanish, and have the highest rate of illiteracy. Their responsibilities are clearly defined: besides domestic work and tending to the children, they help the men tend the family plot, tend cattle and sell a few agricultural products at the local market.

It is normal for women to have many children, who are considered cheap labor, and thus the women spend their youth going from one pregnancy to the next. Representing the family in public life is the task of the man. However,

the traditional ways of life in the countryside are being broken because the land is no longer able to support all the descendants. This forces the men to temporarily leave the home to work in the mines and plantations, or the entire family leaves the countryside, to try to earn a living in the city.

But it is also becoming more common for girls to leave the family when they're very young to work as domestic employees in the city. This is considered a privilege in certain ways, because they have a chance to learn Spanish, and if they're lucky they may finish school. Many of them get married in the city, and with their families populate the shanty towns, which now surround every major city in the country.

These material circumstances are accompanied by a patriarchal double standard of morality, which considers the woman a possession exclusively for the man: as a sexual object, mother and domestic maid. Even if the woman has a job, in her private life her field of action is reduced to the home, and strict marital fidelity is expected of her. The man is completely free for sexual piracy. Consequently, prostitution and single motherhood are a common sight. These morals correspond to the still prevailing feudal mentality. The bourgeois liberal ideas that inspired the first feminist struggles in other places, as well as the bourgeois democratic revolution, with its ideals of "liberty" and "equality," have been unable to get their foothold in Peru.

In the imperialist countries, the state has given women the formal right to equality, but has been unable to make it a reality. The incorporation of women into the productive process is not sufficient to guarantee their emancipation; it is only the starting point for the emancipation struggle. Those "Marxists" who think that "the woman question" can be solved by giving women equal conditions within the economic process, are only obscuring the true cause of feminine oppression: private ownership of the means of production. The emancipation of women can only be accomplished by the abolition of this private property, and the only social system capable of achieving that is socialism. Therefore, even if a bourgeois-democratic revolution in Peru were still historically possible, it could not achieve the emancipation of women. That is only possible today, through developing the democratic revolution of the new type, such as the one that the PCP is leading, and its uninterrupted continuation through the Socialist Revolution.

3 THE INCORPORATION OF WOMEN INTO THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE

In Peruvian history, there are a number of extraordinary women who provided important contributions to the country's literature, art and politics. It suffices to remember Micaela Bastidas, who at the end of the 18th century, with her husband Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui (AKA Tupac Amaru II) led one of the largest peasant uprisings in Peruvian history. In the 19th century, influenced by liberal bourgeois ideas, there emerged the first women in literature and the demand for education for women. Until then, there were only "girls' schools" operated by nuns, with very limited curricula, preparing girls for their future role as housewife and mother. Access to these private institutions was for the privileged classes only. According to the feudal mentality, women working outside the home were considered as lacking decorum, a symbol of social decay.

As a result of the struggles for the right to education, in 1908 women were allowed to enter the university for the first time in Peru. In 1928, the first state school for women was founded in Lima. At the time, the vast majority of women students pursued careers in education. After World War II, women entered all professional careers, and today studying at the university is not limited to the ruling classes, although because of their high cost, their doors remain closed to the poor sectors. So today, the right to education is no longer a problem of gender, but of the necessary economic means.

The most profound change in the situation of women took place with their incorporation into industrial production. The emergence of bureaucratic capitalism at the end of the 19th century introduced the use of machinery, which made possible the growing integration of women into the productive process. This created the material base for the politicization of women, which was expressed as their participation in trade union struggles. Women took an active part in the struggles for better wages and working conditions, and for the eight hour work day, and they organized actions to protest against poverty and the high cost of living. With all this, especially with their adherence to the proletarian ideology, women finally saw the doors open for their definitive emancipation.

Mariátegui analyzed the feminist movement of his time and concluded that three fundamental tendencies could be seen, based on their class character: bourgeois feminism, petty bourgeois feminism and proletarian feminism.

He summarized: “Women, like men, are reactionary, centrists or revolutionary. They cannot, therefore, fight together in the same battles. On the current human political scene, class differentiates individuals more than gender.” He also held that a genuinely revolutionary feminist movement would have to be based on proletarian ideology. He saw how the incorporation of women into the productive process was an important condition for them to develop political consciousness, and he called on Communists, to pay special attention to work among women in the universities and trade unions. The object of this work was to politicize women, incorporate them into the class struggle, and elevate their ideological and political levels through their education in proletarian ideology, as well as their organization into trade unions and into the Communist Party, where he foresaw the creation of women’s secretariats.

When in the 1960s Chairman Gonzalo, who was heading the red fraction, began the reconstitution of the PCP as a party of the new type, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, he reclaimed Mariátegui’s theses on the woman question and developed them further. The result was the founding of the “People’s Women’s Movement” (Movimiento Feminino Popular, MFP) as an organization generated by the Party in the struggle for the specific interests of women.

The MFP developed a declaration of principles and a programme. There it rejected any and all bourgeois feminism and emphasized that “The struggle of Peruvian women is part of the struggles of the exploited and oppressed people, and their enemies are the same.” Its established tasks are to struggle for the specific demands of women, to mobilize, politicize and organize them on the basis of the thought of Mariátegui, as well as their participation in all the organizational forms of the proletariat, and in the people’s struggles in general.

The application of this specific line in the mass work led to the great number of Communist women who have taken their place on the side of the fighting people. Convinced that only the destruction of exploitative society and the construction of a new society would realize the emancipation of the oppressed, they broke with the traditional role of women and actively took part in the long years of struggle against revisionism, to prepare the PCP for the initiation of the armed struggle. One great example is Comrade Norah, born in 1945, founding member of the red fraction, and an implacable fighter against revisionism, who until her death in combat on November 14th, 1988, was an outstanding member of the Party’s Central Committee.

With the beginning of the People's War, the struggle of women also took on another dimension. It rose to a struggle for emancipation with weapons in hand. When the first guerilla units marched onto the field, many women were among them, smashing the prejudice that war is only for men, participating from the very beginning in equal conditions in the armed actions. They showed their capacity to confront the difficult life of the guerilla and their high courage and bellicosity; many gave their lives for the revolution. On many occasions, they proved in practice their capability as leaders and assumed command of their units.

While at the start of the People's War, the majority of women in the revolution were of petty bourgeois origins, and very soon that changed too. Since 1982, when the first People's Committees were formed as the specific form of the State of New Democracy in the countryside, the peasantry increasingly incorporated themselves into the revolution. This also meant the massive incorporation of peasant women into the People's War, since one of the particularities of the Peruvian revolution is that in the People's Committees, the whole population is organized militarily, as the base force. Under the New Power, women as well as men have the right to take an active part in the decisions of the People's Committees.

In addition, organisms are generated which represent the specific needs and interests of the women, and they enforce them. The children in the People's Committees also receive a new democratic education, without differentiation by sex, which from early age, develops their political consciousness. The result is a generalized politicization and the emergence of many women with a highly developed revolutionary spirit.

In the cities as well, we see the active participation of women in the class struggle. They understand that the wage cuts and firings of their husbands affect their own existence, and they actively support the workers' struggles. In the struggles in the shanty towns to defend their plots of land, or in the struggles for potable water, drainage or electricity, it is common to see women in the front lines. The PCP takes these demands as just and correct, and creates organisms generated by the Party to lead these struggles.

The class conscious men and women workers are organized into the "Movement of Class-conscious Workers and Laborers" (MOTC in Spanish); the most advanced part of the population in the shanty towns constitute the "Neighborhood Class-conscious Movement" (MCB). In 1990, "People's Struggle Committees" were developed in some shanty towns. They were formed in places where the majority of the population supported the revolution, and

they constitute an embryonic form of the New Power in the city. Their main task is to lead the struggle for the just demands of the workers and poor masses in general, as well as to organize other collective activities, and to solve concrete problems of the population.

There too, women participate with the same rights and duties as men, and have formed organizations of collective survival. Some, like the “People’s Cafeteria” (Comedores Populares) or the “Glass of Milk Committees,” were initially founded by the revisionist parties for electioneering purposes. Today, in the same places, class conscious women have assumed leadership, and they do not “humbly and appreciatively” accept the handouts the State so nicely “gives” them; rather they demand it as a right of the people that it actually is. The working masses, with their labor, with their sweat and tears, and with their heavy toiling, create all the riches of society without exception, and so they have the right to the fruit of their own labor. These “generous handouts” of the haughty powerful, are but the fruit of the labor of the masses which have been wrested away from them by force of arms. They are now recovering them, as is due, by force of arms. These people’s struggles are very instrumental to the politicization and organization of women.

In the Third Plenum of the Central Committee, in July of 1992, the PCP saw the need to push forward the struggle for the basic needs of the people and to place themselves at the head, to win over the masses in the cities, and construct the People’s Liberation Front. President Gonzalo reaffirmed this agreement in his historic speech of September of ’92. There is ample evidence that the PCP has taken up this directive and is putting it into practice. According to information in the Peruvian Press, increased activity by the PCP in the factories and shanty towns is very noticeable, and new organizations are being created to struggle for the just demands of the masses. These activities will lead to a still greater integration of women in the cities, into the revolutionary movement.

STRUGGLE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL REALM

For centuries the thesis of a supposed “human nature” has been used as an ideological justification for oppression in general, and of women in particular, along with the complementary thesis of the so-called “feminine nature.” In particular, religion has played a nefarious role in the propagation of these ideas. Marxists, however, sustain that human beings are a product of society

and resolutely oppose the “feminine nature” thesis, as well as that of “human nature.”

Applying Chairman Mao’s great thesis that politics commands everything, the place within the leadership structure of those integrating into the Party, army and organizations generated by the PCP is defined exclusively by their ideological and political level and not, as in bourgeois society, by good relations with the ruling class or even by specific qualifications. The PCP starts from the need to carry out the tasks, to apply a correct political line and to rely on the masses; no one, man or woman is excluded beforehand from any task simply because they may not have a few specific skills or know-how. In this way, women cannot be limited to traditionally “women’s tasks” as happens so often in the bourgeois and revisionist parties, where only rarely do women manage to become leaders.

On the other hand, we cannot completely ignore that ideological transformation is a very prolonged process; there are revolutionaries too who consider taking care of children and domestic work as primarily the responsibility of women, because women as well as men find breaking with prejudices about traditional roles not very easy to achieve. So in many people the prejudice persists that politics is primarily a thing for men, telling women they are unprepared to understand politics. The background for this is the persistence of the feudal-imperialist mentality expressed in individualism and selfishness.

The frequent argument hindering the political advancement of women is, what else? That someone must take care of the children, and that someone is understood to be the mother. Thus, women find it harder to break away from the ties of the old society, where domestic work and the care of children are not organized collectively. For instance, if both men and women work, why can’t the plant’s cafeteria, at the end of the work day, give each family a canteen with an already prepared supper? Likewise the day care centers and other institutions? – All those things are impossible to achieve under capitalism! But not under genuine socialism based on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Gonzalo Thought. The old customs weigh heavy, but they are being shaken as the revolution progresses, and after power is conquered they will be destroyed, as both the material basis for the oppression of women and the feudal-imperialist system and ideology that sustain that oppression are attacked and eliminated.