

Germany: Prominent feminist Alice Schwarzer agitates against Clara Zetkin

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11 March 2010

In a hysterical rant in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on International Women's Day, March 8, Alice Schwarzer, Germany's best-known representative of bourgeois feminism, called for its abolition. Schwarzer is the editor of *Emma*, which calls itself "the political magazine for women."

For almost half a page, Schwarzer raged against the day that for many years has marked the fact that the equality of men and women has not become a social reality.

In Germany, according to the Federal Statistics Office, the income of women is still almost one quarter lower than that of men, a wage gap that has even grown in recent years. State childcare is hardly affordable for many women in Germany; single mothers are often exposed to unbearable harassment at the Job Center.

At first glance, Schwarzer's claims seem surprising, since for the somewhat older generation she counts as the personification of the struggle for women's rights. In fact, she is a representative of feminism. That the struggle for women's rights and feminism are not quite the same thing is something that Schwarzer herself has now made more than explicit.

What bothers Alice Schwarzer about International Women's Day? In her column she states it quite bluntly: It was "a socialist invention, which can be traced back to a strike by brave women textile workers and was decided in due form in 1910 at the 2nd Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen. 'Comrades! Working women and girls!' Wrote Clara Zetkin in 1911 in *Gleichheit*, 'March 19th [later changed to March 8] is your day. It is your right!'"

Schwarzer could have added that the date change occurred in 1921, when the communists wanted to honour the role of women, who had played a crucial role on that day in 1917 in the Russian February

Revolution, which overthrew the tsarist regime.

Like all right-wing anticommunists, Schwarzer draws a direct line from Clara Zetkin to Stalinism. Her main criticism of the Stalinist regime, in spite of her scorn for the "socialist mothers' day," is not the police-state repression of the working class (both male and female), not even the Stalinist cult of the family and chauvinism. No, her criticism is that the "top layers were well known to be women-free." Unlike, for example, in that women's paradise, Britain, where Margaret Thatcher was able to rise to be prime minister and carried through attacks on jobs, wages and social rights, if necessary by employing police violence.

Schwarzer tells us that "the women's movement" had "as is generally known, emerged in the West in the early 1970s, not least as a protest against the left." Before that, there was no women's movement. It is unclear whether the feminist bigotry here is mixed with ignorance or deliberate historical misrepresentation. Clara Zetkin is an example of how long a women's movement was active before Schwarzer & Co., but it was one that regarded itself as part of the left, socialist labour movement.

It was the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which, at the end of the 19th century, when it still claimed to be Marxist, voted in the Reichstag (parliament) against the introduction of the Civil Code (BGB), mainly because this still referred to a "Christian-Occidental" tradition, which anchored the subordination of women to men in law.

The socialist movement was the first mass movement that advocated complete equal rights in both the private sphere and constitutionally. The book *Woman and Socialism* by August Bebel, chair of the SPD until 1913, in which he comprehensively justified these demands, became a bestseller among workers.

Women's suffrage was established in Germany not by feminists, but by workers of both sexes in the November 1918 revolution. As in the 19th century social legislation under Bismarck, this again proved true the testimony of Rosa Luxemburg that reforms, both democratic and social, are a by-product of a revolutionary movement or are a result of the fear of it.

The biggest leap in the emancipation of women in human history undoubtedly occurred in Russia after the October Revolution. Where before, the husband's "right to punish" was recognized by the state, now equal rights applied in private life, employment, politics and in the free right to abortion and divorce. Alexandra Kollontai, the first female minister in the world, sought the socialization of housework and childcare.

Workers leaders such as Zetkin, Kollontai and Luxemburg were hostile to the national narrow-mindedness of someone like Alice Schwarzer, who writes with disdain of a left that "wanted to liberate the last Bolivian peasants, but who let their own wives and girlfriends continue making coffee, typing pamphlets and caring for children." What are poverty and the dictatorial oppression of Bolivian coffee farmers when it comes down to who makes the coffee in West Germany!

The Church, which for centuries had advocated the subordination of woman to man, the poor to the rich and the subject to the state, lost all privileges in revolutionary Russia and was strictly separated from the state and schools. The rehabilitation of the cult of family, state and nation by the Stalinists was not an expression of socialism, but on the contrary, went hand in hand with the oppression, persecution and murder of hundreds of thousands of socialists.

In West Germany after the Second World War, it was the labour movement that stood behind all progress in the matter of equal rights. This began with the first disputed sentence of the constitution, "Men and women have equal rights." It continued in the struggle against "traditional marriage" (Hausfrauehe) propagated by the Christian churches up to the liberalization of the Penal Code concerning matters of sexual relations. Until the 1950s, the husband was allowed to terminate the employment of his wife and had sole rights in all questions to do with marriage and children's upbringing.

Among other things, the abolition of the criminalization of homosexuality and adultery was first placed on the agenda in 1968, and was then implemented in 1973. Since then, rape and similar crimes have no longer been listed in the Criminal Code under the heading "crimes against morality" but as crimes against sexual self-determination. Reduced sentences for the "honour killing" of an "unfaithful" wife also stopped then. This social awakening was characterized by a global mass movement of working people, especially the general strike movement in France, and the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the US invaders.

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, despite the domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the expropriation of capital and state planning saw social progress for millions of female workers. Despite all the authoritarian and undemocratic structures, the inclusion of women into working life enabled them a certain self-confidence; nurseries took away part of the burden of child care. Schwarzer can only see in this a triple burden of "factory, shopping queues, children." This anticommunist feminist probably regards the social devastation that followed the reintroduction of capitalism into Eastern Europe—which for many women meant unemployment, poverty and often domestic violence and prostitution—as liberation.

Alice Schwarzer has made abundantly clear that feminism and the struggle for equality are two different things. Those who support the former should read her *Emma*, those who are for the latter, should read *Gleichheit* (Equality)—the magazine of the German Socialist Equality Party and also the name of the publication produced by Clara Zetkin.



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