LENIN'S CONTRIBUTION ON WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S STRUGGLE IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE

SACP



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Introduction

- Today, we are expected to delve into a critical aspect of history that often goes unnoticed—the profound contribution of Vladimir Lenin to the working-class women's struggle within the broader context of the class struggle.
- Lenin, a revolutionary thinker and leader, played a pivotal role in shaping the course of history, and his impact on the working class, particularly women, is a testament to his commitment to equality and justice.

Lenin's revolutionary fervor was not confined to abstract theories or grandiose rhetoric; rather, he understood the importance of addressing the specific struggles faced by working-class women.

In the early 20th century, as Russia grappled with socio-economic challenges and political upheavals, Lenin recognized that the emancipation of women was intertwined with the broader struggle for the liberation of the proletariat.

- The same belief that the SACP holds that:

The struggle against patriarchal oppression and gender inequality is far from over.

We commit to build on the shoulders of communist women who have gone before us, in full appreciation of the class and national content of the gender struggle and the gender content of the class and national struggles.

One of Lenin's significant contributions was his emphasis on the need for women's active participation in the workforce and political life.

He argued that true emancipation required women to be active agents in the revolutionary process, contributing their skills and talents to the struggle for a more just and equal society.

Lenin championed the cause of women's education and labor rights, recognizing that the exploitation of women in the workplace was not only a gender issue but also a class issue.

- Lenin's vision went beyond superficial notions of equality.

- He understood that the liberation of women required a fundamental transformation of the economic and social structures that perpetuated their oppression.

- The Bolshevik government, under Lenin's leadership, **implemented policies that aimed at dismantling the patriarchal norms** and **creating an environment where women could fully participate in all spheres of life**.

FOR EXAMPLE



Alexandra Kollontai

IN LENIN'S GOVERNMENT, Alexandra Kollontai

- People's Commissar in Lenin's government
- First woman to serve in Lenin's cabinet
- First Woman Ambassador

- The legal reforms introduced by Lenin which marked a departure from the oppressive practices that had shackled working-class women for centuries
- **These included the right to vote**, **maternity benefits,** and **equal pay for equal work**,
- His commitment to the principles of socialism and Marxism **provided the ideological framework for these reforms**, **emphasising the need to eradicate the capitalist system that had inherently bred inequality and exploitation.**

LENIN understood the conditions of women

Lenin was acutely aware of the double burden borne by working-class women (*the **exploitation in the workplace** and the **traditional gender roles** that confined them to domestic duties*)

As such, He advocated for socialisation of household tasks, recognising that true liberation required the **dismantling of both economic** and **domestic hierarchies**.



- As we reflect on Lenin's legacy, let us draw inspiration from his commitment to justice, equality, and the empowerment of the oppressed.
- The struggle for a just society continues, and it is our responsibility to carry forward the torch that Lenin lit—a torch that illuminates the path toward a world where all individuals, regardless of gender or class, can live in dignity and equality.
- Lenin’s work in advancing and motivating for women activism in the struggle can be seen on the following:

The pathetic condition of working-class women in Russia

- In the early 20th century, working-class women in Russia faced a myriad of challenges that stemmed from a deeply entrenched patriarchal society coupled with the harsh realities of industrialization.
- The intersectionality of class and gender created a unique set of struggles for these women, shaping their experiences in profound ways.

Industrialization and Exploitative Labor Conditions:

- The rapid industrialization that Russia underwent during this period led to the proliferation of factories and increased demand for cheap labor.
- Working-class women found themselves in low-paying jobs, often subjected to long working hours, unsafe conditions, and minimal job security.
- Lack of protective labor laws meant that women were vulnerable to exploitation by factory owners seeking to maximize profits.

2. Low Wages and Economic Precarity:

- Women were typically paid lower wages than their male counterparts for the same work, contributing to economic precarity for working-class families.
- Economic instability heightened the vulnerability of women, making them more susceptible to poverty and limited opportunities for advancement.

Limited Educational Opportunities:

Educational opportunities for working-class women were severely limited. Educational institutions were often inaccessible, particularly for those living in impoverished urban or rural areas.

The lack of education further perpetuated a cycle of poverty and restricted social mobility.

4. Traditional Gender Roles and Societal Expectations:

- Russian society was deeply ingrained with traditional gender roles, where women were expected to fulfill domestic duties and conform to societal expectations.
- The burden of caregiving and household responsibilities fell disproportionately on women, limiting their ability to participate fully in the workforce or engage in political activities.

5. Lack of Legal Rights:

- Working-class women had limited legal rights, exacerbating their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.
- Absence of laws protecting women in the workplace meant they had little recourse against unfair labor practices or unsafe conditions.

6. Healthcare Disparities:

- Access to healthcare was often a luxury for working-class women. Inadequate medical facilities and lack of preventative care contributed to a higher prevalence of health issues.
- Maternal mortality rates were notably high, reflecting the challenges faced by women in accessing proper healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth.

7. Political Repression:

- Political repression was a significant challenge for all members of the working class, but particularly for women who sought to engage in political activism.
- Women advocating for their rights faced arrest, imprisonment, and persecution by the authorities.
- **8. Influence of Peasant Life:**
- In rural areas, many working-class women were **engaged in agricultural labor**. The agrarian lifestyle brought its own set of challenges, including harsh working conditions, limited access to education, and dependence on agrarian cycles.

9. Limited Representation in Decision-Making:

Working-class women had minimal representation in **decision-making bodies**.

Their voices were often excluded from political and economic discussions, further marginalizing their concerns.

10. Dual Burden of Work and Home:

- The dual burden of working in factories or fields while maintaining household responsibilities created immense stress for working-class women.

(a) Balancing work and domestic duties without proper support systems placed an added strain on their physical and mental well-being.

(b) Understanding the depth of these challenges provides a crucial backdrop for appreciating Lenin's efforts to address the specific struggles faced by working-class women during this tumultuous period in Russian history.

- Lenin's recognition of the interconnectedness of gender and class was a groundbreaking step toward dismantling these systemic inequalities.

Emergence of Feminist movements in the early 20th century

- In the early 20th century, Russia witnessed the emergence of feminist movements that sought to address the social, economic, and political inequalities faced by women.
- Broader global trends influenced these movements in feminism but also shaped by the unique socio-political context of Russia during that time.

1. Women's Suffrage Movement:

- One of the central themes of the feminist movements in early 20th-century Russia was the demand for women's suffrage—the right to vote.

- Activists, inspired by suffragettes in Western countries, organized campaigns and protests advocating for political enfranchisement

2. Intellectual and Literary Feminism:

- Intellectual and literary circles played a significant role in shaping feminist discourse. Women writers and thinkers began to challenge traditional gender roles through their works.
- Prominent figures like Nadezhda Stasova and Alexandra Kollontai contributed to feminist thought through their writings and activism.

3. Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU):

- The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1904, was a key organization advocating for women's rights in Russia.
- WSPU members engaged in various forms of activism, including protests, strikes, and the distribution of feminist literature.

4. Socialist Feminism:

- Many feminist activists in Russia were influenced by socialist ideologies. They believed that the struggle for women's rights was intertwined with the broader class struggle.
- Socialist feminists sought to address both the gender-specific and class-based issues faced by women.

5. Labor Movement and Women Workers:

- Feminist movements in Russia were closely connected to the labor movement, particularly given the significant number of women in the industrial workforce.
- Women workers actively participated in strikes and demonstrations, demanding better working conditions and equal pay.

6. Participation in Revolutionary Movements:

- Feminist activists were actively involved in revolutionary movements, including the 1905 Revolution and later the 1917 Russian Revolution.
- Women played crucial roles in organizing protests, participating in strikes, and advocating for women's rights within the broader revolutionary agenda.

7. Formation of Feminist Periodicals:

- The early 20th century saw the establishment of feminist periodicals and publications, providing a platform for feminist writers and activists to share their ideas and experiences.
- These publications served as important tools for spreading feminist consciousness and mobilizing support.

Challenges and Criticisms:

- Feminist movements in Russia faced challenges and criticisms, both from conservative elements within society and some within the revolutionary circles.
- Critics argued that focusing on gender issues diverted attention from the broader class struggle.

9. Post-Revolutionary Changes:

- The 1917 Russian Revolution brought significant changes for women, with legal reforms and newfound opportunities.
- While some feminist goals were achieved, the revolutionary period also saw a complex interplay of progress and challenges for women's rights.

10. Legacy and Impact:

- The feminist movements of the early 20th century in Russia left a lasting impact on the struggle for women's rights.
- They paved the way for ongoing discussions on gender equality and influenced subsequent generations of feminists in Russia and beyond.
- These feminist movements, while not always aligned with the socialist or Bolshevik agenda, contributed to the broader discourse on women's rights during a critical period of Russian history. The interplay between these feminist movements and the revolutionary forces influenced the trajectory of women's emancipation in the years that followed.

Lenin’s Policies on Women’s Liberation:

- Lenin's policies had a monumental impact on the working-class women's struggle, marking a transformative era in which the systematic oppression of women began to be dismantled.
- His contributions were multifaceted, addressing not only the economic disparities faced by women but also challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for their active participation in both the workforce and political life.

Economic Empowerment:

1. Equal Pay and Labor Rights:

- Lenin's policies laid the foundation for economic empowerment by championing equal pay for equal work. This was a radical departure from the prevailing norms that perpetuated gender-based wage discrimination.
- The establishment of labor rights and the recognition of women's contributions in the workplace were pivotal in enhancing economic independence for working-class women.

2. Women's Active Participation in the Workforce:

- Lenin recognized the untapped potential of working-class women in the industrial sector. His policies actively encouraged and facilitated the increased participation of women in the workforce.
- This shift not only addressed labor shortages but also challenged societal norms by breaking down the barriers that had traditionally confined women to domestic roles.

Legal Reforms:

1. Right to Vote:

- Lenin's advocacy for political enfranchisement was a groundbreaking step. The right to vote was extended to women, giving them a voice in the political landscape.
- Political empowerment provided a platform for women to actively engage in shaping the policies that directly impacted their lives.

2. Maternity Benefits:

- Lenin's policies included provisions for maternity benefits, recognizing the unique challenges faced by working-class mothers.
- This acknowledgment of the dual roles played by women—both in the workforce and as caregivers—was a significant stride towards alleviating the burdens of the double shift.

Social and Cultural Transformation:

1. Education and Empowerment:

- Lenin's emphasis on women's education was revolutionary. Policies promoting education for working-class women opened avenues for intellectual and professional development.
- Education became a tool for empowerment and development, allowing women to challenge societal norms and contribute meaningfully to various spheres of life.

2. Socialization of Household Tasks:

- Recognizing the unequal burden placed on women in domestic responsibilities, Lenin advocated for the socialization of household tasks.
- By challenging traditional gender roles, these policies aimed to create an environment where both men and women could share responsibilities, allowing women more freedom to participate in public life.

Recognition of Intersectionality:

1. Class Struggle and Gender Liberation:

- Lenin's recognition of the interconnectedness of class struggle and gender liberation was a paradigm shift. He understood that the emancipation of women was not a standalone issue but an integral part of the broader socialist agenda.
- This acknowledgment laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and holistic approach to addressing societal inequalities.

On whether women must have their special organisation

“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**

SIMILARLY, THE SACP

- In its 2022 Women's Day message, "calls on working-class formations, on trade unions, on gender transformation activists, on youth and student organisations, and on community-based organisations. Together, **let us build a progressive women's movement anchored in a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor**. This is as **essential as reinforcing the vanguard capacity of the SACP** and as **important as strengthening class conscious trade unions to tackle the multiple crises of capitalism**, **towards ultimately replacing the system with a just and equal society."**

In conclusion, Lenin's contribution to the working-class women's struggle in the broader class struggle was monumental.

He recognized that the liberation of women was not a secondary or peripheral issue but a central aspect of the revolutionary agenda.

Lenin's vision and policies paved the way for a more inclusive and egalitarian society, where the working-class women could actively participate in shaping their destiny.

we continue to be inspired by Lenin's work and we are still influenced and motivated by his declaration that:

"There can be no real mass movement without women."

Amandlaaaa!!!!!