

Women at the Highest Levels

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STRUGGLESSESSIONS



Women cadres were in the center of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) and made up the majority of its Central Committee at the pinnacle of the People's War. To keep up with this great tradition, sexism within Communist Parties today must be rebelled against so that women can scale the heights as soldiers and politicians. Highlighting the benefits that women at the highest levels bring to the Party, here we outline some of the specific obstacles to developing women cadre and inquire ways to overcome these obstacles. 'The Party' refers to the given Communist

Party or Party-reconstitution effort in the specific countries where they exist. 'Communist' and 'cadre' are interchangeable—they mean the exact same thing, and women cadre (not women mass members) are the subject.

Feminism is not what women need. While studying its lessons should not be dispensed completely, feminism's history is one of integration into capitalism without exception. Unequipped to end capitalism, feminism is not equipped to end the oppression of women. A Party constituted to initiate Protracted People's War (PPW) along with red women's mass organizations must fill the void unanswered by feminism to analyze the women's question. Once socialism has been established sexism persists ideologically, therefore the vital cultural revolutions become the job of women, who not only should but must become their strong fighting force.

Men are not women's enemies. Rather, the enemy of women is capitalism-imperialism mainly, along with the remnants of the decaying system of patriarchy which women are bound to by capitalism today. The root of women's oppression is the existence of private property—as a system and not based on the individual; therefore, the communist fight against sexism is not merely a fight against men nor a fight against male communists. With this said no Communist Party or Party reconstitution effort within the International Communist Movement (ICM) can claim to be immune from sexist ways of thinking. Perhaps the most invasive of these is the so-called 'feminine nature'.

Obstacles which must be overcome

“Just as Marxism considers the human being as a concrete reality historically generated by society, it does not accept either the thesis of “feminine nature,” which is but a complement of the so-called “human nature” and therefore a reiteration that woman has an eternal and unchanging nature; aggravated, as we saw, because what idealism and reaction understand by “feminine nature” is a “deficient and inferior nature” compared to man...With this pseudo-theory it is intended to maintain and “justify” the submission of women.”

–Marxism, Mariategui and the Women's Movement

'Feminine nature' socializes women to be submissive, agreeable, and to stay in their place. This socialization remains the case in 2018, and feminism has not changed this. Far from a new world where women are equal, working-class women are still socialized to see themselves as little more than wives and mothers, and for these to primarily define them. In the imperialist superpower that is the US, women are not mainly stay-at-home moms, but in the realm of ideas they still derive their self-worth and other ideas about themselves in connection with their place in the family. This is true even for single mothers and others who deviate from the bourgeois family; all are faced with sexism in connection with the family.

As a side note, the radical feminist notion that having children is *inherently* sexist is wrong, and Maoism rejects it, as childbirth itself will not cease for those women who choose it under the proletariat's dictatorship. Still, while class society and the private family exist, women are not permitted to have children and relationships which are free from the vestiges of patriarchal oppression. As Engels said in *Origin of the Family*, “Within the family he [the husband] is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat.” With submissive subjects being more easily dominated, the docility associated with being a woman is derived directly from women's historical position in the nuclear family, which was to pass on inheritance. The docility is then perpetuated with the sexist division of labor that places proletarian women in largely reproductive labor.

Internally this docility can at times propel women who are struggling to become political leaders to be tame and apologetic. Women may even be driven to not present their political criticisms, and let the men do most of the talking, while women take a backseat and do more complementary or reproductive tasks. Conquering leadership requires imposition and asserting the left line, and women cadres must be put in a position to overcome timidity

and the double standards they will inevitably (but to varying degrees) experience within the ICM itself. The self-doubt and relying on men to do the grunt-work must absolutely be broken with. The courage required for female leaders to make decisive calls directly contradicts the timid 'feminine nature'.

Parvati (before her submission to revisionism) gives validity to this observation that docility is a legitimate obstacle, extracting lessons from the PPW in Nepal in Women's Participation in People's Army:

"Problem of docility

If men have [the] problem of being too confident, women have problems taking initiative in their hands. It is generally found that even if they have [the] necessary skill, they wait for men to take initiative. They are found diligent, obedient, sacrificing but when it comes to formulating new plans, handling new weapons, debating on political lines they are found shirking. As a result they land up doing repetitive gender specific works more than the challenging ones... This is also seen in the field of reporting, they have problem[s] synthesizing their work despite having rich experience in their field, and this results in underreporting and marginalizing their work. Due to feudal patriarchal oppression right from childhood they are more prone to suffer from inner conflict, resulting in reflective actions such as fits, hysteria. Their narrow outlook gets reflected more amongst themselves than when they are with men. This is manifested in showing jealousy amongst themselves, doubting women's leadership and thereby taking men's leadership more seriously."

This phenomenon is easy to see in situations like women relying on men to do the physical labor but can be harder to see, though still very present, in intellectual labor. Untrue because it is idealist, 'feminine nature' nonetheless has real effects because it has been peddled to the masses relentlessly. As women are educated on the roots of 'feminine nature' and realize that it does not promote their interests, it will anger women masses who encounter it which will only propel them to rebel more.

All cadres including women are tempered in class struggle, mainly the organized confrontations with recognized class enemies which draw forward and educate the masses. The struggle against 'feminine nature' externally, in all of capitalist society is most important and can only happen through a fight for socialism. Second to this external struggle and one that must complement it is the struggle against the ideas of 'feminine nature' that women have internalized themselves. Transformation is impossible without practice but uprooting a woman's own sexist thinking is not accomplished solely through her participation in the external rebellion—being part of a such a movement will propel her to reflect on her own life. She cannot clock out once she leaves the protest. The internal struggle a woman has is not primary in capitalist society (as liberals and postmodernists would insist)—but ignoring it would not be dialectical and would not result in her transformation into a communist. Where the external struggle against 'feminine nature' will be expressed best in the women's mass organizations, the internal struggle must be carried out at the cadre level to see the uprooting through to the end.

There must be a strategic and unceasing plan to develop women into leaders, and this is something Parvati agrees with in her aforementioned text. Such a strategy cannot mean diluting the standards of what it takes to be a leader but means ensuring the necessary struggle and time is devoted for women cadre to genuinely reach these standards. Men are taught all the same things about 'feminine nature' but are taught it in different ways as a tool to divide our class. In developing women cadres there tends to be capitalist ideology, in the form of *internalized* 'feminine nature', that must be ruptured with to build genuine Communists.

Women are also expected to sacrifice more, something that can objectively make them better fighters. Women being relegated to positions of reproductive labor over time puts them at an advantage in terms of organizational and logistical skills. The sexist expectation that women be more self-critical makes women generally quicker to

unite with correct criticisms than their male comrades. (But the pressure for females to accept criticism should not result in accepting incorrect criticisms). Within the ICM men should learn from women, becoming more self-sacrificing, organized, and self-critical than bourgeois society teaches them to be.

“It is our particular set of oppressions that has given us the tools to become assets to the revolutionary project. Our conditions have forced us to be humble, vigilant, strong, and resourceful in order to survive. We aim to take these traits which have been used as tools of survival and sharpen them into spears and pierce the hearts of our oppressors. They have unwittingly forced upon us the very tools we will use to defeat them.”

-PWM-MFP

Due to socialization women generally become more steadfast in their beliefs, and may be less tempted by the rightist misapplication of diplomacy than men. To speculate, this may have roots in women's traditional role in the home. During feudalism, women were confined to the home and not allowed to interact with the outside world, so they became less directly invested in making ideological concessions. They were also tasked with indoctrination of the children and stereotypically put into the position of teacher of doctrine. This steadfastness in beliefs expresses itself in religion and politics and can be either good or bad. Women tend to be at the forefront of mass political movements, but this includes reformist ones. Through intense struggle though, once the capitalist ideology has ceased to become dominant and Communist ideology has become dominant in the mind, this steadfastness makes women strong antirevisionists.

Women leaders, no exception from leaders in general, must be firm (in the sense of defeating and drowning out the rightist line) and critical, both of which they will face sexist treatment for. Women leaders must therefore be steeled and determined to persist against sexism much like they would against revisionism, unable to capitulate in the face of either. Women cadre are not the mothers of their subordinates and should not be expected to coddle.

The ICM is not any more sexist than the rest of society, but the sexism, which is bourgeois, does seep in and this cannot be denied. For women cadres to experience this and not pave the way for their future sisters of our class is unacceptable and will inevitably continue sexist oppression.

Such a continuation of organizational sexism is true for all the contemporary revisionist organizations in the US, who for all their tokenizing of women leaders have a sexist division of labor and a mechanical approach to the women's question. Revisionists first and misogynists second, they are not equipped to muster any analysis of sexism under capitalism or plan for revolution beyond the vague and empty call for “liberation”. Because of mechanical materialism they waver between erasing the material roots of sexism on one hand and identity opportunism on the other hand. A recent example of this wavering is the unrest in Workers World Party (WWP), where an oppressed-nations man in one chapter was accused of serial sexual assault by women in and around the “party”. The main trend in WWP dismissed the claims in an official capacity and even claimed it was slanderous racism to “paint” an oppressed-nations male as a rapist, which was the worst mistake. In the absence of a genuine analysis of women's oppression the camp who wanted to rid the organization of true abusers also turned to postmodern call-out culture, negating the need for a full investigation. WWP seems to be falling apart due to this, with one of its oldest chapters officially resigning from the party as a result. Most of the exchanges occurred on Twitter but affected their structure materially. Nowhere was there a correct analysis of the main issue and the correct investigation, treatment and handling of abusers. These “parties” cannot produce militants to begin with and therefore cannot produce women militants. The true ICM cannot fall into these errors and must learn from them.

While men are the principal aspect of the relations of sexist oppression women are not immune from being sexist. Identity opportunism from petty bourgeois feminists uses womanhood to shield from criticism, supposing that

women are incapable of receiving criticism and therefore incapable of improving. Like the rhetoric behind ‘feminine nature’ to begin with, it rests wittingly or not on the premise that women are too frail for the harsh tempering that it takes to become leaders in the class struggle. Only the revisionist woman “leader” relies on her identity to gain hegemony instead of the correctness of her political line.

Women Communists do have a duty and a post as women to forge new women Communists, raising them up. For those who would claim women leadership falls from the sky and does not necessitate specific attention we need not look further than this answer from Lenin in *Lenin on the Women’s Question*:

“Why have we never had as many women as men in the Party – not at any time in Soviet Russia? Why is the number of women workers organised in trade unions so small? Facts give food for thought. The rejection of the necessity for separate bodies for our work among the women masses is a conception allied to those of our highly principled and most radical friends of the Communist Labour Party. According to them there must be only one form of organisation, workers’ unions. I know them. Many revolutionary but confused minds appeal to principle ‘whenever ideas are lacking’. That is, when the mind is closed to the sober facts, which must be considered. How do such guardians of ‘pure principle’ square their ideas with the necessities of the revolutionary policy historically forced upon us? All that sort of talk breaks down before inexorable necessity. Unless millions of women are with us we cannot exercise the proletarian dictatorship, cannot construct on communist lines. We must find our way to them, we must study and try to find that way.”

While Lenin refers here to women’s mass organizations mainly, what he is getting at applies to women at the highest levels of the Party. Women leaders should not be relegated to issues that only affect women, and their talents must be used to the benefit of the entire proletariat and its allies. Women must be leaders not just as women but as Communists in their own right within the vortex of the storm. The PCP handled the women’s question masterfully by paying it specific attention theoretically and in mass work and would not have had historic women membership without having attended to this vital component.

Where there is a lack of women leadership in the Communist Party, it must be examined: what are the theoretical issues leading to this lack? What are the theoretical issues with the general militancy of the movement that are keeping women from joining its ranks? Last, are there sexist practices being continued within the Party that are keeping women from being developed into the best they can be?

Leadership is not principally defined as whoever holds the given leadership title within the organization. Rather it is the culmination of experience in the class struggle—whoever has mastered the lessons drawn from it, which is qualitatively something higher than election to the position. In line with this truth we do not want women leaders for the sake of women leaders. We do not want women to be given leadership positions they have not earned, as this is not only revisionist (negating that leadership must be conquered) but also sexist (in assuming that women are incapable of conquering that leadership). Women leaders just as male leaders must be developed, in the course of genuine class struggle.

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