

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN PERU

Peru People's Movement (MPP)

1997



Honor and Glory to Comrade Norah!

In 1964, a handful of female workers and university students (mostly from peasant origins) set up, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Peru (the PCP), the women's section of the Students' Revolutionary Front (the FER - "Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario").

Most of them were from Ayacucho, 400 km. Southwest of Lima high in the Andes, and in their declaration they began by drawing a clear line of demarcation vis-a-vis the pseudo "feminist" positions propagated by reactionaries among the petit bourgeoisie. Their stated aim was to "retake Mariategui's road" and to forge the women's contribution to the revolutionary road.

Few seriously believed that this undertaking of the Communists would bear fruit. The revisionists who in past years had supported the brief ventures into "foquismo" tactics-ie. those following the model of Che Guevara, such as Luis de La Puente Uceda, considered the newly-established women's

movement of the FER as a short-lived initiative, which would burn itself out rapidly enough. The would-be emulators of Che and his petty bourgeois Cubanism filtered out any sign of life of a real women's movement from their ranks, most importantly they dismissed the leading role of the proletariat, and the role as principal force of peasants in the revolution, demonstrating their skepticism in their fighting power. Thus, they launched a guerrilla warfare in 1965, which was brutally wiped out in less than 3 months by the Belaunde regime.

Four years later, in 1968, the women's movement of Ayacucho made a public declaration of their principles and a plan of action. They upheld Lenin's thesis dealing with women's participation in the revolution, namely that "the success of the revolution depends on the degree of women's involvement." At the same time, a programme was being implemented as part of a central objective to educate, involve and organize female workers and peasants.

In 1973, during the Velasco fascist dictatorship, the People's Women's Movement (the MFP - Movimiento Femenino Popular) was founded. It was "an organization generated by the proletariat among the ranks of women and as an organism featuring three characteristics: adherence to the ideology of Mariátegui, being an organization of the masses, and guiding itself by democratic centralism.

Thereafter, the majority of the MFP members, including its leadership, went on to unfold their actions principally in the rural areas, to spread the ideology of the proletariat and to enlighten the female peasants on the importance of women's participation in the revolutionary process.

In 1975, the MFP took up the task of expanding to a national level. To achieve this the MFP would merge with the masses in its class struggle, especially with the female workers and peasants, developing a protracted and hard working task.

In January of that year, the MFP staged its first national conference for co-ordination, outlining its plans for the immediate future. Soon after the meeting, which had brought together leaders from all over the country, a manifesto was published. Its slogan and title was "Marching Under the Banner of Mariátegui, Let's Develop the People's Women's Movement". The document recommended, among other things, "constant adherence to the line of Mariátegui" and quoted two of his thesis concerning the role of women.

The first reads as follows: "Feminism in Perú did not appear artificially and out of nowhere. It has appeared as a consequence of the new roles of

women as intellectuals and manual workers. The genuine feminist women are those who work and those who study.”

The second quotation read: “The class struggle - as historical reality rather than as a theoretical exercise - is reflected at the level of feminism. Women, as well as men, are just as likely to be reactionaries, or centrists, or revolutionaries. Therefore women all cannot fight together in the same battle. In today’s humanity, class differentiates individuals more than gender.”

The MFP’s manifesto from its national conference unified all women’s organizations upholding the class line and in favor of fully retaking the road of Mariátegui and this manifesto appeared at a moment in which the emancipation of women had become a field of contention of ever growing significance between the people and their enemies at the national and international level.

This national event was seen by its organizers as “one more step on the road to the politicization, mobilization and organization of the Peruvian woman” begun in 1964. From this conference arose the National Coordinating Committee, taking upon itself the elaboration of the manifesto and its positions, conclusions and tasks.

In synthesis, the movement was organized under the guidance of two basic principles:

- the principle of political-ideological construction as the cornerstone, and
- the principle of organizational construction.

As a first step it organized the National Coordinating Committee with the fundamental political objective of encouraging women to go into the process of production, familiarizing them with the trade union experience and getting them acquainted with the Party of the proletariat, the Communist Party of Perú.

For ideological-political work a line of action was laid down: “It is imperative for working women to become conscious of their situation of double exploitation. In the first instance exploited as part of the proletariat, a slave subjected to the yoke of capital. Secondly, as the victim of ferocious social, ideological and political oppression enforced by imperialism, the bourgeoisie and the remnants of the feudal system, which in her condition as a woman weigh heavier upon her.”

In 1978, the MFP’s roots had spread widely throughout the countryside and in townships. As they prepared themselves for definition in taking up

the road to the initiation of the People's War, they drew a clear cut and final demarcation with bourgeois feminists and all non-proletarian positions.

Reiterating the thesis of Mariátegui concerning feminism, the MFP pointed out: "Three fundamental currents, three basic hues can be distinguished within feminism: bourgeoisie feminism, petit-bourgeois feminism, and proletarian feminism. Proletarian women totally infuse and merge their feminism with the faith of the revolutionary masses in the society of the future".

In 1979, as preparations for the ILA (The Initiation of the Armed Struggle) got under way, the MFP's standpoint became more solid centering itself more closely on the cornerstone of party unity (Gonzalo Thought). Within the torrent of revolution storming down the Peruvian Andes - with a totally reconstituted Communist Party of Perú, equipped with concrete and definite plans for "initiating the armed struggle from the countryside into the cities." the MFP, as a united organism generated by the revolution, has clearly defined its position.

Another of their documents, quoting Chairman Mao Zedong, points out: "In the semi-feudal and semi-colonial societies, the woman is subject to four-fold oppression: political oppression, clan oppression, religious and marital oppression."

Further on, and to illustrate the importance of the participation of peasant women in the People's War, they quote Mao' saying that "since the peasantry is the main force of the revolution, peasant women play a vital role in the struggle of the women's movement."

This maoist guidance has been implemented by the PCP through the course of more than 17 years of victorious People's War, where women constitute half of the leadership of the Party, the People's Army of Liberation and the People's Front of Liberation.



COMPAÑERA COMBATIENTE (WOMAN COMRADE IN ARMS)

Compañera
scaling the heights
piercing the mountains
fighting with decision
On with the People's War!
Not pain
hunger
nor cold
can bend you
forward you march
eyes straight ahead
toward Communism
with unshakable faith

you build a world
where misery
and exploitation
are no longer here
Woman,
you fight for your emancipation
Your eyes of fire
reflect the steel
of the Party's forge
the invincible light
of
Chairman
Gonzalo

NOTE: Poem of the Women's Prisoner of War.