Towards the Liberation of Women

a document of the Spanish Communist Party

The liberation of women is central to the struggle for freedom in this agonising period we are experiencing under the present regime in Spain.

The brutal and scandalous extremes to which discrimination against women has been carried by the regime is the primary reason for this. The other critical factor is the change which is taking place throughout Spanish society - the profound cultural revolution against conformism, reactionary traditions and established customs, which places great emphasis on the demand for equality of the sexes. It is the recognition of the discrimination against her that is motivating the Spanish woman to take an increasingly aggressive part in the social and political struggles in the fight for democracy.

The Communist Party lays great stress on developing a much more energetic struggle to remove discrimination against women at work. More than 64 percent of Spanish women are housewives while working women represent only 24 percent of the workforce. These figures illustrate the magnitude of the problem.

In the latter part of 1975 the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) held a Conference where it adopted the final text of its Program-Manifesto. A draft of this document had been circulated and widely discussed in the period following the VIIIth Congress of the PCE. At the same time the Conference adopted a policy document on the liberation of women. This document has been published together with the program for circulation inside Spain. Its positive evaluation of the movement for the liberation of women and its self-critical tone has evoked wide comment in Europe.

This, the first English translation, is published here for the information of readers.
Women entering the workforce start from behind scratch. Because their education has been different from that of men, they lack professional training and are channelled into jobs which are typically "female". They usually do not have as much money and authority as men and are conditioned to regard work as a mere stopgap between childhood and marriage.

The Labour Ordinances are discriminatory and this legalised discrimination is aggravated by the regulations of the employers. As well, the Work Contract contains vexatious conditions for married women; they must have the consent of their husbands to get a job and be paid for their own labour. Discrimination is even greater against women who work at home - they are paid minimum rates and have no social security - and against women in domestic service and peasant women. The underlying element in female labour, that it is used as a reserve work force according to fluctuations of the capitalist economy, gives rise to other forms of exploitation.

The number of women joining the class struggle will be in direct proportion to the priority the communist party and the workers' movement as a whole gives to struggle against the super-exploitation of women. Communists must exert themselves to ensure that increasing numbers of women occupy leading positions in the working class movement. Women's capacities are frequently underestimated because of atavistic ideas of women's 'inferiority'. The militancy and the qualities of leadership shown by women in the recent trade union elections illustrate their qualities and these will be enhanced as the level of struggle against all forms of discrimination is raised.

In spite of certain reforms in recent years, discrimination against women is still firmly based in Spanish law - in the Civil Code, the Penal Code, in Commercial Laws and others.

The original Napoleonic Code, and the long list of fascist adaptations incorporated in it, restricts the legal standing of women, subordinating them in the final analysis to the over-riding authority of the male.

The recent legislation dealing with the legal position of married women - the "Rights and Responsibilities of the Husband and Wife" - far from introducing any important modification, has endorsed the spirit of the Civil Code, which, when promulgated, affirmed: "The authority which nature, religion and history assign to the husband." The Penal Code legalises a double moral standard; adultery is for women a crime carrying a six years' gaol term. It is not an offence for men.

The Communist Party considers that before there can be true democracy established in Spain, all discriminatory legislation against women must be eliminated and their right to hold any professional or public office established. This democratic demand reflects the consensus in Spanish society today. A stronger and more systematic campaign for the elimination of these anachronistic aspects of Spanish law is necessary. It is vital for millions of women.

Laws and economic-social conditions are not alone responsible for women's inferior position. Children are conditioned to this idea from babyhood. It is something instilled in them at home and in their earliest schooling. Education is thus one of the principal factors
in converting the supposed "superiority" of men into something that appears "normal", the "common sense" accepted by men and even by many women. From childhood the small girl is confined to certain colours, certain toys, her role is drilled into her and she becomes accustomed to the double standard of morals. All this conditions her to accept the idea that she is an inferior being.

This bias is continued in the curricula of the segregated schools and in the establishments of higher education. There are very few for females and the courses are oriented towards the supportive roles - secretary, teacher, nurse - and tend to be extensions of the home.

This social and educational conditioning is reflected in the progressively fewer numbers of girls in the later years of higher education and their almost total absence from the field of technical education. Only a minute number of women finish technical courses and they then face great difficulties in practising their professions. An important point in the Communist Party's program for democratic reform in education is the eradication of all aspects which lead to discrimination against women.

At the same time the party recognises that changes in the education field, however important they may be, will not solve the problem. The exploiting classes have a decisive interest in maintaining discrimination against women, not only, as we have seen, because women are super-exploited in production, but because of their work at home. Women in the home do a day's work for which they receive no remuneration (those working outside the home as well do a double shift), but this work is essential for the maintenance and reproduction of the work force and without it production would come to a standstill.

Discrimination against women starts in the traditional family home, economically, socially and ideologically and it is expressed in the clear division of roles. Men are responsible for the economic maintenance of the family and this brings them into direct contact with the outside world. Women's basic functions are the domestic tasks, a form of coarsening slavery, which isolates them and keeps them from social labour. For thirty-nine years the fascist regime has eagerly propagated the myth that the domestic slavery of women is a "feminine virtue"
new conditions which will be much more favourable for women’s liberation.

When Spain becomes socialist many of the lingering structures, discriminatory against women, will be destroyed.

At the same time, experience shows that the full liberation of women does not automatically follow the winning of freedom and socialism. Even in socialist societies, in spite of their achievements, women are discriminated against in a number of ways and many people in those societies still consider it “natural” for women to remain inferior to men in certain spheres.

Unlike Utopian Socialism, Marxism is the first theory to make a profound analysis of the roots and causes of the thousands of years of subjugation of women. It is the first theory to postulate incisively the need to struggle for the complete equality of women and men. However, some of the basic Marxist tenets have either been forgotten or set aside. The pressure of a society in which men are superior to women has been felt even within organisations based upon Marxism. There is an apparent reluctance to face new aspects associated with the problems of women’s liberation.

At the same time, we see an upsurge of radical feminist movements in various countries, generally based upon Marxism, although the conclusions drawn are incorrect in that they are narrow and one-sided. The Communist Party underlines the importance of the feminist movement and concurs with its objective, the achievement of equality for women. In this sense we are, we must be, a feminist party. We are the party of women’s liberation.

In general, the mistake made by the radical feminist movement is that women’s problems are seen in isolation - apart from the political and social struggle for change - as if they could be solved in a straight out man-woman confrontation. Minority abstract solutions can divert masses of women from the most effective path in their struggle for liberation.

We recognise that the women’s liberation movement is a diversified mass movement which must have an open, legal organisation capable of correctly assessing the backward conditions of women. It should be oriented towards unity with the fighting fronts of other mass movements and at the same time work to develop in them a greater understanding of the women’s dilemma. The diverse forms of organisation and the wide variety of theoretical views within the women’s liberation movement are paralleled in the broad general mass movement where the action is.

The Communist Party is self-critical as it was in its VIII Congress on the question of women’s liberation. We are aware that there is discrimination against women within our own ranks and that many communists still have reactionary ideas on the subject. To overcome this problem it must first be recognised and this must be followed by a revolutionary change in our thinking. Eradication of discrimination against women is basic to communist thinking.

The creative potential of women has been limited for thousands of years. The extent of this loss of the full capabilities of more than half the human race is incalculable.

With communism a new woman will emerge - truly equal to man. Human life will reach a higher level. A new quality will emerge in the relations between the sexes - in love, in work and in the arts and sciences.

Our policy today, our ideal for tomorrow is to have great masses of women in the ranks of the Party. Women’s political might is great and it will increase. Today most women still have no political conviction. We have to demonstrate to them that, along with solutions for their most immediate problems and a perspective of complete liberation, their place is with us in the struggle for freedom and socialism.

First we must promote a campaign to recruit women into the Party on a basis of equality with men. Women’s militancy cannot be one-sided. The flexible forms of organisation demanded by their present situation must be seen not only as reflecting the injustice to which they are subject but also as an instrument with which to fight against that injustice. The Party must pay particular attention to the development and promotion of women cadres. This will benefit both the party and the broad mass movement of women. It must become the concern of all our organisations. Finally, although women themselves will provide the major force in the struggle for women’s liberation, this struggle is a fundamental revolutionary task for the whole Party. We intend to hold a special Party Conference which will make an in-depth study of the range of problems evoked by the women’s liberation movement.