

Clara Zetkin, 1920

Lenin on the *Women's Question*

From *My Memorandum Book*

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Comrade Lenin frequently spoke to me about the women's question. Social equality for women was, of course, a principle needing no discussion for communists. It was in Lenin's large study in the Kremlin in the autumn of 1920 that we had our first long conversation on the subject.

"We must create a powerful international women's movement, on a clear theoretical basis", Lenin began. "There is no good practice without Marxist theory, that is clear. The greatest clarity of principle is necessary for us communists in this question. There must be a sharp distinction between ourselves and all other Parties. Unfortunately, our Second World Congress did not deal with this question. It was brought forward, but no decision arrived at. The matter is still in commission, which should draw up a resolution, theses, directions. Up to the present, however, they haven't got very far. You will have to help."

I was already acquainted with what Lenin said and expressed my astonishment at the state of affairs. I was filled with enthusiasm about the work done by Russian women in the revolution and still being done by them in its defence and further development. And as for the position and activities of women comrades in the Bolshevik Party, that seemed to me a model Party. It alone formed an international communist women's movement of useful, trained and experienced forces and a historical example.

Movement of Working Women

"That is right, that is all very true and fine", said Lenin, with a quiet smile. "In Petrograd, here in Moscow, in other towns and industrial centres the women workers acted splendidly during the revolution. Without them we should not have been victorious. Or scarcely so. That is my opinion. How brave they were, how brave they still are! Think of all the suffering and deprivations they bore. And they are carrying on because they want freedom, want communism. Yes, our proletarian women are excellent class fighters. They deserve admiration and love. Besides, you must remember that even the ladies of the 'constitutional democracy' in Petrograd proved more courageous against us than did the junkers. That is true. We have in the Party reliable, capable and untiringly active women comrades. We can assign them to many important posts in the Soviet and Executive Committees, in the People's Commissariats and public services of every kind. Many of them work day and night in the Party or among the masses of the proletariat, the peasants, the Red Army. That is of very great value to us. It is also important for women all over the world. It shows the capacity of women, the great value their work has in society. The first proletarian dictatorship is a real pioneer in establishing social equality for women. It is clearing away more prejudices than could volumes of feminist literature. But even with all that we still have no international communist women's movement, and that we must have. We must start at once to create it. Without that the work of our International and of its Parties is not complete work, can never be complete. But our work for the revolution must be complete. Tell me how communist work is going on abroad."

Lenin listened attentively, his body inclined forward slightly, following, without a trace of boredom, impatience or weariness, even incidental matters.

“Not bad, not at all bad”, said Lenin. “The energy, willingness and enthusiasm of women comrades, their courage and wisdom in times of illegality or semi-legality indicate good prospects for the development of our work. They are valuable factors in extending the Party and increasing its strength, in winning the masses and carrying on our activities. But what about the training and clarity of principle of these men and women comrades? It is of fundamental importance for work among the masses. It is of great influence on what closely concerns the masses, how they can be won, how made enthusiastic. I forget for the moment who said: ‘One must be enthusiastic to accomplish great things.’ We and the toilers of the whole world have really great things to accomplish. So what makes your comrades, the proletarian women of Germany, enthusiastic? What about their proletarian class-consciousness; are their interests, their activities concentrated on immediate political demands? What is the mainspring of their ideas?”

“I have heard some peculiar things on this matter from Russian and German comrades. I must tell you. I was told that a talented woman communist in Hamburg is publishing a paper for prostitutes and that she wants to organise them for the revolutionary fight. Rosa acted and felt as a communist when in an article she championed the cause of the prostitutes who were imprisoned for any transgression of police regulations in carrying on their dreary trade. They are, unfortunately, doubly sacrificed by bourgeois society. First, by its accursed property system, and, secondly, by its accursed moral hypocrisy. That is obvious. Only he who is brutal or short-sighted can forget it. But still, that is not at all the same thing as considering prostitutes – how shall I put it? – to be a special revolutionary militant section, as organising them and publishing a factory paper for them. Aren’t there really any other working women in Germany to organise, for whom a paper can be issued, who must be drawn into your struggles? The other is only a diseased excrescence. It reminds me of the literary fashion of painting every prostitute as a sweet Madonna. The origin of that was healthy, too: social sympathy, rebellion against the virtuous hypocrisy of the respectable bourgeois. But the healthy part became corrupted and degenerate.

“Besides, the question of prostitutes will give rise to many serious problems here. Take them back to productive work, bring them into the social economy. That is what we must do. But it is difficult and a complicated task to carry out in the present conditions of our economic life and in all the prevailing circumstances. There you have one aspect of the women’s problem which, after the seizure of power by the proletariat, looms large before us and demands a practical solution. It will give us a great deal of work here in Soviet Russia. But to go back to your position in Germany. The Party must not in any circumstances calmly stand by and watch such mischievous conduct on the part of its members. It creates confusion and divides the forces. And you yourself, what have you done against it?”

Sex and Marriage

Before I could answer, Lenin continued: “Your list of sins, Clara, is still longer. I was told that questions of sex and marriage are the main subjects dealt with in the reading and discussion evenings of women comrades. They are the chief subject of interest, of political instruction and education. I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard it. The first country of proletarian dictatorship surrounded by the counter-revolutionaries of the whole world, the situation in Germany itself requires the greatest possible concentration of all proletarian, revolutionary forces to defeat the ever-growing and ever-increasing counter-revolution. But working women comrades discuss sexual problems and the question of forms of marriage in the past, present and future. They think it their most important duty to enlighten proletarian women on these subjects. The most widely read brochure is, I believe, the pamphlet of a young Viennese woman comrade on the sexual problem. What a waste! What truth there is

in it the workers have already read in Bebel, long ago. Only not so boringly, not so heavily written as in the pamphlet, but written strongly, bitterly, aggressively, against bourgeois society.

“The extension of Freudian hypotheses seems ‘educated’, even scientific, but it is ignorant, bungling. Freudian theory is the modern fashion. I mistrust the sexual theories of the articles, dissertations, pamphlets, etc., in short, of that particular kind of literature which flourishes luxuriantly in the dirty soil of bourgeois society. I mistrust those who are always contemplating the several questions, like the Indian saint his navel. It seems to me that these flourishing sexual theories which are mainly hypothetical, and often quite arbitrary hypotheses, arise from the personal need to justify personal abnormality or hypertrophy in sexual life before bourgeois morality, and to entreat its patience. This masked respect for bourgeois morality seems to me just as repulsive as poking about in sexual matters. However wild and revolutionary the behaviour may be, it is still really quite bourgeois. It is, mainly, a hobby of the intellectuals and of the sections nearest them. There is no place for it in the Party, in the class-conscious, fighting proletariat.”

I interrupted here, saying that the questions of sex and marriage, in a bourgeois society of private property, involve many problems, conflicts and much suffering for women of all social classes and ranks. The war and its consequences had greatly accentuated the conflicts and sufferings of women in sexual matters, had brought to light problems which were formerly hidden from them. To that were added the effects of the revolution. The old world of feeling and thought had begun to totter. Old social ties are entangling and breaking, there are the tendencies towards new ideological relationships between man and woman. The interest shown in these questions is an expression of the need for enlightenment and reorientation. It also indicates a reaction against the falseness and hypocrisy of bourgeois society. Forms of marriage and of the family, in their historical development and dependence upon economic life, are calculated to destroy the superstition existing in the minds of working women concerning the eternal character of bourgeois society. A critical, historical attitude to those problems must lead to a ruthless examination of bourgeois society, to a disclosure of its real nature and effects, including condemnation of its sexual morality and falseness. All roads lead to Rome. And every real Marxist analysis of any important section of the ideological superstructure of society, of a predominating social phenomenon, must lead to an analysis of bourgeois society and of its property basis, must end in the realisation, “this must be destroyed”.

Lenin nodded laughingly. “There we have it! You are defending counsel for your women comrades and your Party. Of course, what you say is right. But it only excuses the mistakes made in Germany; it does not justify them. They are, and remain, mistakes. Can you really seriously assure me that the questions of sex and marriage were discussed from the standpoint of a mature, living, historical materialism? Deep and many-sided knowledge is necessary for that, the dearest Marxist mastery of a great amount of material. Where can you get the forces for that now? If they existed, then pamphlets like the one I mentioned would not be used as material for study in the reading and discussion circles. They are distributed and recommended, instead of being criticised. And what is the result of this futile, un-Marxist dealing with the question? That questions of sex and marriage are understood not as part of the large social question? No, worse! The great social question appears as an adjunct, a part, of sexual problems. The main thing becomes a subsidiary matter. That not only endangers clarity on that question itself, it muddles the thoughts, the class-consciousness of proletarian women generally.

“Last and not least. Even the wise Solomon said that everything has its time. I ask you: Is now the time to amuse proletarian women with discussions on how one loves and is loved, how one marries and is married? Of course, in the past, present and future, and among different nations-what is proudly called historical materialism! Now all the thoughts of women comrades, of the women of the working people, must be directed towards the proletarian

revolution. It creates the basis for a real renovation in marriage and sexual relations. At the moment other problems are more urgent than the marriage forms of Maoris or incest in olden times. The question of Soviets is still on the agenda for the German proletariat. The Versailles Treaty and its effect on the life of the working woman – unemployment, falling wages, taxes, and a great deal more. In short, I maintain that this kind of political, social education for proletarian women is false, quite, quite false. How could you be silent about it. You must use your authority against it.”

Sexual Morality

I have not failed to criticise and remonstrate with leading women comrades in the separate districts, I told him. By my criticism I had laid myself open to the charge of “strong survivals of social democratic ideology and old-fashioned philistinism”.

“I know, I know”, he said. “I have also been accused by many people of philistinism in this matter, although that is repulsive to me. There is so much hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness in it. Well, I’m bearing it calmly! The little yellow-beaked birds who have just broken from the egg of bourgeois ideas are always frightfully clever. We shall have to let that go. The youth movement, too, is attacked with the disease of modernity in its attitude towards sexual questions and in being exaggeratedly concerned with them.” Lenin gave an ironic emphasis to the word modernity and grimaced as he did so. “I have been told that sexual questions are the favourite study of your youth organisations, too. There is supposed to be a lack of sufficient speakers on the subject. Such misconceptions are particularly harmful, particularly dangerous in the youth movement. They can very easily contribute towards over-excitement and exaggeration in the sexual life of some of them, to a waste of youthful health and strength. You must fight against that, too. There are not a few points of contact between the women’s and youth movements. Our women comrades must work together systematically with the youth. That is a continuation, an extension and exaltation of motherliness from the individual to the social sphere. And all the awakening social life and activity of women must be encouraged, so that they can discard the limitations of their philistine individualist home and family psychology. But we’ll come to that later.

“With us, too, a large part of the youth is keen on ‘revising bourgeois conceptions and morality’ concerning sexual questions. And, I must add, a large part of our best, our most promising young people. What you said before is true. In the conditions created by the war and the revolution the old ideological values disappeared or lost their binding force. The new values are crystallising slowly, in struggle. In relations between man and man, between man and woman, feelings and thoughts are becoming revolutionised. New boundaries are being set up between the rights of the individual and the rights of the whole, in the duties of individuals. The matter is still in a complete chaotic ferment. The direction, the forces of development in the various contradictory tendencies are not yet clearly defined. It is a slow and often a very painful process of decay and growth. And particularly in the sphere of sexual relationships, of marriage and the family. The decay, the corruption, the filth of bourgeois marriage, with its difficult divorce, its freedom for the man, its enslavement for the woman, the repulsive hypocrisy of sexual morality and relations fill the most active minded and best people with deep disgust.

“The constraint of bourgeois marriage and the family laws of bourgeois states accentuate these evils and conflicts. It is the force of ‘holy property’. It sanctifies venality, degradation, filth. And the conventional hypocrisy of honest bourgeois society does the rest. People are beginning to protest against the prevailing rottenness and falseness, and the feelings of an individual change rapidly. The desire and urge to enjoyment easily attain unbridled force at a time when powerful empires are tottering, old forms of rule breaking down, when a whole social world is beginning to disappear. Sex and marriage forms, in their bourgeois sense, are unsatisfactory. A revolution in sex and marriage is approaching, corresponding to the

proletarian revolution. It is easily comprehensible that the very involved complex of problems brought into existence should occupy the mind of the youth, as well as of women. They suffer particularly under present-day sexual grievances. They are rebelling with all the impetuosity of their years. We can understand that. Nothing could be more false than to preach monkish asceticism and the sanctity of dirty bourgeois morality to the youth. It is particularly serious if sex becomes the main mental concern during those years when it is physically most obvious. What fatal effects that has!

“The changed attitude of the young people to questions of sexual life is of course based on a ‘principle’ and a theory. Many of them call their attitude ‘revolutionary’ and ‘communist’. And they honestly believe that it is so. That does not impress us old people. Although I am nothing but a gloomy ascetic, the so-called ‘new sexual life’ of the youth – and sometimes of the old – often seems to me to be purely bourgeois, an extension of bourgeois brothels. That has nothing whatever in common with freedom of love as we communists understand it. You must be aware of the famous theory that in communist society the satisfaction of sexual desires, of love, will be as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water. This glass of water theory has made our young people mad, quite mad. It has proved fatal to many young boys and girls. Its adherents maintain that it is Marxist. But thanks for such Marxism which directly and immediately attributes all phenomena and changes in the ideological superstructure of society to its economic basis! Matters aren’t quite as simple as that. A certain Frederick Engels pointed that out a long time ago with regard to historical materialism.

“I think this glass of water theory is completely un-Marxist, and, moreover, anti-social. In sexual life there is not only simple nature to be considered, but also cultural characteristics, whether they are of a high or low order. In his **Origin of the Family** Engels showed how significant is the development and refinement of the general sex urge into individual sex love. The relations of the sexes to each other are not simply an expression of the play of forces between the economics of society and a physical need, isolated in thought, by study, from the physiological aspect. It is rationalism, and not Marxism, to want to trace changes in these relations directly, and dissociated from their connections with ideology as a whole, to the economic foundations of society. Of course, thirst must be satisfied. But will the normal person in normal circumstances lie down in the gutter and drink out of a puddle, or out of a glass with a rim greasy from many lips? But the social aspect is most important of all. Drinking water is, of course, an individual affair. But in love two lives are concerned, and a third, a new life, arises, it is that which gives it its social interest, which gives rise to a duty towards the community.

“As a communist I have not the least sympathy for the glass of water theory, although it bears the fine title ‘satisfaction of love’. In any case, this liberation of love is neither new, nor communist. You will remember that about the middle of the last century it was preached as the ‘emancipation of the heart’ in romantic literature. In bourgeois practice it became the emancipation of the flesh. At that time the preaching was more talented than it is today, and as for the practice, I cannot judge. I don’t mean to preach asceticism by my criticism. Not in the least. Communism will not bring asceticism, but joy of life, power of life, and a satisfied love life will help to do that. But in my opinion the present widespread hypertrophy in sexual matters does not give joy and force to life, but takes it away. In the age of revolution that is bad, very bad.

“Young people, particularly, need the joy and force of life. Healthy sport, swimming, racing, walking, bodily exercises of every kind, and many-sided intellectual interests. Learning, studying, inquiry, as far as possible in common. That will give young people more than eternal theories and discussions about sexual problems and the so-called ‘living to the full’. Healthy bodies, healthy minds I Neither monk nor Don Juan, nor the intermediate attitude of the German philistines. You know, young comrade — ? A splendid boy, and highly talented. And yet I fear that nothing good will come out of him. He reels and staggers from

one love affair to the next. That won't do for the political struggle, for the revolution. And I wouldn't bet on the reliability, the endurance in struggle of those women who confuse their personal romances with politics. Nor on the men who run petticoat and get entrapped by every young woman. That does not square with the revolution.

"The revolution demands concentration, increase of forces. From the masses, from individuals. It cannot tolerate orgiastic conditions, such as are normal for the decadent heroes and heroines of D'Annunzio. Dissoluteness in sexual life is bourgeois, is a phenomenon of decay. The proletariat is a rising class. It doesn't need intoxication as a narcotic or a stimulus. Intoxication as little by sexual exaggeration as by alcohol. It must not and shall not forget, forget the shame, the filth, the savagery of capitalism. It receives the strongest urge to fight from a class situation, from the communist ideal. It needs clarity, clarity and again clarity. And so I repeat, no weakening, no waste, no destruction of forces. Self-control, self-discipline is not slavery, not even in love. But forgive me, Clara, I have wandered far from the starting point of our conversation. Why didn't you call me to order. My tongue has run away with me. I am deeply concerned about the future of our youth. It is a part of the revolution. And if harmful tendencies are appearing, creeping over from bourgeois society into the world of revolution – as the roots of many weeds spread – it is better to combat them early. Such questions are part of the women question."

Principles of Organisation

Lenin glanced at the clock. "Half of the time I had set aside for you has already gone", he said. "I have been chattering. You will draw up proposals for communist work among women. away. What sort of proposals have you in mind?"

I gave a concise account of them. Lenin nodded repeatedly in agreement without interrupting me. When I had finished, I looked at him questioningly.

"Agreed", said he. "I only want to dwell on a few main points, in which I fully share your attitude. They seem to me to be important for our current agitation and propaganda work, if that work is to lead to action and successful struggles.

"The thesis must clearly point out that real freedom for women is possible only through communism. The inseparable connection between the social and human position of the woman, and private property in the means of production, must be strongly brought out. That will draw a clear and ineradicable line of distinction between our policy and feminism. And it will also supply the basis for regarding the woman question as a part of the social question, of the workers' problem, and so bind it firmly to the proletarian class struggle and the revolution. The communist women's movement must itself be a mass movement, a part of the general mass movement. Not only of the proletariat, but of all the exploited and oppressed, all the victims of capitalism or any other mastery. In that lies its significance for the class struggles of the proletariat and for its historical creation communist society. We can rightly be proud of the fact that in the Party, in the Communist International, we have the flower of revolutionary woman kind. But that is not enough. We must win over to our side the millions of working women in the towns and villages. Win them for our struggles and in particular for the communist transformation of society. There can be no real mass movement without women.

"Our ideological conceptions give rise to principles of organisation. No special organisations for women. A woman communist is a member of the Party just as a man communist, with equal rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score. Nevertheless, we must not close our eyes to the fact that the Party must have bodies, working groups, commissions, committees, bureaus or whatever you like, whose particular duty it is to arouse the masses of women workers, to bring them into contact with the Party, and to keep them under its influence. That, of course, involves systematic work among them.

We must train those whom we arouse and win, and equip them for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. I am thinking not only of proletarian women, whether they work in the factory or at home. The poor peasant women, the petty bourgeois – they, too, are the prey of capitalism, and more so than ever since the war. The unpolitical, unsocial, backward psychology of these women, their isolated sphere of activity, the entire manner of their life – these are facts. It would be absurd to overlook them, absolutely absurd. We need appropriate bodies to carry on work amongst them, special methods of agitation and forms of organisation. That is not feminism, that is practical, revolutionary expediency.”

I told Lenin that his words encouraged me greatly. Many comrades, and good comrades at that, strongly combated the idea that the Party should have special bodies for systematic work among women.

“That is neither new nor proof”, said Lenin. “You must not be misled by that. 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.

Immediate Demands

“That is why it is right for us to put forward demands favourable to women. That is not a minimum, a reform programme in the sense of the Social Democrats, of the Second International. It is not a recognition that we believe in the eternal character, or even in the long duration of the rule of the bourgeoisie and their state. It is not an attempt to appease women by reforms and to divert them from the path of revolutionary struggle. It is not that nor any other reformist swindle. Our demands are practical conclusions which we have drawn from the burning needs, the shameful humiliation of women, in bourgeois society, defenceless and without rights. We demonstrate thereby that we recognise these needs, and are sensible of the humiliation of the woman, the privileges of the man. That we hate, yes, hate everything, and will abolish everything which tortures and oppresses the woman worker, the housewife, the peasant woman, the wife of the petty trader, yes, and in many cases the women of the possessing classes. The rights and social regulations which we demand for women from bourgeois society show that we understand the position and interests of women, and will have consideration for them under the proletarian dictatorship. Not of course, as the reformists do, lulling them to inaction and keeping them in leading strings. No, of course not; but as revolutionaries who call upon the women to work as equals in transforming the old economy and ideology.”

I assured Lenin that I shared his views, but that they would certainly meet with resistance. Nor could it be denied that our immediate demands for women could be wrongly drawn up and expressed.

“Nonsense!” said Lenin, almost bad temperedly. “That danger is present in everything that we do and say. If we were to be deterred by fear of that from doing what is correct and necessary, we might as well become Indian Stylites. Don’t move, don’t move, we can contemplate our principles from a high pillar! Of course, we are concerned not only with the

contents of our demands, but with the manner in which we present them. I thought I had made that clear enough. Of course we shan't put forward our demands for women as though we were mechanically counting our beads. No, according to the prevailing circumstances, we must fight now for this, now for that. And, of course, always in connection with the general interests of the proletariat.

"Every such struggle brings us in opposition to respectable bourgeois relationships, and to their not less respectable reformist admirers whom it compels, either to fight together with us under our leadership – which they don't want to do – or to be shown up in their true colours. That is, the struggle clearly brings out the differences between us and other Parties, brings out our communism. It wins us the confidence of the masses of women who feel themselves exploited, enslaved, suppressed, by the domination of the man, by the power of the employer, by the whole of bourgeois society. Betrayed and deserted by all, the working women will recognise that they must fight together with us.

"Must I again swear to you, or let you swear, that the struggles for our demands for women must be bound up with the object of seizing power, of establishing the proletarian dictatorship? That is our Alpha and Omega at the present time. That is clear, quite clear. But the women of the working people will not feel irresistibly driven into sharing our struggles for the state power if we only and always put forward that one demand, though it were with the trumpets of Jericho. No, no! The women must be made conscious of the political connection between our demands and their own suffering, needs, and wishes. They must realise what the proletarian dictatorship means for them: complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; an end to the power of the bourgeoisie."

"Soviet Russia shows that", I interrupted.

"That will be the great example in our teaching", Lenin continued. "Soviet Russia puts our demands for women in a new light. Under the proletarian dictatorship those demands are not objects of struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. They are part of the structure of communist society. That indicates to women in other countries the decisive importance of the winning of power by the proletariat. The difference must be sharply emphasised, so as to get the women into the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat. It is essential for the Communist Parties, and for their triumph, to rally them on a clear understanding of principle and a firm organisational basis. But don't let us deceive ourselves. Our national sections still lack a correct understanding of this matter. They are standing idly by while there is this task of creating a mass movement of working women under communist leadership. They don't understand that the development and management of such a mass movement is an important part of entire Party activity, indeed, a half of general Party work. Their occasional recognition of the necessity and value of a powerful, clear-headed communist women's movement is a platonic verbal recognition, not the constant care and obligation of the Party."

What About the Men?

"Agitation and propaganda work among women, their awakening and revolutionisation, is regarded as an incidental matter, as an affair which only concerns women comrades. They alone are reproached because work in that direction does not proceed more quickly and more vigorously. That is wrong, quite wrong! Real separatism and as the French say, feminism *à la rebours*, feminism upside down! What is at the basis of the incorrect attitude of our national sections? In the final analysis it is nothing but an under-estimation of woman and her work. Yes, indeed! Unfortunately it is still true to say of many of our comrades, 'scratch a communist and find a philistine'. Of course, you must scratch the sensitive spot, their mentality as regards women. Could there be a more damning proof of this than the calm acquiescence of men who see how women grow worn out in petty, monotonous household work, their strength and time dissipated and wasted, their minds growing narrow and stale, their hearts beating slowly, their will weakened! Of course, I am not speaking of the ladies of

the bourgeoisie who shove on to servants the responsibility for all household work, including the care of children. What I am saying applies to the overwhelming majority of women, to the wives of workers and to those who stand all day in a factory.

“So few men – even among the proletariat – realise how much effort and trouble they could save women, even quite do away with, if they were to lend a hand in ‘women’s work’. But no, that is contrary to the ‘rights and dignity of a man’. They want their peace and comfort. The home life of the woman is a daily sacrifice to a thousand unimportant trivialities. The old master right of the man still lives in secret. His slave takes her revenge, also secretly. The backwardness of women, their lack of understanding for the revolutionary ideals of the man decrease his joy and determination in fighting. They are like little worms which, unseen, slowly but surely, rot and corrode. I know the life of the worker, and not only from books. Our communist work among the women, our political work, embraces a great deal of educational work among men. We must root out the old ‘master’ idea to its last and smallest root, in the Party and among the masses. That is one of our political tasks, just as is the urgently necessary task of forming a staff of men and women comrades, well trained in theory and practice, to carry on Party activity among working women.”

Millions Building New Life

To my question about the conditions in Soviet Russia on this point, Lenin replied:

“The Government of the proletarian dictatorship, together with the Communist Party and trade unions, is of course leaving no stone unturned in the effort to overcome the backward ideas of men and women, to destroy the old un-communist psychology. In law there is naturally complete equality of rights for men and women. And everywhere there is evidence of a sincere wish to put this equality into practice. We are bringing the women into the social economy, into legislation and government. All educational institutions are open to them, so that they can increase their professional and social capacities. We are establishing communal kitchens and public eating-houses, laundries and repairing shops, nurseries, kindergartens, children’s homes, educational institutes of all kinds. In short, we are seriously carrying out the demand in our programme for the transference of the economic and educational functions of the separate household to society. That will mean freedom for the woman from the old household drudgery and dependence on man. That enables her to exercise to the full her talents and her inclinations. The children are brought up under more favourable conditions than at home. We have the most advanced protective laws for women workers in the world, and the officials of the organised workers carry them out. We are establishing maternity hospitals, homes for mothers and children, mothercraft clinics, organising lecture courses on child care, exhibitions teaching mothers how to look after themselves and their children, and similar things. We are making the most serious efforts to maintain women who are unemployed and unprovided for.

“We realise clearly that that is not very much, in comparison with the needs of the working women, that it is far from being all that is required for their real freedom. But still it is tremendous progress, as against conditions in tsarist-capitalist Russia. It is even a great deal compared with conditions in countries where capitalism still has a free hand. It is a good beginning in the right direction, and we shall develop it further. With all our energy, you may believe that. For every day of the existence of the Soviet State proves more clearly that we cannot go forward without the women.”