

A Strong Soviet Family N.K. Krupskaya

(Preface to the pamphlet “The New Law on Mother and Child”, 1936. Preface written by N. K. Krupskaya.)

After widespread discussion at meetings and in the press of the draft decree ”on the prohibition of abortions, increased material assistance to young mothers, the establishment of government aid for large families, the extension of the network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens, increased penalties for failure to pay alimony, and certain alterations in the divorce laws”, this decree with certain additions and amendments, has been passed by the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the U.S.S.R.

The carrying out of this decree will entail great expenditures on the part of the Soviet state. But our Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has become so strong that it can afford to take them upon itself.

Why does the government undertake these large expenditures? Because it considers the measures comprised in the decree to be of great importance in remoulding people’s personal lives, in actually emancipating the working women, in establishing proper family relations.

It was just because the law now adopted is of such great importance that it was first put up for discussion by the people.

Such discussion is of the greatest importance. In the first place, it has been brought home to the broadest of masses.

Everyone made his suggestions. Of course, only a small number of these suggestions – the most important, the most essential – could be included in the decree.

People working in the People’s Commissariats of Justice, Health and Education will time and again read over these suggestions from various strata of people, in order to be able to carry out this decree in the proper Soviet way, as Lenin would have wanted it carried out, as Stalin demands.

The universal discussion of the decree will help its correct application.

Lenin spoke many times about the necessity of drawing every cook into the work of governing the state. And the discussion of the decree furthers this knowledge, fills the decree with living, practical matter. The discussion of the decree made it possible to accumulate quantities of practical material about the living conditions and personal

life of our working people. The subcommittees of the Soviets will themselves be able to engage in organising every-day like on a now basis, without entrusting this work to their bureaus.

The problems dealt with in the decree vitally concern every family, and they particularly agitate the women.

It is common knowledge that Lenin attached enormous importance to the matter of emancipating women, furthering their enlightenment and drawing them into social work.

A great deal of work to this end has been going on all the time, but Lenin's principles could be properly applied only after the necessary prerequisites for their realisation has been created.

Ten years ago, could the state have assigned such funds for the maternity homes, nurseries, kindergartens? Ten years ago, would it have been possible to arrange such widespread discussion of the decree, to draw the villages into the discussion? Would the peasant women's voices have sounded so loudly at that time?

Especially heated discussion was provoked by the clause on the prohibition of abortions, which had been legalised in 1920. Looking over some old articles of mine, I found one in which I dealt in detail with the question of abortions. The article was printed in the *Kommunistka*, No. 1-2, for 1920. It was called "The War and Childbirth".

"The war", I wrote in that article, "has brought the country to the extreme of poverty and ruin. Poverty forces women to sell their bodies, forces women who are not prostitutes making a trade of it, but mothers of families, who often do it for the sake of their children, for the sake of their old mothers."

The Soviet laws have changed the nature of marriage, transforming it from the purely commercial deal that it often was before the Socialist October Revolution into a union on the basis of mutual sympathies. But the Civil War, constant evacuations, the break-up of old habits that were established in the course of centuries, made marital ties very unstable.

This instability of marriage and the material hardships – the Civil War, the ruined state of the country, the food shortage – led to the fact that in many cases the entire burden of rearing and training her child fell on the mother alone.

How is one to help the mother, breaking under the burden of childbirth and the rearing and upbringing of children?" I wrote in my article, "The answer is clear – the state must not only undertake the protection of the mother and child, must not only care for women during pregnancy, and during and after confinement, but must set up tens of thousands of nurseries, kindergartens, children's colonies, and dormitories where children receive care and food, where they would live, develop and study under conditions ten times better than even the most loving mother could provide for them by her own unaided efforts.

The Soviet government did away with the old homes that took the children away from their mothers forever; it shut down the "establishments for the manufacture of angels" which had existed under the old regime and had in reality been institutions for concealed infanticide. It set up children's homes, kindergartens and nurseries, but at that time all this was but a drop in the ocean.

The situation was especially grave in the countryside, where the kulaks were active in agitating against the nurseries. In 1919 we still used to receive petitions signed with crosses by illiterates, begging that the children should not be put in the nurseries, not be taken away from their parents forever. Children's homes were often materially exploited by "teachers" who had no connection whatever with pedagogy, with the teaching and raising of children.

So in 1920 this matter of abortions became acute. Up to that time abortions had been punishable by law. But the penalty descended not on those who compelled women to have abortions, not on those who performed illegal abortions under extremely unsanitary conditions, and by methods which for a long time after impaired the health of the women concerned – it was the woman who was held responsible. At that time I wrote:

The fight against abortions must be carried on not by persecuting the mothers, who resort to abortions often at great risk to their own lives, but must be directed towards eliminating the social causes that have made it necessary for women to resort to abortions.

...Of course, impunity with respect to abortions cannot rid the mother of the depression produced by an abortion. Her whole organism has, as it were, entered on the path of childbirth, the organism has begun to adapt itself to nourishing the embryo within it, and the mother usually feels an interruption of this process to be a crime against herself and her child. The nervous excitement and yearning that can often be seen in the eyes of a woman who has resorted to an abortion are enough to show at what price the mother buys her freedom.

It was bitter want that compelled the working women to reject motherhood.

Improvement of general living conditions, and particularly the protection of mother and child and the public education of children, will remove this main cause.

Those who really want to remove from the order of the day all these horrible questions of infanticide, of abortions, of contraceptions, must work without pause to build the new life in which motherhood will take the place due to it.

Fifteen years have passed since that article was written. Our country has become rich, mighty, and prosperous. Our people are better educated and more enlightened. Women have become a force in the collective farm. They have become active in social work. Many of the women are Stakhanovites. They are studying hard. The Party and the government surround the children with public care. They make their childhood a happy one. It is with good cause that millions of working women are so devoted to Stalin – they see his solicitude for the working women.

Under these new conditions the questions of the family and of abortions appear in a new light. The new decree will play an extremely important part in remoulding people's modes of life.

It is essential to carry out this decree on the widest possible scale, to fight for good maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens. There is much work ahead.

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EXTRACT FROM “THE WIFE – HER SOLDIER HUSBAND’S FRIEND AND COMRADE”, SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE CONFERENCE OF WIVES OF RED ARMY COMMANDERS BY N.K.KRUPSKAYA.

...All of us know the great role of Comrade Stalin in this work. And let me say that our work, the work of furthering the enlightenment and arousing the activity of the masses of women, was also led by him.

Comrade Stalin has time and again stressed the important part played by women in all spheres of socialist construction, particularly in the collective farms; he has constantly given us exhaustive and very clear, specific instructions on methods of organising work among women.

Take a look at the whole history of our women's movement. At first we had the Women's Organisations. In their time these Women's Organisations fulfilled a very

important function. But when the scope of the work became greater, when it became necessary to start a truly mass movement, they proved inadequate. Other methods of developing this movement arose, and the movement became closely linked up with the entire work of socialist construction.

I should like together with you to express the deepest gratitude to Comrade Stalin for what he has done to further the enlightenment of women, to develop their activity in social work, for what he has done to make women active builders not in word, but in deed...

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ca.firstwave/cpl-abortion/section6.htm>