

HOW SOVIET RUSSIA LIBERATED WOMEN: THE SOVIET  
MODEL IN CLARA ZETKIN'S PERIODICAL *DIE*  
*KOMMUNISTISCHE FRAUENINTERNATIONALE*

by

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## ABSTRACT

### HOW SOVIET RUSSIA LIBERATED WOMEN: THE SOVIET MODEL IN CLARA ZETKIN'S PERIODICAL *DIE KOMMUNISTISCHE FRAUENINTERNATIONALE*

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Clara Zetkin was celebrated in both Germany and the Soviet Union before World War II because of her active involvement in the communist movement. She wrote prolifically and preached the virtues of socialism. She concerned herself particularly with women's needs, arguing that women would respond best to a different form of agitation than that used among men. Zetkin asserted that communism was the only way to respond to women's concerns as mothers and that only state involvement in domestic life would allow women to be fully emancipated. Women needed freedom from household work and increased training and support to aid them as workers, and Zetkin's writings centered on these principles.



The Bolshevik Revolution proved to Zetkin that communism rescued women from the oppression of capitalism. The Soviet model showed that women could find protection for themselves and their children through state intervention. In addition, communism provided a female proletariat with increased employment opportunities and training. While bourgeois women's movements spread through Europe, Zetkin emphasized that true liberation came only through communism. For Zetkin, communism as found in Soviet Russia in the 1920s brought women equality not just in theory but also in practice.

Zetkin's periodical *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (1921-1925) included articles that emphasized the Soviet system for aiding women. These articles supported Zetkin's belief that communism would benefit women by lightening their burdens. *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* established a forum in which communist women throughout the world could hear news from movements in countries other than their own. By including discussion of the Soviet model in her periodical, Zetkin sought to convince women of the virtues of joining Soviet Russia in worldwide revolution rather than succumbing to the empty promises of capitalist nations.

*Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, however, presented statistics, accounts, and promises that conflicted with reality. Historians have shown that the Soviets never fully developed institutions that would emancipate women from housework and grant them the equality Zetkin and her followers desired. The Soviet model portrayed in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* was optimistic but, nevertheless, illustrated what Zetkin anticipated her female readers dreamed for themselves.



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## INTRODUCTION

“Alles durch die Revolution! Alles für die Revolution!”<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin wrote these words in 1921, declaring the supremacy of communist revolution. This dedication to revolution provided the foundation for Zetkin’s periodical *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, in which communist women from throughout the world united their voices in the cause of international solidarity. For decades, Zetkin had been a leader among socialist feminists in Germany. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, her advocacy for international solidarity intensified as she strove to unite communist women in Germany with their female comrades in the newly created Soviet Union. She anticipated that communist women everywhere would look forward to enjoying the same benefits as Soviet women.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Zetkin advocated the rights of women through social democracy. Women’s rights grew after World War I as Germany’s Weimar Republic, formed in 1919, brought significant changes through its new constitution, which stated that all Germans were equal before the law and that men and women had the same legal rights and privileges. Some German women took advantage of this equality and pushed societal boundaries to create the image of the New Woman, one

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<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin, “Geleitwort,” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 1 (April 1921): 5. “Everything through the Revolution! Everything for the Revolution!”

who was independent and completely equal to men. This New Woman was similar to American versions of a liberated woman.

The promises offered to women through the Weimar constitution, however, were never fulfilled. While the law gave women complete legal equality, society could not grant liberation so easily. Judges and civil servants who had been appointed by the Kaiser before 1914 did not enforce gender equality.<sup>2</sup> In addition, decisions about family law, property rights, wages, and working conditions continued to sustain inequality between men and women.<sup>3</sup> It was clear that for women to be completely equal, German society had to undergo a revolution at many different levels.

During the same time period, Russians created a new image for women, one that presented an alternative to the New Woman of the Weimar Republic. The Bolshevik Revolution ushered in an international movement that promised legal, economic, and social equality for women. Yet, the Communist Party only indirectly promised women's liberation. Its first goal was a revolution that would solve the problems of capitalism. After the initial liberation from class antagonisms, party doctrine promised that all men as well as women would be emancipated from bourgeois oppression.<sup>4</sup> This second liberation would be a natural consequence of the economic liberation and could only be granted through communist revolution. Firmly believing in the promises of communism, tens of thousands of Russian women joined the Bolshevik movement. Many of these female Bolshevik leaders dedicated their lives completely to the cause of communism.

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<sup>2</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work," in *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 303.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 304-5.

As communist ideas spread, Bolshevik women joined such organizations as the Comintern, which focused on spreading communism internationally. The Comintern organized international conferences to establish and unite communist parties throughout the world. In Germany, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, and others formed the Spartacist League, which was renamed the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and joined the Comintern in 1919. Through involvement in the KPD and the Comintern, German communists interacted with Bolshevik women, who had already experienced many of the privileges German communist women hoped to achieve in their own country. Female leaders of the KPD fostered the spread of communism in Germany and provided models for other women.

After Rosa Luxemburg's death in 1919, Clara Zetkin became the dominant female leader of communism in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Zetkin was born in 1857 and raised in a working-class section of Germany. She trained as a teacher and spent her educational years with Russian émigrés, who taught her about Marxism. Her middle-class background enabled her to get an education, and her mother's involvement in feminism during the nineteenth century encouraged Zetkin to lead a similar movement. After marrying Ossip Zetkin, Clara moved with her husband to France. With her husband's encouragement, she was active in the social democratic movement and developed particular concern for women's issues. When Ossip died in 1889, Zetkin returned to Germany with her two sons and continued as an activist. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Zetkin's dedication to international communist revolution grew with the split between Germany's social democrats and communists. She became one of the leaders of Bolshevism as she

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<sup>5</sup> Zetkin was ill and therefore not in Berlin at the time of Rosa Luxemburg's and Karl Liebknecht's assassinations.

interacted with Lenin, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, and others.<sup>6</sup> Zetkin, along with other female followers of Lenin, advocated the rights of working women as found only through communism.

Because of her close ties with Russia and the Bolsheviks, Zetkin looked to Russia as a shining example and goal for communists in Germany. She believed that women could achieve complete equality with men not through the Weimar constitution, but through worldwide communist revolution. Zetkin thus became a major advocate of international solidarity among communist women. She took very seriously the famous words “Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!”<sup>7</sup> as she dedicated her talents to the spread of communism by writing and editing hundreds of articles, pamphlets, and speeches. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Zetkin’s efforts to promote solidarity between Germany and the Soviets became even stronger, and her writings showed her increased allegiance to the Soviet model. In addition, her writings confirmed the feelings of many Bolshevik women, who dreamed of a new society free of oppression.

The hopes of the early Bolshevik women can be seen in the periodicals for which Zetkin was responsible. She edited three periodicals: *Die Gleichheit*, *Die Kommunistin*, and *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*.<sup>8</sup> Of all these publications, *Die*

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<sup>6</sup> Krupskaya was Lenin’s wife. Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand were early advocates of women’s involvement in the Bolshevik Revolution. According to Wendy Goldman, Zetkin convinced Kollontai in 1906 to begin organizing working-class women. See Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>7</sup> In English, “Workers of all countries, unite!”

<sup>8</sup> *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) was published before World War I and was eventually taken over by the Social Democratic Party of Germany. *Die Kommunistin* (The Female Communist) began in 1919 and ran until 1926, while *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (The Communist Women International) ran from 1921-1925. While each of these periodicals targeted communist women, their goals were slightly different. *Die Gleichheit* affiliated itself with the Social Democratic Party of Germany, and *Die Kommunistin* was the women’s magazine of the Communist Party of Germany. *Die Kommunistische*

*Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* came closest to portraying Zetkin's personal aims for a communist women's periodical and illustrating her attitudes towards women's place under communism. The goal of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, as an appendage of the Comintern, was to unite communist women throughout the world in the cause of international revolution. It provided a venue for Zetkin to elucidate her attitudes towards world revolution and allowed communist women an outlet for discussion. Many of the articles in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* focused on Soviet Russia because, as Zetkin asserted in her introduction to the first issue, her female comrades in all lands would be passionately interested in every bit of news from the land of a victorious revolution.<sup>9</sup> Zetkin's enthusiasm for the Soviet model, therefore, permeated her writings as she encouraged women to follow the example of their Soviet sisters.

Articles in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* emphasized the periodical's commitment to transforming women into working members of a proletarian state and away from the bourgeois models of women and family. They illustrated what Zetkin believed would appeal to women who felt burdened by the demands of both childcare and employment. Zetkin used examples of communism as practiced in the Soviet Union to provide women hope for what could be found only through communism rather than through any type of capitalist reforms. Although articles in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* did not reflect the entire scope of life for women in Soviet Russia, they nevertheless represented Zetkin's assertion that Soviet Russia

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*Fraueninternationale* emphasized an international communist women's movement through its loose affiliation with the Communist International. *KFI* was thus not controlled by a political party as the previous periodicals had been.

<sup>9</sup> Zetkin, "Geleitwort," 5. She says, "In allen Ländern lauschen die Genossinnen mit leidenschaftlichem Interesse auf jede Nachricht aus dem Reiche der siegreichen Revolution."

granted women equality both in theory and in practice as state intervention aided mothers, their children, and women in the workplace.

## Literature Review

Although little has been published about Zetkin's periodical *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, several historians have researched Zetkin's role in the development of communism. These authors note Zetkin's relationship with the Soviets and the evolution of her political beliefs. Clara Zetkin's name is mentioned in many of the articles and books that discuss communism or social democracy both before and after World War I. Ben Fowkes's *Communism in Germany under the Weimar Republic* and Eric Weitz's *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990* both include brief discussion of Clara Zetkin in the communist movement in Germany.<sup>10</sup> Her name is standard in such discourses, though her further relevance in the discussion of communism and particularly world revolution is rarely discussed in texts.

Most of the literature about German women as part of the socialist workers' movement explores the movement before World War I. Very few historians have looked at communist women during the Weimar Republic. Renate Pore and Karen Honeycutt are the main authors who have addressed Clara Zetkin's involvement in socialism, but both focus on the period before World War I. In addition to Pore and Honeycutt, Jean Quataert also wrote briefly about Clara Zetkin. In *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917*, she identifies the key leaders in the socialist women's movement: Emma Ihrer, Ottilie Baader, Helene Grünberg, Gertrud Hanna, Clara Zetkin, Luise Zietz, Lily Braun, and Marie Juchacz. Quataert argues that these women were

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<sup>10</sup> Ben Fowkes, *Communism in Germany under the Weimar Republic* (London: MacMillan Press, 1984); Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997).

rebels in two senses—as socialists and as feminists.<sup>11</sup> Her work highlights the complexity of the socialist women’s movement in noting the disagreements between the various characters and the attitudes each took towards the others. Like Honeycutt and Pore, Quataert focuses on the period before World War I and does not fully explore Zetkin’s relationship with the Bolsheviks nor Zetkin’s work in editing *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*.

It is mainly through reading the biographies published about Zetkin that historians can appreciate her life and attitudes after World War I. The first of these biographies was Luise Dornemann’s 1962 book *Clara Zetkin: Ein Lebensbild*.<sup>12</sup> Until recently, this has been the premiere biography of Zetkin. Dornemann’s biography provides a look at Zetkin’s birth, a chronology of her life, and ends with her death. Dornemann highlights Zetkin’s personal, professional, and political life, trying to present a look at all aspects of Clara Zetkin.

Dornemann’s biography of Zetkin was published in conjunction with the Institute for Marxism-Leninism in the former German Democratic Republic. In the GDR in 1962, Clara Zetkin was considered a heroine. Dornemann’s work is a tribute to Clara Zetkin rather than an analysis or criticism of her activities. In addition, Dornemann’s biography of Zetkin suggests a strong bond between Zetkin and Russia. This bond was necessary in 1962 to further feelings of unity between East Germany and the Soviet Union. This biography emphasizes many aspects of Zetkin’s relationship with Russia and the influence of the Bolsheviks as a role model for Germany.

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<sup>11</sup> Jean H Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 55.

<sup>12</sup> Luise Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin: Ein Lebensbild* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962).

Gilbert Badia's biography of Zetkin, titled *Clara Zetkin: féministe sans frontières* [*Clara Zetkin: Eine neue Biographie*] also highlights Zetkin's interactions with and attitudes towards the Soviets. The French title itself assumes Zetkin's role as an international leader.<sup>13</sup> Even more than the biography by Dornemann, Badia's biography of Zetkin highlights aspects of her life and writings that promoted both world revolution and solidarity with the Soviets. Badia's biography presents a chronological discussion of Zetkin's life while highlighting specific themes that guide the focus of individual chapters. Badia includes detailed information on Zetkin's interactions with the Bolsheviks and her travels to Soviet Russia, proposing that Zetkin gained more prestige in Russia than any other western communist.<sup>14</sup>

Badia provides insight into the fate of the many Bolsheviks who had built strong ties with Lenin but opposed Stalin. Clara Zetkin was one of these "Old Bolsheviks," who, had she lived longer, would have faced the same fate as Nikolai Bukharin and others killed by Stalin's purges.<sup>15</sup> Zetkin kept her contempt for Stalin secret, though Badia argues that Zetkin felt Stalin betrayed the integrity of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>16</sup> Badia's biography of Zetkin thus provides the clearest insight into Zetkin's admiration for the Bolsheviks and subsequent disillusionment with the outcomes after Lenin's death. However, neither Dornemann's nor Badia's works address Zetkin's particular attention to the needs of communist women; rather, these historians focus on Zetkin and the

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Badia, *Clara Zetkin: Eine neue Biographie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1994). The French title could be translated as *Feminist without Frontiers*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

Bolsheviks rather than Zetkin's relationship with Soviet women after the Bolshevik Revolution.

One of the most recent publications on Zetkin came out in 2003. Tania Puschnerat's biography of Zetkin follows a flexible chronology as the author selects specific topics related to Zetkin's political beliefs.<sup>17</sup> Puschnerat focuses her discussions on mentalities, particularly the bourgeois mentality and the Marxist mentality. She uses the development of Zetkin's political beliefs to guide her through Zetkin's life, noting Zetkin's transition from social democrat to communist as well as shifts in Zetkin's attitudes towards feminist issues. She places little emphasis on Zetkin's private life, relationship with family members, or the miscellaneous dates and facts associated with her life. Rather, Puschnerat selects political beliefs and attitudes as her focus. According to Puschnerat, Zetkin fostered a strong bond with her Russian comrades as she corresponded with the Bolsheviks and visited Russia several times. Puschnerat's biography of Zetkin provides a strong background to Zetkin's personal interactions with and attitudes toward the Bolsheviks both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution.

In the 1970s and 1980s, several articles about Clara Zetkin and her attitudes towards the Bolsheviks were published in East German periodicals. L.G. Babichenko published a series of articles about Zetkin's travels to the Soviet Union. The author explores Zetkin's impressions of the newly formed Soviet Union and highlights her dedication to aiding the workers and peasants.<sup>18</sup> Zetkin's prominence among the workers

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<sup>17</sup> Tania Puschnerat, *Clara Zetkin: Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> L. G. Babichenko, "Die erste Reise Clara Zetkins in die Sowjetunion," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 22, no. 2 (1980): 242-252.

grew as she spent time in their factories, getting to know their lives and needs.<sup>19</sup>

Babichenko demonstrates that Zetkin's personal experiences in the Soviet Union expanded her admiration of the new regime as she interacted with the women mentioned in her periodicals.

Fritz Staude takes Babichenko's work a step further. He describes Zetkin's place among the Bolsheviks involved in the international workers' movement.<sup>20</sup> He argues that Zetkin's role as editor of communist women's periodicals, along with her involvement in the International Red Help, strengthened the relationship she had with the Bolsheviks. Staude concludes that the struggle for international solidarity among the working classes of all nations was of primary importance to her.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Katja Haferkorn explores Zetkin's relationship with early Bolsheviks such as Lenin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Nadezhda Krupskaja.<sup>22</sup> She concludes that Clara Zetkin and the Bolsheviks established an unbreakable unity, noting Zetkin's membership in the Society for Old Bolsheviks.<sup>23</sup> These authors place Zetkin in the context of the Old Bolsheviks—the earliest leaders of revolution in Russia. They demonstrate that Zetkin could clearly be categorized beside Kollontai, Krupskaja, Armand, and other early female supporters of Lenin. Though German, Zetkin was nevertheless a Bolshevik.

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<sup>19</sup> L. G. Babichenko, "Clara Zetkin und Sowjetrußland 1923," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 27, no. 2 (1985): 241-248.

<sup>20</sup> Fritz Staude, "Zur Vermittlung der Erfahrungen der Bolschewiki und des Roten Oktober in der internationalen Arbeiterbewegung durch Clara Zetkin," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 26, no. 11 (1978): 983-995.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 995.

<sup>22</sup> Katja Haferkorn, "Clara Zetkin und die Bolschewiki," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 24, no. 3 (1982): 334-347.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 347. Haferkorn accessed this information from ZPA Moscow 528/1/1769.

The work of these historians illustrates Zetkin's direct connection with various Bolshevik leaders and her dedication to international solidarity. While these authors have highlighted the basic principles of Zetkin's political beliefs, they have failed to assess the importance of Zetkin's periodicals. *Die Gleichheit* and *Die Kommunistin* are often mentioned as elements of Zetkin's activities, but their content is rarely analyzed. Similarly, no historian has published an analysis of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*. Zetkin was responsible for this periodical, and, more so than her other periodicals, *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* fostered unity among communist women internationally. It is surprising that historians have ignored Zetkin's masterpiece of international solidarity. *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* was the only periodical over which Zetkin had total control for its entire publication run. Because of this, she could publish what she deemed valuable rather than obeying what her overseers viewed as the interests of the readers. Thus, it is interesting that while historians clearly note Zetkin's commitment to solidarity with the Soviet Union, they have never explored how Zetkin's attitudes towards the Soviets have been illustrated in her periodicals.

In addition, historians have taken for granted the idea that Bolshevik women, including Zetkin, saw communist revolution as the only method of providing complete equality for women. Scholars have not explored Zetkin's view of which aspects of women's life communism would improve. Through analyzing Zetkin's periodicals, historians can determine the specific improvements Zetkin viewed as essential to women's equality. In identifying such communist developments for women, historians

can clarify why Zetkin viewed communism as more effective than capitalism in granting women's liberation.

An analysis of the articles included in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* demonstrates Zetkin's admiration for the Soviets as well as what she viewed as important for women. The periodical highlights women's new life under communism and the advantages Soviet women enjoyed that women in capitalist countries did not. *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* leaves little doubt that Zetkin viewed state involvement in women's lives the only practical means of granting true equality. She, therefore, viewed Soviet Russia as the one country that had liberated women.

Because *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* has received very little attention from scholars, the first chapter of this thesis will present an overview of the periodical. It will look at Zetkin's development as a champion of international solidarity with an emphasis on her periodicals aimed at communist women. The second chapter of the thesis will look at specific articles from *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* that discuss the new position of women in Soviet Russia in terms of legal equality vis-à-vis women in capitalist countries. The third and fourth chapters will address women's roles as mothers and workers and ways in which Zetkin's periodical used the Soviet model to persuade women to believe that Soviet Russia truly liberated women from the chains of the bourgeoisie.

## CHAPTER 1

### CLARA ZETKIN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER PERIODICALS

Clara Zetkin was born to Gottfried and Josephine Eißner on July 5, 1857, in a small east German town. Her parents concerned themselves with social and political issues providing Clara and her siblings with fertile ground for Clara's later endeavors. In particular, her mother presented Clara with an example of an energetic model, active in the women's movement of the mid- to late-nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In her childhood and adolescence, Clara witnessed the poverty of nearby factory workers and their families. When her father died in 1875, Clara's family suffered from financial difficulties as well.<sup>2</sup> Zetkin's early years clearly established sympathies within her that would lead to her involvement in the communist movement.

As Zetkin received education, interacted with Russian émigrés, and eventually married Ossip Zetkin, she gained the knowledge and skills necessary to become an agitator within the socialist movement. In the 1890s, during her sojourn in France, Zetkin began writing articles in favor of socialist feminism. She straddled two worlds: that of socialism and that of feminism. Yet her goal from the beginning was twofold. She, along with other socialist feminists, argued that women's rights could only be found within the context of social revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Badia, *Clara Zetkin: Eine neue Biographie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1994), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Zetkin's view of socialist feminism permeated her periodicals. Before World War I, *Die Gleichheit* addressed women's issues such as suffrage and finding relief from the burdens of motherhood and employment. After World War I, Zetkin's periodicals continued a socialist feminist emphasis but transformed to works that clearly supported communist revolution. *Die Kommunistin* was tied to the KPD and targeted women in Germany. Both *Die Gleichheit* and *Die Kommunistin* addressed international topics in addition to women's issues, but it was her final periodical, *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale (KFI)* that fully enabled Zetkin to publish her views of women under communism. *KFI* maintained the internationalist agenda to which Zetkin was so committed, emphasized theoretical understanding rather than appealing to a mass audience, and allowed Zetkin to explore life for Soviet women.

### **Zetkin and the Socialist Women's Movement**

The socialist women's movement in Germany began in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth. The movement intensified as World War I approached but remained essentially the same in character until the Weimar Republic. Karen Honeycutt argues in a 1976 article that, after Friedrich Engels and August Bebel, Zetkin was the foremost theoretician on the woman question in European socialism before World War I.<sup>3</sup> Honeycutt asserts that while most socialist men were committed to the theory of female emancipation, they were still afflicted by the prejudices of society. In consequence, women had to rely on themselves to achieve liberation.<sup>4</sup> Even after 1908, when women received the legal right to organize politically with men, Zetkin believed that women

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<sup>3</sup> Karen Honeycutt, "Clara Zetkin: A Socialist Approach to the Problem of Woman's Oppression," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976): 131.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

nevertheless required separate women's groups within the Social Democratic Party because sexual prejudice and discrimination still existed.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Clara Zetkin claimed that women's position of inferiority was due to her economic dependence on man and not being engaged in socially productive labor. Thus Zetkin identified a distinct connection between socialism and woman's emancipation. Through socialism, woman could alleviate the conflict between occupational labor and motherhood.<sup>6</sup>

Clara Zetkin's approach to women and socialism developed in the late nineteenth century. Until the 1890s, Zetkin emphasized "the role of class almost to the exclusion of sex as the determinant of oppression for working-class women."<sup>7</sup> Yet by the end of this decade, Zetkin recognized women's unique role and position in relation to reproduction and thus argued that women and men were fundamentally different, though fully equal.<sup>8</sup> Part of this shift in attitude could have been due to Zetkin's becoming a mother herself in the 1880s. Honeycutt explains Zetkin's approach to women in socialism further by stating that women's liberation required full development of the woman as both a mother and as an occupational laborer. These roles, according to Zetkin, would create a mutually beneficial relationship, allowing the woman to develop in both public and private spheres.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 135.

Zetkin's first periodical, *Die Gleichheit*, blossomed from her socialist feminist sentiments, and the first issue of *Die Gleichheit* appeared in January 1892.<sup>10</sup> As a socialist feminist magazine, *Die Gleichheit* addressed women's needs and interests in the context of socialism. Rather than a bourgeois version of feminism that focused solely on women's issues, socialist feminism concluded that women would only be equal to men through socialism. Social democrats feared *Die Gleichheit* sought to begin a women's movement, similar to bourgeois women's movements in England and the United States. Yet Zetkin stated that her audience was not the masses of women but rather proletariat women in particular. She wanted women to look towards social democracy rather than joining bourgeois women's movements.<sup>11</sup> Zetkin knew that women had needs separate from those of men. She feared that if socialism did not address women's political and social claims, these women would look elsewhere. Thus socialist feminism, rather than just socialism or just feminism, motivated all of Zetkin's writings.

Articles in *Die Gleichheit* addressed the interests and concerns of women. In addition, it included proceedings from conferences of socialist women, discussions of voting rights, and other legal issues. Other articles focused on specific professions such as factory workers or students. *Die Gleichheit* was also an instrument of agitation as a propaganda tool for Marxist instruction. Because of this emphasis on Marxist training, many in social democracy found the periodical heavy handed. Zetkin was criticized for being too theoretical, so by 1913 the periodical included special sections for housewives

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<sup>10</sup> Badia, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 58.

and for children. Zetkin also began including poetry and feuilletons in an effort to appeal to a broader spectrum of women.<sup>12</sup>

*Die Gleichheit* proved successful in appealing to women. By 1909, 82,000 women subscribed to the periodical compared to only 62,259 female members of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. By 1914, the number of female subscribers to the periodical reached 125,000.<sup>13</sup> The nationalities of subscribers did not remain exclusively German, indicating an appeal that spanned countries. Perhaps because Zetkin had been elected Secretary of the International Women's Secretariat in 1907, *Die Gleichheit* targeted women throughout the world.

Zetkin received help from her Russian comrades in making *Die Gleichheit* a success. Even before the Bolshevik Revolution, Zetkin corresponded with Alexandra Kollontai. Kollontai, also a socialist feminist, shared many of the same goals as Zetkin. They would eventually become close friends, but in 1909, their correspondence remained businesslike. In a January 28, 1909, letter to Kollontai, Zetkin greeted her as Worthy Comrade Kollontai [*Werte Genossin Kollontay*]. She included addresses for other communist women and briefly discussed circumstances with the periodical *Die Gleichheit*.<sup>14</sup> Kollontai likely aided the distribution of the periodical to socialist women in Russia.

An April 3, 1911, letter took a similar tone in discussing matters of agitation. In addition, Zetkin asked Kollontai to contribute to *Die Gleichheit*. She requested an article

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>14</sup> Clara Zetkin to Alexandra Kollontai, 28 January 1909, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands (hereinafter abbreviated as IISH).

about female Russian workers' participation in the May Day celebration, or the International Labor Day.<sup>15</sup> Such correspondence likely continued between Zetkin and Kollontai as each labored in her respective country to spread not only socialism but also recognition of women's unique needs within a socialist framework.

By 1913, Zetkin addressed Kollontai as "dear," [*Liebe Genossin Kollontai*] and asked for additional help with *Die Gleichheit*. The two women sent letters back and forth throughout 1913 in which they tackled such issues as women's suffrage, protection of mothers and children, and enrichment of daily life. Both women agreed that protection of mothers was vital to the development of women workers.<sup>16</sup> Kollontai suggested in December of that year that she write an article about motherhood and insuring mothers. She explained that women did not receive adequate care in Russia's hospitals, so an article on this topic would greatly benefit readers of *Die Gleichheit*.<sup>17</sup>

After discussing matters of business regarding the communist movement among women, Kollontai included a special note to Zetkin. She expressed gratitude for Zetkin's friendship and love for Zetkin's big heart and beautiful soul [*Mensch mit grossen Herzen und schönen Seele*].<sup>18</sup> Clearly, a friendship developed between Zetkin and Kollontai as the two women, with similar values and aspirations, worked together. By the time the Great War began, Zetkin had succeeded in developing a strong relationship with other

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<sup>15</sup> Clara Zetkin to Alexandra Kollontai, 3 April 1911, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

<sup>16</sup> Clara Zetkin to Alexandra Kollontai, 5 December 1913, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandra Kollontai to Clara Zetkin, 23 December 1913, transcript in the hand of Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

socialist women. *Die Gleichheit*, as it expanded to an internationalist periodical, aided the development of unity between Zetkin, as a German, and Kollontai, as a Russian.

World War I naturally brought problems for Zetkin, who was dedicated to an international revolution. How could she support a war against her Russian comrades? By 1905 *Die Gleichheit* had come under the auspices of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD).<sup>19</sup> Zetkin remained editor of the publication until its affiliation with the SPD caused difficulty for her during the Great War. After 1914, the official stance of the SPD supported the war. Those who opposed the war left the SPD and formed their own party—the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD).<sup>20</sup> This split meant that Zetkin, who published anti-war articles in *Die Gleichheit*, was ousted by the sponsoring SPD. The SPD produced a new periodical in January 1916 called *Gewerkschaftliche Frauenzeitung*, which quickly appealed to social democratic women.<sup>21</sup> If Zetkin maintained her dedication to international solidarity, she had to focus on issues other than her struggles with *Die Gleichheit*. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 presented a new focus for Zetkin's political endeavors.

### **Zetkin and the Bolsheviks**

Clara Zetkin had great hopes for Russia as early as the 1905 revolution. In discussing the anticipation of victory for the Russian working class during this

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<sup>19</sup> Badia, 62. The SPD gained control over the various social democratic presses in Germany, so Badia argues that by 1905 the SPD had ownership over the Dietz Verlag, through which Zetkin published *Die Gleichheit*. Women such as Lily Braun were happy about this move because they felt Zetkin had too much control over the periodical.

<sup>20</sup> In 1919, the USPD became the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

<sup>21</sup> Jean H Quartaert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 216. In only fifteen months, the number of subscribers reached 100,000 and doubled by December 1918.

revolutionary period in Russia, Zetkin said, “Russian victory is German victory, is European victory, international victory.”<sup>22</sup> Luise Dornemann, a GDR biographer of Zetkin, asserts that this revolution had particular significance to Zetkin, Luxemburg, and others in inspiring an international workers’ movement.<sup>23</sup> In truth, the Russian revolution of 1905 inspired workers’ strikes including one in February in which over 200,000 workers went on strike.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, even the 1905-1906 Russian Revolution fostered Zetkin’s promotion of international solidarity.

Zetkin used the example of this first Russian Revolution further to discuss the role of the working classes in a revolution. She argued that the industrial workers of Russia were the country’s mightiest power. In addition, the German workers should learn from the Russian revolutionaries and try to emulate them.<sup>25</sup> Zetkin likewise studied the methods of fighting among the Russian proletariat. She concluded that the demonstrations and strikes in Russia could also be implemented in Germany.<sup>26</sup> Zetkin hoped to apply principles from the Soviet model to her own work among communists in Germany.

The Bolsheviks, in turn, highly respected Zetkin. Inessa Armand and Lenin both corresponded with Zetkin and supported her in spreading socialism among women and in building international socialism.<sup>27</sup> A major event in building the relationship of Clara

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<sup>22</sup> Luise Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin: Ein Lebensbild* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 176.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

Zetkin with the Bolsheviks was the International Women's Conference in March 1915 held in Bern. Hundreds of women from throughout Europe attended this conference, and Nadezhda Krupskaya led the Bolshevik delegation. The delegates spoke against the imperialist war being waged in Europe as well as the fracturing of the social democratic parties.<sup>28</sup> Zetkin, along with her Russian comrades, was concerned about the fate of an internationalist movement.

The March 1915 conference was part of what Tania Puschnerat calls a time of crisis for Zetkin. She looks at Zetkin's transition from social democracy to communism and emphasizes the importance of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia in fostering Zetkin's conversion to the more radical position of a revolutionary communist. While Zetkin had earlier believed that socialist revolution was in the distant future, the Bolshevik Revolution changed her stance. Zetkin viewed the Bolsheviks as having provided practical solutions for reaching the goals of socialism.<sup>29</sup> This admiration for the Bolsheviks' pragmatism saturated Zetkin's writings. Unlike the social democrats of Germany, Zetkin and the KPD became impatient for revolution through seeing its realization in Russia.

The extent to which Clara Zetkin was influenced by the Russian October revolution is clear in Puschnerat's discussion of the "Bolshevizing" of Clara Zetkin.<sup>30</sup> After the Bolshevik Revolution, Zetkin visited Russia several times, thus fostering a strong bond with her Russian comrades. This relationship was strengthened, as was

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 234-235.

<sup>29</sup> Tania Puschnerat, *Clara Zetkin: Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003), 222-223. She sees the years 1914-1921 as a crisis for Zetkin in transforming her views of revolution.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 235.

Zetkin's enthusiasm, by her 1920 journey to Soviet Russia.<sup>31</sup> Despite her poor health, Zetkin made the journey.<sup>32</sup>

While in Russia, Zetkin visited factories and met with workers, women, and leaders.<sup>33</sup> The city of Petrograd made a particular impression on Zetkin as she realized the hardships of the people there. Zetkin saw that, despite the people's pains and sorrow, they were heroes, hoping for a brighter future.<sup>34</sup> Zetkin was particularly impressed with "Communist Saturdays and Sundays," days in which workers voluntarily labored on special projects to help clean the workplace and the community. She was amazed that the people would voluntarily work, asserting that nothing such as this has happened in history.<sup>35</sup> She seemed to view the Russians as happy workers, eager to do anything necessary to improve society. As Zetkin dedicated herself to aiding the workers and peasants of Russia, her prominence among the workers grew as she spent time in their factories, getting to know their lives and needs.<sup>36</sup> Zetkin's personal experiences in the Soviet Union expanded her admiration of the new regime, and the common people began to revere her.

Zetkin developed an especially strong bond with Soviet women. Wherever Zetkin spoke in the Soviet Union, women came to hear her, and Zetkin treated them all equally,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>32</sup> Dornemann, 314.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>36</sup> For more details on Zetkin's travels in the Soviet Union, see L. G. Babichenko, "Die erste Reise Clara Zetkins in die Sowjetunion," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 22, no. 2 (1980): 242-252; L. G. Babichenko, "Clara Zetkin und Sowjetrußland 1923," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 27, no. 2 (1985): 241-248.

whether they were workers, peasants, or members of the intelligentsia.<sup>37</sup> Zetkin's relationship with leading Bolshevik women also developed. She had long been friends with Kollontai, and her correspondence with Elena Stasova indicated similar feelings of friendship. Zetkin called Stasova "dearest" [*Liebste, teuerste Freundin*] and addressed her by first name. In letters after the Bolshevik Revolution, the women rarely used the term "comrade" for each other, although they used the term to discuss others involved in the movement.<sup>38</sup> Rather than discussing purely business, Stasova felt friendly enough with Zetkin in 1925 to ask about her health. In a letter written a week later, Zetkin again responded to Stasova congenially, speaking of private matters about her health and wanting to go to her dacha.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, from Zetkin's relationship with both Kollontai and Stasova, she had great love for and interest in Soviet women's experiences.

As Zetkin's relationship with the Bolsheviks developed after World War I, so did her efforts to once again edit a periodical—this time one specifically targeting communist women rather than those affiliated with social democracy. In 1919, she created *Die Kommunistin*, a biweekly periodical specifically for women in the KPD. Until 1921, Zetkin edited the periodical herself. From 1921 through 1926, Martha Arendsee edited *Die Kommunistin*, though Zetkin maintained her influence as the periodical's founder and overseer.

*Die Kommunistin* intended to be different from *Die Gleichheit*. It went back to the roots of what Zetkin had tried to accomplish with *Die Gleichheit* before interference from

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<sup>37</sup> Dornemann, 379.

<sup>38</sup> Clara Zetkin to Elena Stasova, 8 April 1924, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH. See also letters from Zetkin to Stasova 3 December 1924 and 13 May 1925.

<sup>39</sup> Clara Zetkin to Elena Stasova, 20 May 1925, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

the SPD. Consequently, the periodical addressed the traditional feminist issues of equal salary, protection of mothers and children, and helping the unemployed. In addition, it included discussion of the *Communist Manifesto* and communism's theoretical foundations. Yet, *Die Kommunistin* was very much a party paper. The introduction to the first issue stated that the goal of the periodical was to get back to the roots of socialism and to clearly distinguish the KPD from the SPD.<sup>40</sup> The article presented almost a vengeful tone as it reminisced about the early days of *Die Gleichheit* that had been taken away. Communism was the only method for saving the world from the bourgeoisie, and *Die Kommunistin* would bring German women closer to that truth.

Although *Die Kommunistin* emphasized a theoretical approach to communism, the periodical nevertheless made itself appealing to average readers. Each issue included one or more pictures or political cartoons. The last section of each issue was a feuilleton, and poetry was also a common inclusion in the paper. Issues were short—an average of only eight pages, making them more appealing to a wider audience. It is, however, interesting to note that no issue during 1919 and 1920, when Zetkin edited the periodical, contained any type of picture or political cartoon. Perhaps *Die Kommunistin* faced the same demand as *Die Gleichheit*: be less theoretical, and appeal to a larger audience, or the periodical will be eliminated.

While *Die Kommunistin* targeted female members of the KPD, the contents of the periodical also addressed international issues. It included articles by Bolshevik women in order to make their experiences known to other communist women in Europe. In addition, each issue included a small section reporting socialist women's movements

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<sup>40</sup> "Was wir wollen," *Die Kommunistin* 1, no. 1 (1 May 1919): 1. Although no author is given, this introductory article was most likely written by Zetkin because she typically wrote the opening article in most issues of her periodicals. The style and rhetoric are also similar to her other writings.

outside of Germany. In December 1921, responsibility for *Die Kommunistin* was taken over by the women's section of the KPD.<sup>41</sup> This shift in editors became clear as the subtitle to *Die Kommunistin* indicated its direct tie to the KPD as an appendage of the Communist International. Zetkin was no longer editor, though the periodical continued to mention her as its founder. Even after Zetkin was replaced as editor, *Die Kommunistin* included somewhat of an international focus as entire articles were devoted to Soviet Russia and other countries in Europe. However, the major emphasis of articles in *Die Kommunistin* focused on German communist women.

It is unclear why *Die Kommunistin* stopped being produced after 1926. It was one of many communist women's periodicals being produced in Europe at the time, and it was just one of Zetkin's many agitation projects. It is likely, however, that the end of *Die Kommunistin* could be attributed more to the situation of the KPD rather than Zetkin's own circumstances. As with *Die Gleichheit*, *Die Kommunistin* had been released from Zetkin's control.

### **Overview of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale***

Just after Zetkin was replaced as editor of *Die Kommunistin*, she formed a new publication. It was very similar to that of her previous periodicals in that it targeted an international audience of communist women. However, unlike *Die Gleichheit* and *Die Kommunistin*, Zetkin maintained control over the editing and publication of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*. Because it was truly her periodical for international agitation rather than one belonging to a German political party, Zetkin could use *KFI* to express her own attitudes and discuss what she deemed most important.

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<sup>41</sup> Badia, 232.

Zetkin's idea for *KFI* began in 1920. She proposed the following to Lenin: form a committee of communist women from various countries, and meet together in congresses to discuss topics related to women in the workplace and social care of mothers and children.<sup>42</sup> In a February 1921 letter to Alexandra Kollontai, Zetkin extended this idea by proposing the creation of a new organization and its periodical. Concerned with various agitation efforts throughout Europe, Zetkin sought for a method to publish conference proceedings (both women's conferences and Comintern conferences) to her female comrades. She wanted to mobilize women even further in the communist movement.<sup>43</sup> Thus blossomed the idea for the Communist Women International and its monthly newsletter—*KFI*. Zetkin told Kollontai that the Communist Women International would be an appendage of the Comintern, similar to the Communist Youth International.<sup>44</sup> Such an organization could not wait, though it would be an organization more on paper than in reality [*mehr auf Papier als in Wirklichkeit*].<sup>45</sup> Thus, the newsletter for the organization would be the only manifestation of its existence.

Zetkin hoped that the periodical for the Communist Women International could be published out of Moscow by the International Communist Women Secretariat but knew that transportation difficulties would hinder such a plan. Therefore, Zetkin proposed that she take over the editing and publication of the periodical. She did so

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<sup>42</sup> Clara Zetkin, "Lenin on the Women's Question," interview by Clara Zetkin (Moscow, Autumn 1920), *My Memorandum Book* (International Publishers, 1925). Available from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1925/lenin/zetkin2.htm>

<sup>43</sup> Clara Zetkin to Alexandra Kollontai, 1 February 1921, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

grudgingly, noting that she was overworked.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Zetkin stated that the Communist Women International must succeed, and she would commit herself to overcoming the obstacles.<sup>47</sup> She already had access to a printer, so printing *KFI* would not be a problem.

Zetkin set out other criteria for the newsletter of the Communist Women International: it must support the Third International both materially and morally, it would be translated into French, English, German, and Russian, and the length of each issue would be approximately nine pages.<sup>48</sup> The publication would include reports, a collection of materials, and theoretical clarification and schooling. A final suggestion for the periodical illustrated Zetkin's discomfort with its title: *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*. She stated that she could simply not come up with a better title, but perhaps Alexandra and her friends in the women's secretariat could come up with something more creative.<sup>49</sup> Apparently they could not.

The creation of *KFI* may have stemmed from elements of Zetkin's bitterness from losing control of both *Die Gleichheit* and *Die Kommunistin* or the lack of attention given women in the communist movement altogether. In the introduction to the first issue of *KFI*, Zetkin argued that previous attempts to include women's issues within the communist movement had failed, noting that the Communist Women International did not even have representation in the Second International.<sup>50</sup> She hoped that *KFI* would

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Each issue ended up being closer to thirty pages rather than only nine.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Zetkin, "Geleitwort," 2. These are both Comintern organizations.

therefore solidify women's position within the overall international communist movement. She stated that *KFI* was the combined international organ of the communist women's movement of all countries.<sup>51</sup> Zetkin thus saw *KFI* as a means for gathering women's efforts throughout the world in supporting international revolution.

Unlike *Die Gleichheit* and *Die Kommunistin*, Zetkin had enough control over *KFI* that she could treat it as her own pet project. She included discussion of Marxist theory, which had been criticized with *Die Gleichheit*. She maintained a purely international focus, something not included in *Die Kommunistin* because of its ties to the KPD. *KFI* has no special sections for mothers and children, as found in her previous periodicals, and the only picture included throughout its publication run was one of Lenin on the cover of the January 1925 issue. Poetry and literature discussions were always placed within a socialist context. Clearly, *KFI* exemplified all Zetkin had wished for in her previous women's periodicals. It is therefore unclear why historians such as Badia and Puschnerat have disregarded *KFI* and only occasionally referenced it.

The typical structure of *KFI* included sections that promoted Marxist scholarship, understanding of current events, and enrichment of women's intellect. The major sections in any given issue of *KFI* contained articles, reports, notes on movements within various countries, and concluded with a feuilleton section. *KFI* even incorporated plays, poetry, and discussion of literature that might be of interest to communist women. Several issues of *KFI* included conference proceedings from the Third International as well as proceedings of international women's conferences. Popular topics for articles included

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 1. "Es ist das internationale gemeinsame Organ der kommunistischen Frauenbewegung aller Länder."

government programs for mothers and children, issues related to prostitution, health care, worries about the occupation of the Ruhr, agitation efforts, and tributes to Lenin.

Women's role in the communist movement was clear in Zetkin's introduction to the periodical and throughout the journal's five years of publication. The women's movement seemed to play an even larger role in *KFI* than did the communist revolution itself. Zetkin stated that both the development of the non-communist proletarian women's movement and the bourgeois women's movement fell into the circle of what *KFI* hoped to accomplish.<sup>52</sup> True to this promise, most issues of *KFI* included a section discussing the progress of women's movements outside the communist women's movement. While Zetkin may have hoped that this would recruit women to communism, the content of the majority of the articles in *KFI* assumed readers were already interested in communism.

*KFI* aimed at developing a sisterhood among communist women of the world. It provided updates on how women were doing and presented a newsletter-style approach to making readers aware of the latest trends in socialist feminist movements. During the first couple years of publication, issues came out regularly and focused mostly on European interests. In 1921, discussions of women in Soviet Russia played a particularly important role. Issues in 1922 were also published regularly and again emphasized feminist and socialist movements in continental Europe. By 1923, issues were sporadic, with only January through July being published. Yet by 1923, the periodical moved outside of Europe in addressing the latest news in other regions of the world, particularly East Asia. Only a handful of issues came out in 1924, and 1925's four issues ended with the May/June issue. The year 1925 also found a renewed interest in Soviet Russia and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 4.

expressing gratitude for Lenin. Other than the changes noted, the content, focus, and style of *KFI* remained unchanged. Articles from 1921 could have easily been published in a 1925 issue, and vice versa.

The sporadic nature of the periodical indicates that it was not the highest priority for the Communist International and likely depended on Zetkin's own ability to print new issues. For example, Zetkin visited the Soviet Union three times in 1923.<sup>53</sup> Her time spent away from Germany coincided with the lack of new issues of *KFI* being published. The publication run of the periodical also coincided with Zetkin's membership in the KPD's Central Committee. When she was not reelected to the Committee in June 1925, *KFI* also stopped being published.<sup>54</sup> These facts, in addition to possible questions of funding and illness, give plausible reasons why Zetkin stopped producing *KFI*.

### **The Soviet Model in *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale***

*KFI* appeared during the rush of interest in the Soviets just after the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War had ended. Recognizing this interest, Zetkin included many articles in *KFI* about Soviet Russia. Women such as Alexandra Kollontai and Nadezhda Krupskaja frequently authored articles. In addition, various programs and innovations in Soviet Russia served as examples of what communist women throughout the world could strive for.

As Zetkin asserted in her introduction to *KFI*, women would be eager to learn news from a country that had experienced a victorious revolution. Table 1 illustrates the

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<sup>53</sup> Badia, 227. She made a trip to the Soviet Union in March, from June through September, and from mid-October through mid-December. The last two trips may explain why no issues of *KFI* were published between July and December of 1923 as Zetkin was not in Stuttgart during those months.

<sup>54</sup> See Badia's chronology of Zetkin. She was in the Central Committee from December 1920 until June 1925 and then again from March 1927 through June 1929. Perhaps Zetkin's not being reelected in 1925 discouraged her from supporting the Communist International. When she was reelected in 1927, Zetkin's physical ailments could have prevented her from once again editing a periodical.

role of the Soviet model in *KFI*, indicating the number of articles discussing the Soviet Union included each year in *KFI*. These numbers consist of articles directly discussing the situation of women in the Soviet Union, proceedings from conferences held in Moscow, articles analyzing Russian literature, experiences from International Women’s Day, and articles about international issues that make particular mention of the Soviet Union. In addition, the first issue of 1925 memorialized Lenin and discussed his role in women’s liberation.

Table 1 also shows that 1921, 1924, and 1925 produced nearly twice as many articles about the Soviet Union as years 1922 and 1923. Soviet Russia provided readily available news to get *KFI* going, and the one-year anniversary of Lenin’s death in January 1925 prompted further discussion of Soviet experiences. Despite the seeming bursts of attention to the Soviet Union, during the almost five years of *KFI* publication, only two out of a total twenty-five issues did not include at least one article specifically discussing Soviet Russia. Thus articles pertaining to the Soviet Union appeared consistently throughout *KFI*’s history.

Table 1. Articles Discussing the Soviet Union in *KFI*

<b>Year</b>	<b># of issues</b>	<b>Total # of Articles</b>	<b># of articles discussing the Soviet Union</b>	<b>Percentage of articles discussing the Soviet Union</b>
<b>1921</b>	6	70	29	41.4
<b>1922</b>	6	69	16	23.2
<b>1923</b>	6	46	11	23.9
<b>1924</b>	3	19	8	42.1
<b>1925</b>	4	34	15	44.1

Articles in *KFI* focused on various issues relevant to women in early twentieth-century society. While the articles discussed a variety of topics from many countries, the

articles about women in the Soviet Union focused on three main topics: the new legal position granted to women as compared to that of capitalist countries, state protection of mothers and children, and the development of women as workers. The periodical addressed communist women's particular needs, using the Soviet model to confirm that communism would provide equality both in theory and practice, lighten the burdens of motherhood, and develop them as workers. These articles illustrated the expectations of a generation of female Bolsheviks, such as Zetkin, who would eventually become disillusioned with unfulfilled promises.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOVIET WOMEN'S POSITION IN CONTRAST TO THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN CAPITALIST NATIONS

For feminists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the suffrage movement represented the capstone of what women sought in terms of equality. Being given the right to vote symbolized equality with men and a welcome to the public sphere. After World War I, European nations, as well as the United States, granted women the franchise. Germany's Weimar Republic, and its democratic liberation of women, thus became a shining example to women worldwide. This legal equality between men and women was the first step to social and economic liberation for all.

Socialist feminists presented a different perspective on the liberation of women and their equality with men. The right to vote, or even complete equality granted in a constitution, did not suffice. The true test of equality presented itself in the practical application of legal equality. For communist women, the Soviet example of providing both written and practiced liberation for women proved that communism was the only method for making men and women equal.

The Bolsheviks did not wait long before granting men and women the same rights. In 1918, the regime established new laws and codes concerning marriage and the family. These decrees were gender neutral, allowing spouses their own identities in addition to economic independence. Either spouse could request alimony from the other,

and all, no matter the gender, would be given equal pay for equal work.<sup>1</sup> The Bolsheviks sought to liberate the masses, regardless of gender. Thus, gender was simply not an issue in terms of legal rights.

For Zetkin, the equality granted in capitalist countries was inferior to that given to Soviet women because it was only in Soviet Russia that such equality was actually practiced. Thus, most *KFI* articles about women in the Soviet Union aimed at proving that life for Soviet women was much better than life for women in capitalist nations such as England, France, and Germany. By comparing the Soviet Union to capitalist countries, articles in *KFI* emphasized that women in the Soviet Union were equal to men both in theory and in practice. Zetkin viewed Soviet women's practical equality as a direct result of communist revolution.

### **Remembering Lenin**

Soviet women's legal equality did not come without a great leader who could foster change. For Zetkin, Lenin was the savior of women, someone who led them to salvation when women elsewhere were not so fortunate. It was because of him that Soviet women experienced unprecedented equality. The January 1925 issue of *KFI* was a special issue devoted solely to Lenin to mark the one-year anniversary of his death. Zetkin's introductory article, "Was die Frauen Lenin verdanken" presented an overview of reasons why women could be grateful to Lenin.<sup>2</sup> Zetkin admitted that Lenin had never written a book or tract devoted to the "women's question," but he nevertheless influenced women

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 50.

<sup>2</sup> Clara Zetkin "Was die Frauen Lenin verdanken," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 5, no. 1 (January 1925): 1-12. In English, "What Women Thank Lenin For."

greatly. She called him the great redeemer [*Erlöser*] of the female gender.<sup>3</sup> It was through Lenin that other wonderful privileges had been granted to women in the Soviet Union—privileges not given to women in other nations.

Because Zetkin was continually interested in Marxist theory and ensuring that the people were properly educated in it, she viewed Lenin's competence in Marxism as something for which women could thank him. He opened the eyes of the proletariat and proved that the Soviet regime, a proletarian dictatorship, was the only type of government that could destroy the power of factory owners, merchants, bankers, and all other capitalists.<sup>4</sup> Lenin educated the people of Russia in a way that had not been done for those of other countries. As an intellectual, Lenin led the proletariat to a greater understanding of its potential future.

But the teaching of Marxist theory was not the only thing for which women could thank Lenin. He had proved that communism was not an empty delusion by showing women in countries other than Russia that there was hope for them. He gave women courage.<sup>5</sup> Even though Lenin led the revolution in Russia, he promised to be the savior to the workers of the world. Zetkin stated that the proletarian revolution in Russia was the beginning of world revolution—worthy of admiration, gigantic, but nevertheless the beginning. No one was surer of this fact than Lenin, a student of Karl Marx.<sup>6</sup> As the creator of the Communist International, Lenin proved his dedication to worldwide revolution. The point was vital to a periodical such as *KFI* because Zetkin wanted to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 6.

show women in German and throughout the world that Lenin could be thanked and admired not just for his successes in Russia but in his position as international revolutionary.

Zetkin summed up her attitude towards Lenin's legacy by stating that memorials of Lenin were also revolutionary women's works.<sup>7</sup> As women looked at a statue of Lenin, they could be grateful for the liberation he provided for women of the world. He was woman's friend, helper, teacher, and leader.<sup>8</sup> Zetkin's article in *KFI* confirmed Lenin's place of prominence among communist women worldwide and encouraged them to wish for a similar savior in their own countries.

### **Comparisons with Capitalist Countries**

Because Soviet women were fortunate enough to have a leader such as Lenin, they were in a much better legal and social position than women in capitalist countries. Democratic nations had experienced revolutions just after World War I, but they lacked the completeness of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. One of the tenets of socialist feminism, or the attitude of communist women, maintained that freedom and equality for women would come only through a communist revolution. To rationalize the validity of this argument, Zetkin authored the article "Die beiden Novemberrevolutionen und die Frauen" in the November/December 1921 issue of *KFI*.<sup>9</sup> The article looked at two November revolutions: the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the 1918 German revolution that created the Weimar Republic. Zetkin proved to her readers that, even though the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>9</sup> Clara Zetkin, "Die beiden Novemberrevolutionen und die Frauen," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 8/9 (November/December 1921): 2-13. In English, "The Two November Revolutions and Women."

Weimar Republic granted women legal equality, it was only in Russia that women actually lived in an equal, liberated society.

In both Germany and Russia, the revolutions provided a great deal of hope for women. Feminists wanted legal equality, equal opportunity in the workplace, and help as mothers. Zetkin illustrated the lot of women in Russia since the Bolshevik Revolution. They had political equality with men, the same work responsibilities as men from the age of sixteen onwards, enjoyed an eight-hour workday, and had access to all occupations. In addition, women received equal pay for equal work.<sup>10</sup> Mothers in Russia also received aid with time off before and after the birth of a child and access to special homes and nurseries for mothers and children.<sup>11</sup> Zetkin's description of post-revolution Russia portrayed a socialist feminist paradise. Neither work nor family placed a burden on women as communism provided practical equality between men and women.

Zetkin also recognized that working women were distressed over the fact that they often made less than men. Zetkin noticed that this was typically because women often did not have a similar set of skills as men. To combat this discrepancy in skill level, the Soviet government created training courses for working women and female peasants. In addition, children, who began working at age sixteen, attended vocational schools. Zetkin noted that since 1917, more than 80,000 vocational schools had been established, compared to a total of only 55,000 schools established in 1911.<sup>12</sup> Because of the November revolution in Russia, men and women had equal access to education and job

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

training. Through government assistance, women became equals with men in all regards—not just through the written law.

Zetkin contrasted the mighty achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution with the unfulfilled promises of the German Revolution of 1918. Despite the legal equality between men and women, the number of female Parliament members in Germany was small.<sup>13</sup> Equal work for equal pay in Germany rarely occurred, and the eight-hour workday was still only on paper rather than a reality. In contrast to the benefits afforded to Russian mothers, the life of German women faced little aid for mothers. In summary, the German November Revolution did not give women equal standing as men either in the law or in practice.<sup>14</sup> The equality between men and women as outlined in the Weimar Constitution was meaningless because such equality was not reinforced. Neither government nor society supported women's involvement in politics, work training, or challenges in motherhood.

Why did the Weimar Constitution not uphold its promise that men and women were equal? Zetkin's answer was that the German November Revolution failed the women because it failed the proletariat.<sup>15</sup> In Germany, the dukes of industry and banking kings [*die Industrieherzöge und Bankkönige*] were the rulers of the empire.<sup>16</sup> Thus, capitalism controlled Germany and thereby prohibited women from becoming men's

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9. Zetkin was one of the few women in the German Reichstag, and she was a member during the entire course of the Weimar Republic. One of her most famous speeches happened in 1932 when she, as the eldest member, opened up a new session of the Reichstag. At this point, much of her work involved fighting fascism.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11. "Die deutsche Novemberrevolution mußte den Frauen gegenüber versagen, weil sie dem Proletariat gegenüber versagte."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 12.

equals. Only in Russia, where the proletariat governed the country, could women be as equal as men. Zetkin's analysis of the two November revolutions supported the socialist feminist stance that women's liberation only came through the liberation of the working class. Zetkin supported feminism not as its own movement but as a byproduct of communism's restructuring of society. Accordingly, only Soviet Russia liberated women from inequality in the workplace and the burdens of motherhood because it was the only country that had supported a communist revolution.

### **Equality through Family Law**

Zetkin's proof that the Bolshevik Revolution liberated women rested upon the fact that equality was not just written but actually practiced. As stated in Zetkin's 1925 article about Lenin, communism was not an empty delusion. Lenin was the one to put communism into practice in the Soviet Union, and the effects of his actions allowed women in the Soviet Union to experience a quality of life and level of rights not allowed to women in capitalist nations such as Germany. One of the most concrete actions meant to improve the status of women in the Soviet Union was the creation of family laws.

Marxist theory argued that the family was an economic institution and therefore oppressive. In his 1920 interview with Zetkin, Lenin said, "The decay, putrescence, and filth of bourgeois marriage with its difficult dissolution, its license for the husband and bondage for the wife, and its disgustingly false sex morality and relations fill the best and most spiritually active of people with the utmost loathing."<sup>17</sup> Lenin promoted the idea among communists that bourgeois marriage was oppressive, giving men freedom to rule

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<sup>17</sup> Clara Zetkin, "Lenin on the Women's Question," interview by Clara Zetkin (Moscow, Autumn 1920), *My Memorandum Book* (International Publishers, 1925). Available from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1925/lenin/zetkin2.htm>

their wives and commit adultery. Wives in such a situation became property of the man, enslaved to him. The liberal family structure was, in fact, supported by socialist women including Kollontai. Communism sought to revolutionize family structure, and Zetkin supported these changes.

The Soviet regime brought freedom to women by eliminating bourgeois marriage. Iakov Brandenburgski emphasized this freedom in “Familien- und Eherecht in der Sowjetunion,”<sup>18</sup> for the February 1925 issue of *KFI*. Brandenburgski argued that communism supplied not only social welfare but also the legal equality of men and women in marriage. In order to prove this point, he explored Soviet family law and compared it to that of capitalist nations, particularly France. Brandenburgski discussed the Soviet struggle against church marriage in favor of civil marriage. If a couple did not have a registered civil marriage, was their marriage valid? The author argued yes—in the Soviet Union, there was no difference between a registered and a non-registered marriage.<sup>19</sup> The author used this point of law to demonstrate the complete equality between persons.<sup>20</sup> Because a registered marriage symbolized traditional marriage, it did not promote egalitarianism between husbands and wives.

Capitalist nations, which permitted only registered marriages, maintained the oppression of women. Brandenburgski cited a French law that said a husband had the

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<sup>18</sup> Iakov Brandenburgski, “Familien- und Eherecht in der Sowjetunion,” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 5, no. 2 (February 1925): 26-32. In English “Family and Marital Law in the Soviet Union.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. “Vom juristischen Standpunkt aus gibt es in der Sowjetrepublik keinen wesentlich Unterschied zwischen registrierter und unregistrierter Ehe, und es kann solch einen Unterschied nicht geben.” From a judicial standpoint, there is no difference between registered and unregistered marriage, and such a distinction is impossible.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

duty to take care of his wife, and the wife must therefore obey her husband and submit to him in all things.<sup>21</sup> He used this example to establish the main thrust of his article: at the time Soviet law was the only law of the world that brought to pass the emancipation of women.<sup>22</sup> Such a bold declaration sought to convince women that communism provided legal equality in addition to the social welfare privileges discussed by other authors in *KFI*. Through communism, women would not be constrained by marriage and children; rather, men and women could develop relationships as equal partners, and the collective cared for their offspring.

Historian Wendy Goldman argues, however, that Brandenburgski may have presented a highly optimistic view of Soviet law. While some communists saw de facto marriage as the way of the future and an opportunity for female emancipation, Goldman notes that others saw it as a sign of chaos, disruption, and a war-ravaged society.<sup>23</sup> She cites a 1924 article by Ivan Stepanov, a member of the Communist Party, who stated, “Women remained chained to the ruined family hearth, and men, whistling gaily, walk out leaving women with the children.”<sup>24</sup> Stepanov’s interpretation provided early criticism of the rose-colored analyses offered by his contemporaries. Such a view was rarely seen in the articles of *KFI*.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 32. “Gegenwärtig die Sowjetgesetzgebung [ist] die einzige Gesetzgebung der Welt ist, die die Befreiung der Frau in Wirklichkeit fördert.”

<sup>23</sup> Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 217.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Original article titled “Problema Pola,” in E. Iaroslavskii, *voprosy zhizni i bor’by* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1924): 205.

Anne Gorsuch agrees with Goldman in her skepticism of equality in relation to men and women in 1920s Russia and addresses the reality of women's equality in practice.<sup>25</sup> She looks at numbers of women, and the reception of young women, in the Komsomol, or the youth league for the Russian Communist Party. Gorsuch uses this research to show that family life in Soviet Russia differed very little from that in other, capitalist, nations.

Even after the Bolshevik Revolution, Gorsuch argues, many Russian men viewed women as backward, the antithesis of revolutionary ideals. Parents even forbade their daughters from joining the Komsomol because "they did not see any reason why a girl should learn politics or participate in social work when her principal task was to learn how to care for the household and to raise children."<sup>26</sup> While women such as Zetkin and Kollontai encouraged women to be politically active and to develop themselves as workers, family and associates told these same women that they had no place in political activities. Women could not participate in strengthening the revolution.

Women's lack of participation may have also been of their own choosing. Not all women felt comfortable participating in politics or joining the Komsomol. Some women felt intellectually or politically unprepared or viewed politics as men's work.<sup>27</sup> Lenin and Zetkin both valued Marxist training of young communists, and perhaps women realized their own lack of knowledge compared to that of the Old Bolsheviks. Politics also

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<sup>25</sup> Anne E. Gorsuch, "'A Woman is Not a Man': The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 636-660.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 641. For further discussion of women's own inability to assert themselves politically, see Barbara Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). She argues that many Bolshevik women did not feel well versed enough in Marxism to be as politically active as their male counterparts.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 642.

burdened women further as it put undue stress on young women, leading to the “triple burden” of caring for family, work, and political involvement.<sup>28</sup> When women already struggled to balance family and work, they did not eagerly greet the additional responsibility of duty to politics.

Because Zetkin herself emphasized the theoretical foundations of Marxism, she could not easily understand why many Soviet women did not appreciate a theoretical approach to communist life.<sup>29</sup> These women felt that the Komsomol did not address their need to seek practical help for family issues. It is interesting that this was a similar critique of Zetkin’s periodicals; she stressed the importance of theories surrounding communism whereas the female public sought publications that more clearly addressed their practical needs. Clearly, the Komsomol did not fulfill the basic needs and interests of Soviet women, and some likely found Zetkin’s approach to *KFI* equally uninteresting and useless.

The practical equality portrayed in *KFI* also did not correspond to the reality of the culture in Soviet Russia. In a typical Komsomol cell, there were six women as compared to thirty or forty young men. This masculine culture made women feel uncomfortable as they did not enjoy the teasing, jokes, and sexual harassment that they experienced at meetings.<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Wood proposes, “If a young Komsomol woman did not agree to sleep with her male peers, she could be accused of ‘puritanism’ or antisocial behavior. If, on the other hand, she did sleep with them and had the misfortune to get

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 643.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 650.

pregnant, she could be shunned as a loose woman.”<sup>31</sup> Despite Soviet law and rhetoric, woman were still seen as sex objects rather than comrades.

Brandenburgski’s article in *KFI* presented a theoretical rather than a practical reality of family law in the Soviet Union. While Zetkin emphasized the equality of men and women in practice rather than just in legal writ, Soviet family codes did not lead to changes in cultural attitudes towards women. Communist revolution could not change women’s position in the eyes of men or their traditional views of themselves. Thus the legal equality in Soviet Russia as portrayed in *KFI* reflected the optimism of Zetkin and other Bolsheviks whose own theoretical approach to communism overshadowed their understanding of its practical application.

### **Supporting Soviet Sisters**

Despite *KFI*’s clear evidence of idealism, Zetkin did not always ignore the harsh realities of life for Soviet women. Concessions indicated problems in the Soviet Union mixed with optimistic views of the country’s successes. “Manifest der Konferenz an die Kommunistinnen der ganzen Welt” was an example of this. It began with the following words “Es ist kein Märchen und ist kein Traum” (It is no fairy tale and is no dream.).<sup>32</sup> The article continued by describing a place in which the people no longer lived as slaves, where all able-bodied persons found work, where mother, child, and sick found help and protection. Where was this amazing land? Russia—the only Soviet republic in the world.

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<sup>31</sup> Wood, 207.

<sup>32</sup> Delegates to the Second International Conference of Communist Women in Moscow and the International Women’s Secretariat, “Manifest der Konferenz an die Kommunistinnen der ganzen Welt,” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 5/6 (August/September 1921): 40-43. In English, “Manifest of the Conference for Female Communists of the Entire World.” Delegates included Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin, Henriette Roland-Holst, and women from throughout Europe, the United States, Korea, and the Caucasus.

This article presented the epitomal example of communist women's hopes placed in the new Soviet Russia as they looked to it as a model for communists everywhere. The article, written in 1921 by delegates to the Second International Conference of Communist Women in Moscow and the International Women's Secretariat, explained what the conference delegates found as they traveled to Russia: communal housing and dining halls, factory kitchens, daycare centers and nurseries. In addition, the authors argued that there was no unemployment and no homelessness.<sup>33</sup> The article painted a picture of a country in which women and men were treated equally, where mothers and children were carefully looked after. This article aligned with articles by Zetkin and Brandenburgski, who viewed Soviet Russia similarly.

The delegates stated that, compared to capitalist countries, Russia was a paradise. The authors solidified this mentality by exploring life in capitalist countries: unemployment, hunger, and homelessness. In addition, mothers sent their children to school without breakfast and with no shirts on their backs.<sup>34</sup> The article showed a stark contrast between life in Russia and life in capitalist countries. Reading it, women would have viewed Russia as a fairy tale land in which economic problems did not exist.

The article, however, noted that not all was well in Russia. The delegates admitted seeing hunger and need in the country, though they did not elaborate on specific economic problems they may have witnessed. Furthermore, the authors argued that such tribulations were caused by capitalist countries fighting against Russia. The cause of Soviets' problems stemmed from bourgeois countries, who hated Russia because it was

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 42.

the hope for the proletariat throughout the world.<sup>35</sup> The world's ills grew directly from capitalism, and the authors of this article made that clear to their readers. Becoming like Soviet Russia was the only option for freedom as the delegates urged readers to look to Russia's example. Thus while the delegates admitted that not all was well for their Soviet sisters, they also asserted that it was through capitalism that Russian women were oppressed. Internal problems were an effect of bourgeois aggression, and the ills of the entire world would be relieved if capitalist countries looked to Russia's example and followed it.

Russian women also urged their Western counterparts to look to their example. In the introductory article of the February 1923 issue, "Der Internationale Kommunistische Frauentag 1923," Zetkin argued that Soviet women would stand side by side with other communist women on International Women's Day.<sup>36</sup> In the same issue, an article written by the female communists of Soviet Russia titled "Aufruf der russischen Genossinnen zum Internationalen Frauentag an die Proletarierinnen aller Länder" urged women in the West to support communism.<sup>37</sup> They asked women: Do you want to be equal? Their husbands and sons would no longer be sacrificed to war. They could have control over production in the workplace. Their children would be protected and fed. Although Russia was no longer at war, there could be no triumph so long as capitalism clawed at the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 40. "Rußland, das Land des tödlichen Hasses der Bourgeoisie, das Land der Hoffnung der Proletarier der ganzen Welt."

<sup>36</sup> Clara Zetkin, "Der Internationale Kommunistische Frauentag 1923," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 3, no. 2 (February 1923): 1-7. In English, "The International Communist Women's Day."

<sup>37</sup> Die Kommunistinnen Sowjet-Rußlands, "Aufruf der russischen Genossinnen zum Internationalen Frauentag an die Proletarierinnen aller Länder," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 3, no. 2 (February 1923): 16-17. In English, "Call of the Russian Female Comrades for International Women's Day to the Female Proletariat of all Countries."

throats of the working classes in the West.<sup>38</sup> These articles induced women to look to Russia for guidance as readers strove for communist revolution in their own lands. Building solidarity with Soviet women inspired communist women internationally as they realized that lack of progress was due to capitalist oppression.

Desire to aid Soviet women in their suffering also helped *KFI*'s readers stay connected with their Soviet sisters. As famine and economic hardship traveled through Russia, the articles in *KFI* asked for additional aid for the country's people, freely recognizing that the country was distressed. In the January/February 1922 issue of *KFI*, The International Women's Secretariat of the Communist International wrote a cry for help titled "Proletarierinnen, schaffende Frauen in allen Ländern, erlahmt nicht in der Hungerhilfe für Sowjet-Rußland."<sup>39</sup> The authors recognized that millions in America and the British Empire were unemployed and dying from hunger. But above all the tragedies of these capitalist countries was the famine in Soviet Russia.<sup>40</sup> The authors asked their readers: "Frauen, könnt ihr einen Tag eures Lebens der Hungernden Sowjet-Rußlands vergessen?" [Women, can you live one day of your life forgetting the starving people in Soviet Russia?]<sup>41</sup> This article appealed to women's sense of compassion and desire to relieve the suffering of others. Just as communist women hoped communism would

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 17. "Doch kann ihr Triumph kein voller sein, solange der raubgierige Kapitalismus mit seinen Krallen der Arbeiterklasse des Westens an der Kehle sitzt."

<sup>39</sup> The International Women's Secretariat of the Communist International, "Proletarierinnen, schaffende Frauen in allen Ländern, erlahmt nicht in der Hungerhilfe für Sowjet-Rußland," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 2, no. 2 (January/February 1922): 7-9. In English "Female Proletarians, Successful Women in all Countries, Shirk not in the Famine Relief for Soviet Russia." The authors were Alexandra Kollontai, M. Kasparowa, Lucie Colliard, Hertha Sturm, and Clara Zetkin.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



*KFI* articles describing an overview of life for women in the Soviet Union asserted that Soviet women were legal equals with men and also had the governmental support necessary to relieve their burdens. Zetkin believed that women throughout the world had reasons to support Lenin because he instigated mighty changes in Russia and also brought hope to women throughout the world. Russia's example to capitalist nations continued as Soviet women gained equality in family life. For the authors of various articles in *KFI*, Russia had fulfilled its promises to women in a way that no capitalist nation could. For that reason, communist women throughout the world needed to support their Soviet sisters in order to build up communism.

Women would only be convinced to support communism if they were shown its virtues. Zetkin and others portrayed communism in practice as paradise—everything feminists throughout the world would hope for. Although this chapter has shown that life for Soviet women was not exactly as portrayed in *KFI*, the articles in this periodical indicated what communist women valued. The Soviet example made them rethink the value of democratic reforms. Was the right to vote good enough? Socialists were forced to compete with capitalist countries that also strove to liberate women, but through different methods. Zetkin recognized this competition and used articles in *KFI* to show that communism provided something capitalism could not offer to women—equality in practice and not just in theory. She viewed any problems in Soviet Russia not as inherent elements of communism but rather evidence of capitalist hindrance of international revolution. Zetkin tried to show readers of *KFI* that once capitalism was eliminated, women could experience complete liberation.



## CHAPTER 3

### SOVIET MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Zetkin and other communist women sought practical emancipation from social and political inequality and the burdens of balancing motherhood with employment. Even for socialist feminists, motherhood was an important role. Zetkin herself mothered two sons, and communists in general emphasized the necessity of bearing children and raising them to be loyal communist workers. The purpose of motherhood in communism was thus to build up a communist state. At the same time, women, typically out of necessity, were required to participate in the workforce. This “dual burden” became difficult for women in industrialized nations. August Bebel’s 1879 book *Woman under Socialism* addressed the difficulty of balancing work and home life. His influential work enlightened communist women, including Zetkin, as to the problems for women in current society and the social problems that could be practically addressed through socialism.

Bebel was concerned with the status of working women and developed a bleak picture of home life:

Both—husband and wife—go to work. The little ones are left to themselves, or to the care of older brothers and sisters, themselves in need of care and education. At noon, the so-called lunch is swallowed down in hot haste,—supposing that the parents have at all time to rush home, which, in thousands of cases is impossible, owing to the shortness of the hour of recess, and the distance of the shop from the home. Tired out and unstrung, both return home in the

evening. Instead of a friendly, cheerful home, they find a narrow, unhealthy habitation, often lacking in light and air, generally also in the most necessary comforts....The workingman's wife, who reaches home in the evening tired and harassed, has now again her hands full. She must bestir herself at breakneck speed in order but to get ready the most necessary things in the household. The crying and noisy children are hurried off to bed; the wife sits up, and sews, and patches deep into the night....The husband is often uneducated and knows little, the wife still less; the husband goes to the saloon, and seeks there the entertainment that he lacks at home; he drinks; however little that be that he spends, for his means it is too much. At times he falls a prey to gambling, which, in the upper circles of society also, claims many victims, and he loses more than he spends in drink. The wife, in the meantime, sits at home and grumbles; she must work like a dray-horse; for her there is no rest or recreation; the husband avails himself to the freedom that accident gives him, of having been born a man. Thus disharmony arises....Indeed, we live "in the best world possible."<sup>1</sup>

As communist women read this and similar passages in *Woman under Socialism*, they recognized capitalism's oppression of women and the idea that only through communism could women become completely equal with men. Perhaps women reading this work in the late nineteenth century felt Bebel described their own homes. He seemed to sense the undue burden placed upon women simply by accident of gender. It was the problems that Bebel sensed in the working-class home that incited Zetkin and others to promote state involvement in childrearing and housework. Help from the government would alleviate women's responsibilities and allow them greater happiness and freedom both inside and outside the home.

Alexandra Kollontai, friend and colleague to Zetkin, was one of the greatest supporters of state involvement in family life and a change to the traditional family structure.<sup>2</sup> She argued that capitalism destroyed the family and women's place within it.

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<sup>1</sup> August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1903), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Kollontai, "Communism and the Family," *Kommunistka*, no. 2 (1920). Also available from the Modern History Sourcebook at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html>

Women were forced to enter factories while still taking care of home and children.

Family life became oppressive to women, who could only be liberated from “domestic slavery” through communism, a position similar to that of Bebel.

As the communist state took responsibility for raising children, parenthood passed to the collective from the individual. Society would feed, educate, and bring up not the mother’s children but “our children, the children of Russia’s communist workers.”<sup>3</sup>

According to Barbara Clements, historian of Soviet women, the development of daycare centers and public dining halls, the building of socialism neighborhood by neighborhood, confirmed the revolution for women.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, articles in *KFI* supported Kollontai’s vision of state responsibility in aiding mothers and a “neighborhood by neighborhood” approach to revolution.

Early Bolshevik women would have found hope in Soviet successes for mothers and children as this was the first step in liberating women from capitalism. Articles in *KFI* confirmed that Zetkin’s views of motherhood under communism aligned with those of Bebel and Kollontai. Thus, she included articles in *KFI* that addressed the importance of state protection for mothers and children as a major aspect of nurturing the overall well-being of the proletariat. By providing examples of government care for the needs of mothers, Zetkin presented evidence that communism aided mothers by using practical measures not implemented in capitalist countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Clements, “The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 487-88.

## State Protection of Mothers and Children

During the five-year publication of *KFI*, fewer articles about women in the Soviet Union addressed the situation of mothers, wives, and children than the development of women as workers. The nature of the few articles about women as wives and mothers focused on the aid given to mothers in the Soviet Union and the burdens lifted from women through communism. This illustrated Zetkin's focus not on motherhood, but rather on employed women. Aiding mothers was, therefore, a means of improving workers, an emphasis that contradicted bourgeois views of women.

In the first issue of *KFI*, Zetkin included an article entitled "Wie Sowjet-Rußland die Mutterschaft und das Kind schützt."<sup>5</sup> This article used the successes of Soviet Russia to demonstrate communism's ability to protect women and children. Thus, from the very first issue of *KFI*, Zetkin clarified the focus of her periodical in addressing women's particular concerns. The article stated that the future must be protected through mother and child.<sup>6</sup> This statement illustrated the attitude of Zetkin and others who saw the future of communism as being fostered in its women and children. The author, Nikolai Semaschko, discussed the depressing circumstances for women and children before the Bolshevik Revolution, noting Russia's earlier high infant mortality. He painted a bleak picture of women and children who were not looked after and contrasted this to the salvation brought to mothers and children because of the new Soviet government.

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<sup>5</sup> [Nikolai] Semaschko, "Wie Sowjet-Rußland die Mutterschaft und das Kind schützt," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 1 (April 1921), 7. In English, "How Soviet Russia Protects Motherhood and Children." The full name of the author is not included, but one might assume that it was Nikolai Semaschko, the People's Commissar for Health. He was also referred to in other articles as "Genossen Semasheko," indicating a male comrade.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. "in der Mutter und dem Kind die Zukunft geschützt werden müsse."

Semaschko concluded that, under the new Soviet regime, the law forbade women from working eight weeks before and eight weeks after delivering a child, all the while receiving full pay. In addition, pregnant women received special privileges such as free transportation on the tram and train along with food and clothing for herself and the newborn. The author then described the medical and educational facilities established to protect and nurture children. He claimed that even in many villages, not just Petersburg and Moscow, mothers and children were provided for. Children were taken care of at school, given warm meals, and even the deaf and blind received schooling.<sup>7</sup> Readers would have been impressed by the extent of the Soviet Union's care for mothers and children.

Readers of this article may have also wondered how such programs could be instituted so quickly in a country that had just come out of a civil war immediately following a revolution. The author recognized this and ended the article with a promise that the things he mentioned would in fact be established on a larger, more complete scale after the country recovered from the civil war. Once Soviet Russia healed, it would become the leader in the area of cultural life and nurturing mother and child.<sup>8</sup> According to Semaschko, the Soviet Union had quickly and efficiently instituted programs to transfer the work of mothers to the state. The state had room for improvement, but that was minor compared to what had already been accomplished.

In the same issue of *KFI*, Semaschko established theses pertaining to the health of mothers and children, indicating the Soviet Union's goals. These theses confirmed many

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9.

of the points in Semaschko's previous article about protecting mothers and children and the role of the state in doing so. Such care of women and children was necessary to support communism's future. In addition, Semaschko wrote against abortion, seeing it as a symptom of capitalism's oppression of the masses.<sup>9</sup> This article indicated that communists did not seek to stop births; rather, abortion counteracted the communist goal of producing more workers. Semaschko's articles from 1921 began *KFI*'s publication run with an immediate promise that communism would take care of women and save them from a bleak and constricting family existence.

Throughout the publication run of *KFI*, Zetkin included articles similar to those written by Semaschko in 1921, thus indicating little evolution in the nature of the periodical's content. In the February 1925 issue of *KFI*, she incorporated two articles concerning women's roles as wives and mothers. "Gesellschaftliche Fürsorge für Mutter und Kind in der Sowjetunion" by Dr. Wera Lebedew<sup>10</sup> reaffirmed the importance of caring for mothers and children, as a "duty of the state," in order to develop society as a whole.<sup>11</sup> The responsibility of parenthood did not fall upon mothers and fathers. Lebedew's article clearly identified the role of the government in supporting mothers by taking care of them and their children.

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<sup>9</sup> [Nikolai] Semaschko, "Mutter- und Kinderschutz: Sowjet-Rußlands Stellung zur Frage des Mutter- und Kinderschutzes und der Abtreibung," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 1 (April 1921): 34-36. In English, "Mother and Child Protection: Soviet Russia's Position to the Question of Mother and Child Protection and Abortion."

<sup>10</sup> Lebedew, "Gesellschaftliche Fürsorge für Mutter und Kind in der Sowjetunion," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 5, no. 2 (February 1925): 14-18. "Social Welfare for Mother and Child in the Soviet Union"

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Lebedew clarified why it was so important to nurture mothers and children—they had other duties to perform as workers. She said that the government created mechanisms that relieved the burdens of motherhood because they understood that this was how women would be a productive, successful power in the social economy.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the Soviets created government organizations for the purpose of lightening the burdens of motherhood because they wanted women to focus on being workers of the collective rather than members of a family. Lebedew emphasized the relationship between motherhood and productive employment, knowing that this dual burden was heavy for women.

Because Lebedew wrote this article in 1925, she presented clearer statistics and more confidence in Soviet programs than Semaschko had done in 1921. Lebedew listed the specific establishments to help mothers and children: infant care, toddler care, offices to help pregnant women and those with diseases, and departments for the education and health of women and children. Such institutions transferred the role of parenting to the state. While Lebedew noted that the future would bring continued progress, she also claimed that in only six years, despite civil war and economic difficulties, the Soviets nevertheless established programs for mothers and children.<sup>13</sup> The author, therefore, implied that social welfare institutions could be erected in a short period of time. This expectation could have provided hope for *KFI*'s readers, who looked to the Soviet example for how government intervention could provide relief from the dual burden.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. “Wir schaffen Einrichtungen, die die Bürde der Mutterschaft erleichtern, weil wir dabei stets die Frau als productive, als schaffende Kraft in der sozialen Wirtschaft auffassen.”

<sup>13</sup> Lebedew, 18.

## Opposition to State Childrearing

*KFP*'s articles about state involvement in the family indicated that Zetkin's intent with the periodical was not to convince German women to support communism but to encourage those already committed to the cause. If this was not her intent, then she clearly did not understand the nature of German women.<sup>14</sup> The majority of women in Germany lived in a traditional family setting and showed little inclination to dissolve it. According to Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz in "Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work,"<sup>15</sup> most German women in the 1920s voted for conservative parties such as the Catholic Center and National Fatherland. It was not the Communist Party—with its promise of total female liberation—that won the majority of women voters.<sup>16</sup> The conservative parties persuaded women to vote for them by accentuating women's traditional role as wife and mother. German women's devotion to parties that emphasized motherhood indicated that women viewed themselves first and foremost as mothers. In contrast, socialists had to "re-form women's view of themselves from 'wife' to 'worker' before their propaganda could be fully effective."<sup>17</sup> Thus, the parties that allowed women to maintain their traditional roles and progress within that station were most successful with female voters in Germany.

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<sup>14</sup> Other than Russia, Germany had the largest and strongest communist movement in Europe. If German women did not support communism, then it was unlikely that other European women would have supported it, either.

<sup>15</sup> Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work," in *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll, 301-329 (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 303-4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

Society also expected women to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. Helen Boak says, “While women were being told that they were emancipated, the traditional role of the German mother and housewife was still being praised lavishly.”<sup>18</sup> Women did not fit in German society until they were married. They looked forward to marriage as a career in itself because it signified security and status, both of which were absent in most fields of employment open to German women.<sup>19</sup> Even women’s movement groups emphasized motherhood, and women were expected to work only in jobs such as social work and domestic service, which used their “natural qualities and virtues.”<sup>20</sup> The traditional role of wife and mother in Germany was not an institution of the past, as proposed by communists. German women did not desire the promises and privileges discussed in *KFI* and supposedly already realized in the Soviet Union. Even women who worked out of necessity dreamed of not having to work and being allowed the privilege of only one burden—that of motherhood.

Articles in *KFI* also illustrated unawareness of the actual situation in the Soviet Union. As Zetkin emphasized the Soviet Union’s successes in helping women and children, she neglected to discuss the harsh realities of a struggling government and economy. Although the Soviet Union had reformed marriage laws, it had also made family life more difficult for women. Goldman argues, “high unemployment, low wages, and lack of daycare not only reinforced women’s dependence on the family, they created

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<sup>18</sup> Helen L. Boak, “Women in Weimar Germany: The ‘Frauenfrage’ and the Female Vote,” in *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, ed. Richard Bessel and E.J. Feuchtwanger, 155-173 (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981), 167.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 182.

a sharp contradiction between the harsh reality of life and a legal vision of freedom long promulgated by reformers and socialists.”<sup>21</sup> Goldman supports this argument by showing that the number of children cared for in state institutions dropped by about 25,000 between 1923 and 1925. In addition, the institutions lacked adequate amounts of shoes, linens, and clothing.<sup>22</sup> Because the state did not have the means to care for children adequately, the government often encouraged families to raise their own children. It was more feasible to give parents stipends in order to care for their children rather than putting them in state custody. It was difficult enough for the state to support orphans let alone care for children who had parents living.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while women viewed Soviet reforms as an opportunity to provide liberation, such developments aggravated already difficult situations because the reforms were not complete. As German readers of *KFI* rejoiced in the promises communism could bring them, their Russian counterparts experienced a much different reality than that portrayed in Zetkin’s work.

Zetkin could not have been completely oblivious to the situation in Soviet Russia because she had traveled there many times. In addition, contributors to *KFI* admitted the country’s poor economic situation and the effects of it. “Konferenz der Leiter der Provinz- und Gouvenmentsfrauenabteilungen Sowjetrußlands” in the November/December 1922 issue of *KFI* clarified the importance of aiding mothers.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 103.

<sup>22</sup> Goldman, 76. The number of children in these institutions in 1923 was 252,317 and 228,127 in 1925.

<sup>23</sup> Goldman, 97.

<sup>24</sup> “Konferenz der Leiter der Provinz- und Gouvenmentsfrauenabteilungen Sowjetrußlands” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 2, no. 11/12 (November/December 1922): 31-35. In English, “Conference for the Leaders of Province and Government Women’s Departments in Soviet Russia.”

article stated that the provincial and government women's department leaders of Soviet Russia were in agreement that the best way to strengthen society's work was through establishing nurseries, daycare centers, dining halls, laundries, and other facilities to move housework and childcare away from mothers and into the hands of the state. The article noted, however, that financial circumstances of the state were not yet ready for such responsibilities. Because of that, it was up to offices and factories to establish their own facilities. As places of employment could not set up such establishments, the bourgeois family structure was once again reinforced.

Economic deprivation was essentially what sustained traditional gender roles as lack of funds forced women to care for the household. Boys had more free time than girls, but girls were expected to do nearly twice as much housework as their male counterparts.<sup>25</sup> Goldman supports this statistic by stating that the average woman had about five hours of housework after working an eight-hour shift while her male counterpart only had about two hours of housework.<sup>26</sup> The atmosphere of the Komsomol, or the youth wing of the Communist Party, was also very masculine. It emphasized the traditional male public sphere versus the female private sphere.<sup>27</sup> Men did not want to get involved in the private sphere and frequently abandoned their wives or lovers who became pregnant.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, men justified their own sexual promiscuity by arguing that in a communist society, there were no more families. Thus they could sleep with many

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<sup>25</sup> Gorsuch, 640.

<sup>26</sup> Goldman, 130.

<sup>27</sup> Gorsuch, 645.

<sup>28</sup> Gorsuch, 647. The author cites a survey of 500 young women in which 27 percent said their husbands left them.

different partners and not be expected to marry or care for a wife and children.<sup>29</sup>

Apparently these young communist men did not understand Lenin, who spoke out against this new, youthful attitude. Zetkin wrote about Lenin's thoughts on women, marriage, and sex, pointing out Lenin's assertion that the "so-called 'new sexual life' of the youth" was nothing more than "an extension of bourgeois brothels."<sup>30</sup> As the bourgeois family structure deteriorated, youths reacted by practicing free love. It was difficult for new communists to determine what sort of family arrangement was appropriate. Many therefore returned to a patriarchal structure or else abandoned family life altogether in favor of promiscuity.

Children also reacted negatively to shifting attitudes towards family life. In the January/February 1922 issue of *KFI*, Henriette Roland-Holst presented an interesting look at Russian mothers and families.<sup>31</sup> She outlined a conversation she had with a small child, who indicated that he would rather be at home with his family than in the children's colony. He stated that it was so cozy [*gemütlich*] with his mother. Roland-Holst excused this young boy's argument by asserting that it was certainly much better for him in the colony than at home. He was only a poor, uneducated working child.<sup>32</sup> It was difficult for Roland-Holst to imagine that a child would want to remain with his parents despite the depravity and poor conditions.

Roland-Holst reminded readers that, for active communists, home life did not exist. Everything was done in the service of the Party. The problem here was that new

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<sup>29</sup> Gorsuch, 648.

<sup>30</sup> Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1934) 49.

<sup>31</sup> Henriette Roland-Holst, "Russische Frauen," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 2, no. 1 (January/February 1922): 35-45. In English, "Russian Women."

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

customs had to be developed, and the establishment of new customs had to work over generations.<sup>33</sup> She made a solid point in accepting that attitudes towards the family would not change immediately. Some youths might experiment with free love while others clung to traditional gender roles. However, Zetkin assumed in *KFI* that eventually all would realize that a communal family set up was best for everyone.

New attitudes towards family did not develop as Roland-Holst had anticipated. By the early 1930s, the gains made by the early Soviet state diminished. Goldman concludes that the official Soviet view of the family completely reversed. It began with a “commitment to individual freedom and ‘the withering away’ of the family” but ended with policies “based on a repressive strengthening of the family unit.”<sup>34</sup> After Lenin’s death in January 1924, the goals of the Soviet Union transformed. Zetkin, and perhaps other Bolshevik women, may have realized that the communist advances discussed in *KFI* would not become a reality, but she did not show this sentiment in her publications. Zetkin fortunately died just before the post-Lenin Soviet Union ended up promoting the bourgeois family structure that Lenin had so abhorred while still continuing “empty rhetoric of women’s emancipation.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, the dreams of the “Old Bolsheviks” shattered as their expectations of collective support for mothers and children remained unmet. Perhaps equality under communism was just as empty as that under capitalism.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>34</sup> Goldman, 337.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 343. Zetkin died in 1933, so she would have witnessed many of Stalin’s early changes to family structure and expectations. However, Zetkin was also very ill in the last decade of her life and also traveled back and forth between Germany and the Soviet Union. She could have simply been unaware of Stalin’s changes and died before the major developments of Stalin’s later years.

## Community Health

As articles from *KFI* illustrated, the foremost goal in protecting mothers and children was to promote the enrichment of society. Zetkin understood that as mothers' household burdens lightened, they could dedicate themselves to the workplace and thus the well-being of the community. In addition, the care of children prepared workers of the future. Children were vital in perpetuating communism. Care of mothers and children illustrated the Bolsheviks' desire to promote a healthy community. Thus establishments such as communal kitchens relieved women from the burdens of housework but also provided for society's hungry.

The April 1921 issue of *KFI* included a brief report of communal kitchens in Moscow, showing that communal kitchens played an essential role in relieving women from the dual burden.<sup>36</sup> A common argument against communism was that it harmed the family that was so cherished by the bourgeoisie. The author of "Kommunale Küchen in Moskau" proposed that communal kitchens actually brought families closer together. When women came home from work to cook dinner for their husbands, they were greeted with tired, agitated spouses and children. Dinner was an unpleasant experience for the family. Rather than a tired woman feeding her family, the woman benefiting from communal kitchens as she ate along with her husband and children. She would still be full of energy because she did not face the burden of household drudgery. The life of the working woman described by Bebel would be eliminated with the establishment of communal kitchens, and Zetkin showed through this discussion of communal kitchens

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<sup>36</sup> "Soziale Einrichtungen zur Entlastung der Hausfrau. Kommunale Küchen in Moskau," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 1 (April 1921): 37-38. In English, "Communal Kitchens in Moscow."

that women who valued family relationships would find more aid through communism than through capitalism.

According to the author, the development of communal kitchens relieved not just woman's "dual burden" but also benefited society at large. Rather than wasting time in the kitchen, women could better use their talents through aiding industry and culture [*Wirtschaft und Kultur*]. Woman's focus on aiding life outside the home would, in turn, greatly benefit society. In addition, communal kitchens aided the poor and hungry. The article presented a contrast between Soviet Russia and capitalist countries. In Moscow, no fewer than 559 communal kitchens had been established, feeding approximately 606,100 adults daily.<sup>37</sup> Each person received two warm meals a day, and children were fed in their own daycare centers. This could be compared to the industrialized regions of capitalist countries in which hundreds of thousands went without even one warm meal each day. The article portrayed the oppression of capitalism by reminding readers of the ties between it and hunger. Zetkin thus showed that communal kitchens supported women as well as relieving social suffering, something not given to women in capitalist nations.

Communal kitchens also nourished the populace as described in the February 1925 article "Anfänge zur Organisierung der Volksverpflegung in der Sowjetunion." The author, Chalатов, tied together the necessity of communal dining with the health of the community.<sup>38</sup> Chalатов discussed the Soviet organization "Narpit" and its role in aiding the health and nourishment of the people through dining halls. According to the article,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>38</sup> Chalатов, "Anfänge zur Organisierung der Volksverpflegung in der Sowjetunion," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 5, no. 2 (February 1925): 23-26. In English, "Beginnings of the Organization of People's Nourishment in the Soviet Union."

dining halls provided the most nutritious meals possible. They came under the jurisdiction of sanitation and nourishment controls within the People's Commissariat for Health. The article outlined minimum calorie consumption outlined by the Commissariat. This included at least 1500 calories for men and 2200-2300 calories for manual laborers.

In addition to providing nourishment, dining halls were a resting place for workers and their families. The people could gather together, playing and discussing in a social setting. Chalатов also addressed women's "dual burden," asserting that dining halls freed female workers from what the author called kitchen slavery [*Küchensklaverei*].<sup>39</sup> Zetkin viewed communal dining halls as evidence that the laws of equality in Soviet Russia were real. Not only were men and women legally equal, but women were also, in deed, full-functioning members in building a new social life.<sup>40</sup> Communal dining benefited women, families, and the overall health of the community.

Wendy Goldman, however, shows that communal dining was not as successful as Zetkin asserted through *KFI*. People waited in long lines, ate often spoiled food in dirty dining halls, and did not have enough food or enough dishes and utensils, even though ninety-three percent of Moscow's population were served by communal dining halls in 1921.<sup>41</sup> Thus while Soviet Russia quickly established communal dining halls, they did not necessarily provide the desired results as indicated in *KFI*.

Care of mothers, children, and the hungry did not end with communal dining. Overall health and medical care promoted the strengthening of the proletariat, which led to an easing of mothers' concern for the health of their offspring. Eliminating social

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>41</sup> Goldman, 128-29.

disease became a method in Soviet Russia for protecting mothers and their children. In a report from the January 1924 issue of *KFI*, the author asserted that only a lively, healthy, strong people can strengthen the development of communism.<sup>42</sup> The article, titled “Vom Kampf gegen Volksseuchen in Sowjet-Rußland” presented statistics to show that, while certain diseases still plagued the country, the numbers had gone down since the Bolshevik Revolution.

Problem diseases included typhus, cholera, diphtheria, and venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea. Malaria prevailed in certain regions of the country, and students in Moscow and St. Petersburg seemed to experience the most cases of venereal disease. In 1922, 15.5 percent of students in Moscow suffered from either syphilis or gonorrhea. The author compared this to numbers from 1905, when 22.7 percent of students in Moscow suffered from venereal disease.<sup>43</sup> Historians today may question the validity of such brief, undocumented statistics to support the connection between the Bolsheviks and a reduction of disease, yet the author of the article pointed out that the Bolsheviks established many different methods for stopping the spread of disease.

To immediately control epidemics, the People’s Commissariat in Soviet Russia organized sanitation stations with inspectors. The stations in the Caucasus and Crimea battled the spread of malaria while other stations throughout the country attended to venereal disease. These stations provided medical advice and help. In addition, the sick

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<sup>42</sup> “Volksgesundheit. Vom Kampf gegen Volksseuchen in Sowjet-Rußland,” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 4, no. 1 (January 1924): 27-29. The English title could be translated as, “Public Health. From the Fight Against Social Disease in Soviet Russia.” The original states, “Dies in der klaren Erkenntnis, daß nur ein leiblich, geistig und sittlich gesundes und starkes Volk die kommunistische Ordnung aufbauen kann.”

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

were rehabilitated. Zetkin, who had been president of *Rote Hilfe* [Red Aid], would have found such advances in medical care a major advantage of communism.

Regulating the spread of disease was not sufficient. Preventing it was the real key as the People's Commissariat organized "Propaganda Weeks" to educate the masses concerning hygiene. The people could ask questions, receive medical advice, learn about the latest research, and develop habits for good hygiene. Courses were also available to teach the people how to take care of themselves. With proper education combined with aid from the government, the people of Soviet Russia could exemplify the health benefits of communism. In addition, the government provided medical care that most parents would not have been able to give their children. As the Soviets cared for the health of the community, mothers did not need to worry about their children's well-being and could instead focus on working for the collective.

In *KFI*, Zetkin highlighted the gains Soviet women received as communism brought relief from household drudgery. The Bolsheviks kept their promises in establishing dining halls, medical services, and nurseries, but these establishments were not complete. Economic conditions prevented full realization of communal dining, communal childcare, and alleviation of mothers' burdens. In addition, men, women, and children may have hesitated themselves in getting rid of the traditional family structure.

Contrary to popular belief at the time, the Bolsheviks did not promote the dissolution of motherhood. Rather, they supported the health and well-being of mothers their children, and the entire community, knowing that doing so would secure the proletariat's future. Bebel stated that under socialism, "Woman is, accordingly, free, and

her children, where she has any, do not impair her freedom: they can only fill all the fuller the cup of her enjoyments and her pleasure in life. Nurses, teachers, female friends, the rising female generations—all these are ready at hand to help the mother when she needs help.”<sup>44</sup> Zetkin sought to show that Bebel’s words had been realized by asserting that Soviet Russia had created a haven for mothers. Working with the state, women’s “dual burden” would be lifted, a healthy proletariat would strengthen communism, and family life would be happier and healthier than that under capitalism.

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<sup>44</sup> Bebel, 347.



## CHAPTER 4

### FEMALE SOVIET WORKERS

Ridding society of the bourgeois institution of marriage was only the first step in developing a communist society that brought complete liberation for women. For Zetkin, Kollontai, and other Bolshevik women, state care of mothers and children was important because it led to something even more worthwhile—wage-earning labor. As women supported themselves financially, they no longer needed the economic support of men. Thus, sexual relationships ceased to be based on economic necessity, and men and women could be equal partners in every regard. Diane Koenker, a historian of Soviet history, put it well: “Participation in the work force by women was widely assumed to be the necessary and sufficient condition for the elevation of their consciousness and for their empowerment in society.”<sup>1</sup> Developing women as workers strengthened the proletarian dictatorship—the keystone of communism.

Zetkin understood the importance of women’s employment under communism. She recognized that the majority of her readers would be employed, and she, therefore, used *KFI* to help enlighten them as to how communism would relieve the stress and inequalities often found in the workplace. Because women’s employment was so important to communists, more articles in *KFI* discussed the accomplishments of the

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<sup>1</sup> Diane P. Koenker, “Men against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Socialist Workplace,” *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 5 (1995): 1439.

Soviet Union in aiding women as workers than articles about aiding mothers and children. Using the Soviet model, these articles illustrated Zetkin's view that communism considered the needs of women in the proletariat and, unlike capitalism, found ways to develop women as workers.

### **Women in the Workplace**

Both World War I and the Russian Civil War had introduced more women into the workforce. In the August/September 1921 issue of *KFI*, Zetkin included a note concerning the percentages of male and female workers in Soviet Russia.<sup>2</sup> She analyzed the numbers of men and women in the country compared to the number of men and women fit to work and included the important point that the Great War drastically changed the amount of men able to work. While 46.9 percent of men fit to work dropped to 37 percent after the war, the percentage of women went from 48.4 percent down to 43.9 percent.<sup>3</sup> Thus the issue of women in the workplace was an issue not just within the context of communism but also as an effect of both World War I and the Russian Civil War. Because of these wars, workplace equality was a much greater concern for women in industrialized nations whether capitalist or communist.

Pauline Wien also noted that more women had entered the workforce due to war, but she went further than Zetkin in exploring new developments for working women. In the July 1921 issue of *KFI*, Wien wrote "Die Arbeit der russischen Kommunistinnen für die Beteiligung der Frauen." She presented statistics to show that women made up

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<sup>2</sup> "Frauenberufsarbeit in Sowjet-Rußland," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 5/6 (August/September 1921): 61-62. In English, "Women's Occupational Work in Soviet Russia."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. The author does not include specific years to correspond with the given numbers, so it is unclear in how short a time period the number of men fit to work dropped.

roughly half of the workforce.<sup>4</sup> In certain industries such as textiles, laundry, and food service, women made up over fifty percent of the workers. Just as women in capitalist countries, women in Russia benefited from the First World War as it put women into the workforce. But was this a means of liberating women?

Wien asserted that just as women became slaves to household work, they also became slaves to the workplace. Under capitalism, women earned less pay for doing the same work as men. The author argued that women needed to fight for equal pay [*gleicher Lohn für gleiche Leistung*], taking a traditional feminist stance. Such a position would have certainly appealed to feminists throughout the world. Wien suggested that courses for career training would aid women in raising their wages.<sup>5</sup> For example, women could take courses for spinning, weaving, and dyeing.

Another method for aiding female workers was through conferences. Throughout the publication of *KFI*, Zetkin included proceedings from women's conferences, workers' conferences, and other communist-related conferences. Wien's article argued that conferences for female workers allowed them to discuss ways to improve the workplace. Workers received greater understanding of industrial plans and gained advice. In addition, women could offer their own suggestions in aiding the development of communism.<sup>6</sup> According to Wien, the cooperation of women in the workplace was essential to the Soviet Union and the realization of communism. In Zetkin's eyes, women under communism benefited more than women under capitalism because they took an

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<sup>4</sup> Pauline Wien, "Die Arbeit der russischen Kommunistinnen für die Beteiligung der Frauen," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 4 (July 1921): 3-9. In English, "Work of Russian Female Communists for the Participation of Women."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

active part in society rather than acting as a means of economic exploitation. Attending conferences thus allowed communist women to actively improve the workplace.

Wien noted a concern that bothered many women, both communist and capitalist—unequal pay. Zetkin was also concerned about unequal wages and, in the May/June 1921 issue of *KFI*, summarized an article from *Pravda* that urged the education of women in order to improve their wages. She noted that while the equality of men's and women's wages in the Soviet Union had improved, men still earned more than women because men were typically more qualified for specialist positions.<sup>7</sup> Women simply did not have the training necessary for occupations with higher wages, thus indicating the reason for pay discrimination. The article affirmed the Soviet commitment to changing the situation by developing women's skills. Zetkin argued that the entire working class would be enriched when workers themselves sought the enrichment of both male and female workers.<sup>8</sup> Zetkin herself had been educated and was thus able to compete with her male counterparts. She saw education as a means to provide women with opportunities and privileges equal to those of men.

Education for women workers continued to be an important issue in *KFI*. A January 1923 article by Sophie Smidowitsch responded to Zetkin's call for more training for women in the Soviet Union. Smidowitsch highlighted the progress of women in the labor unions of Soviet Russia, arguing that there was no need for separate men's and

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<sup>7</sup> "Frauenbildung," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 2/3 (May/June 1921): 72-73. In English, "Women's Training."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

women's unions because both women and men found representation in all labor unions.<sup>9</sup> The author presented statistics to demonstrate women's representation in various unions, showing that women comprised up to forty percent of the membership in managing certain industries, particularly the textile industry.<sup>10</sup> In addition, women joined various labor committees throughout the Soviet Union, comprising approximately twenty-five percent of the membership.<sup>11</sup>

According to Smidowitsch, Soviet women not only had training and education, but they were also involved in labor organizations. These same women had, only a short time earlier, not even known how to read and write.<sup>12</sup> Smidowitsch used this point to remind the reader that although many saw the progress women in the Soviet Union still had to make, women workers nevertheless had improved their lot dramatically after the Bolshevik Revolution. Smidowitsch thus supported the argument of other contributors to *KFI* who had demonstrated that 1920s Soviet Russia was much improved over Tsarist Russia. Indeed, the problems of Soviet society had transformed as the Bolsheviks brought rapid changes to the country.

A year later, one N.N. confirmed Smidowitsch's earlier conclusions that women workers had become legitimate participants in the work force and trade unions. The author discussed the progress of women's representation in labor unions and government departments since 1922 and identified various bodies that by 1924 had female

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<sup>9</sup> Sophie Smidowitsch, "Die Berufstätigen in den Gewerkschaften Sowjet-Rußland," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 3, no. 1 (January 1923): 12. In English, "The Working People in the Trade Unions of Soviet Russia."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

representation: the women's section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the People's Commission for Health, and the office for the protection of mothers and infants.<sup>13</sup> The representation of women in labor unions also expanded in the short time since Smidowitsch wrote the 1923 article. The author of the 1924 article presented statistics to indicate that 63.1 percent of clothing industry organization members were female. Women were represented in slightly lower proportions in other industries such as textiles, public health, and education.<sup>14</sup> Such statistics led readers to conclude that the lot of women workers had improved; they were becoming equal with men in the workplace. Although such industries as education, textiles, and health were traditional areas of work for women, the authors did not concede this fact. They were overjoyed that women were more clearly represented in the total workforce rather than being concerned about which industries included the most women.

Zetkin included sufficient discussion in *KFI* articles to show that, while women's lot had improved in the workplace, it still was not ideal. Knowing that women's rate of unemployment remained high, the author of the 1924 article nevertheless concluded with a sense of hope. "Hand in hand," the Communist Party would work with the various women's departments and organizations for the same cause—the proletariat, who would bring to pass liberating communism for both women and men.<sup>15</sup> Joy in the Soviet Union's accomplishments and hope for continued success pervaded Zetkin's periodical.

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<sup>13</sup> N.N., "Die Arbeiterin in der Gewerkschaftsbewegung des Bundes der Sowjetstaaten" *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 4, no. 3 (March 1924): 47. In English, "The Working Woman in the Trade Union Movement of the Union of Soviet States."

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> N.N., 49.

The Soviet Union's accomplishments were also noted in terms of local government positions. In May 1923, the article "Unsere Arbeit unter den Proletarinnen und Bäuerinnen des Bundes der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken" outlined the developments among proletariat women and female peasants in Soviet delegations. The author stated that certain cities had up to forty percent of their officials being female. The article also noted the success of various periodicals for communist women, with 91,000 copies of *Die Kommunistin* sold in 1922.<sup>16</sup> This statistic indicated an optimistic view that German women, whom *Die Kommunistin* targeted, supported the communist movement in the early 1920s. Female membership in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union also grew to 7.8 percent of total party membership.<sup>17</sup> The author asserted that most of these women were workers and peasants. While Soviet Russia had come a long way from the pre-revolutionary time period, women were still not evenly represented in party membership or the government. But, she concluded, "Where there's a will, there's a way."<sup>18</sup> Even when Zetkin and her contributors admitted that not all was perfect in Soviet Russia, they continually argued that, with time and effort, all promises made to women would be fulfilled through communism.

Even though a way may have been provided to improve the lot of female workers, women did not always have the will for it. The article "Methoden für die Heranziehung der Arbeiterinnen und Bäuerinnen zur Aufbauarbeit in den Sowjetrepubliken" by O.

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<sup>16</sup> S. Nurina, "Unsere Arbeit unter den Proletarinnen und Bäuerinnen des Bundes der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken" *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 3, no. 5 (May 1923), 42. In English, "Our Work among the Female Proletariat and Peasants of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Soklowa in the March 1924 issue of *KFI* discussed the difficulty of recruiting women workers and female peasants into the new communist society. Many female workers, particularly in the countryside, did not actively take part in the development of the new society.<sup>19</sup> The article continued with ways the Communist Party of Soviet Russia encouraged participation of more women workers and peasants in supporting the development of the Soviet system. Many of Soklowa's arguments and observations summarized the ideas of earlier contributors to *KFI*.

Soklowa tied the creation of social welfare programs for mothers and children to the development of employed women. The number of women represented in the local soviets and labor unions had increased. In addition, the Soviet Union encouraged the training and education of female workers. These advances happened because women's organizations emphasized the establishment of education courses and communal dining halls to help develop working women and to liberate them from kitchen and stove.<sup>20</sup> Thus, social welfare programs played a great role in the emancipation of female workers and peasants, indicating the end sought by those who proposed assistance for mothers.

Soklowa's article indicated that not all women were eager for the "liberation" brought by communism. The author was particularly anxious about women in the eastern regions who were still attached to patriarchal structures.<sup>21</sup> Like Smidowitsch, Soklowa recognized that, while the Soviets had made great strides among women, they still needed to improve by bringing communism to women in the countryside. Such an attitude

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<sup>19</sup> O. Soklowa, "Methoden für die Heranziehung der Arbeiterinnen und Bäuerinnen zur Aufbauarbeit in den Sowjetrepubliken," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 4, no. 3 (March 1924), 33. In English, "Methods for Agitation among the Female Workers and Peasants for Development in the Soviet Republics."

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

glorified the new regime yet realistically addressed the weaknesses pertaining to the treatment of women. Soklowa concluded with a look at the role of the Soviet Union in providing an example for capitalist countries: only the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship that also busied itself with the working class would bring to pass the complete equality for women.<sup>22</sup> Zetkin took every opportunity in *KFI* to show that it was not through capitalism, but rather through communism, that women would find equality.

*KFI* articles concerning women workers contained many appeals to the future. More so than articles concerning state care of mothers and children, articles about workers recognized the difficult circumstances for women striving to become equals with men in the workplace. Although the Soviet Union had clearly brought women more employment opportunities, society and the workplace did not transform overnight. The historian Koenker indicates that men and women in 1920s Soviet Russia still held “deeply ingrained attitudes about gender roles in the workplace.”<sup>23</sup> Men often viewed women as intruders, and both men and women were hostile towards each other.<sup>24</sup> Women did not receive proper training, as Zetkin had hoped they would, because men resisted working with women or because they assumed women would get married and quit.<sup>25</sup> In addition, some viewed women as a threat to the proletariat. Their interest in hairstyles and make-up convinced both men and female activists that women were bourgeois. Thus, “as long as class was defined in masculine terms, as in the workplace, then Soviet women

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Koenker, 1441.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1447.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 1444-5.

were left with few possibilities for resisting and transforming these attitudes.”<sup>26</sup> Women hit the glass ceiling in employment simply based on gender. Even though the Soviet model showed that women indeed took an active part in the workplace, they were not treated equally with their male counterparts. Zetkin adhered to the Communist Party line is finding excuses for gender discrimination rather than critiquing male chauvinism.

### **Observations of Female Workers in Russia**

The true test of assessing women’s acceptance in the workplace came through direct observation. Getting to know Russian women on a personal level was important to Zetkin. With each trip to the Soviet Union, she visited women in factories and their homes, getting to know them intimately. Allowing *KFI*’s readers to see communism’s personal touch motivated Zetkin to include accounts of interactions with average Soviet women.

Readers of *KFI* wanted to see how communism affected the small details of women’s lives. What did a communist woman in Soviet Russia look like? How did she behave? The November/December 1921 issue of *KFI* included an article titled “Russische Frauen” in which Henriette Roland-Holst highlighted the examples of several Russian women and their experiences.<sup>27</sup> This article gave readers a personal touch to illustrate how communism has impacted women’s lives. Roland-Holst quoted a working woman whose husband was not a communist. She stated that life was difficult for her. She had little time to aid the communist women’s movement because she had so much to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1463-4.

<sup>27</sup> Henriette Roland-Holst, “Russische Frauen,” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 8/9 (November/December 1921): 18-24. In English, “Russian Women.”

do at home.<sup>28</sup> Because her husband was not a communist, her life was harsher. She did not live in a relationship that valued equality or aided women with their dual burden. Readers of this article would have felt compassion for this poor woman who did not receive the support that a communist husband would have provided.

This working woman could be compared to a peasant woman, who felt communism had saved her. Roland-Holst described this woman as small and thin, with an innocent face and modest manners. Her clothes were shabby, but exceptionally clean, as was the case with nearly all women Roland-Holst encountered in Russia.<sup>29</sup> This woman had only been a communist for one year, but she viewed the communists as saints. She saw the weaknesses of many of the communists but remained brave. She saw that the revolution had been brought about by violence, and the civil war also brought destruction. But she admitted that it could not have been brought about any other way.<sup>30</sup> She specifically thanked Clara Zetkin and those who worked throughout the world to bring communism to women.<sup>31</sup>

Similar to the article “Russische Frauen” in the November/December 1921 issue, “Russische Frauen” in the January/February 1922 issue was written by Henriette Roland-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21. “Es ist schwer, für eine Arbeiterfrau...in der Bewegung zu wirken, es gibt daheim immer so viel zu tun.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. “Und dann, daß ich Klara Zetkin kennen gelernt habe und euch alle, die ihr in eurem eigenen Lande arbeitet, um die Frauen zum Kommunismus zu bringen, das ist mir doch ein so großes Glück!” Zetkin’s first name was most commonly spelled “Clara,” but it was also occasionally spelled “Klara.” The nationality of the author made little difference in the spelling of her name, and Zetkin always signed letters with “Clara.”

Holst.<sup>32</sup> She discussed a group of factory workers in Moscow who were all neatly dressed and clean. She went with some of these women to one's apartment. Her description presented a cozy, almost poetic view of this woman's life. The room was almost empty, but bright. It overlooked a small garden. They had tea at a round table with a vase of roses.<sup>33</sup> Roland-Holst painted a picture of Russian women who led a simple, yet pleasant life. They did not live in need but rather enjoyed the small comforts of life.

The women portrayed in Roland-Holst's article gave readers of *KFI* a goal. They wanted to be like the innocent-looking new communist. They gained hope for their own situations when learning about women whose husbands had not yet joined communism. "Russische Frauen" aided the development of a sisterhood among communist women by using examples of Russian women to comfort and strengthen others. By bringing the personal stories of Russian women to her readers, Zetkin allowed them to experience what she experienced on every visit to the Soviet Union.

*KFI* also portrayed Russian women as willing and eager participants in the building of communism, knowing that it would liberate them and alleviate their suffering. Because they were such willing participants in communism, they eagerly volunteered time on weekends to assist in cleaning their workplaces and neighborhoods. Zetkin admired such commitment and included discussion of it in *KFI*. One E.T., author of "Die Subotniki und die russische Arbeiterin," asserted that the ills of the economy and problems of the civil war could be solved through work.<sup>34</sup> The article stated that women,

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<sup>32</sup> Henriette Roland-Holst, "Russische Frauen," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 1 (January/February 1922): 35-45. In English, "Russian Women."

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-7.

<sup>34</sup> E.T., "Die Subotniki und die russische Arbeiterin," *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 1, no. 8/9 (November/December 1921): 34-37. In English, "Saturdays and the Russian Female Worker."

at first, were hesitant to volunteer their time on weekends, but after seeing the communist men's enthusiasm for it, began to get excited. Women began working despite hunger and cold and served in hospitals, transportation, factories, and day care centers. Women eventually made up to twenty-five percent of Subotniki workers by the end of 1921.<sup>35</sup>

The author asserted that it would be through such work as that done with the Subotniki that communism would come out victorious. Only through work could women become emancipated. Also through the Subotniki, chaos and need would be overcome through the heroism of the workers. The author concluded that the Subotniki showed volunteer work was the weapon against the bourgeoisie as workers worked with the same enthusiasm as Red soldiers fought on the front.<sup>36</sup> Russian Subotniki workers portrayed Russian women as loyal fighters in the building of communism. For Zetkin, Subotniki proved that female workers strengthened the state—and did so eagerly.

### **Prostitution**

Some women living in Soviet Russia were clearly not viewed as willing workers in the proletariat: prostitutes. Yet while Zetkin viewed these women as counterproductive to communism, she also emphasized methods in which prostitutes could be rehabilitated under communism. In her 1920 pamphlet “Die Frau bei der Verteidigung und beim Aufbau Sowjet-Rußlands,” Zetkin discussed the issue of prostitution. She recognized that prostitution was still a problem, even after the Bolshevik Revolution. The revolution had not eliminated prostitution; it had simply changed prostitution's form. Prostitutes in 1920 Soviet-Russia were viewed as “deserters of work” [*Deserteure der Arbeit*]. These women

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 37.

were therefore sent to work colonies to learn how to work. Once the former prostitutes proved they were not lazy and could engage in regular, productive labor, they were allowed to leave the work colonies.<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Waters confirms the Bolshevik view of prostitutes as “deserters of work.” She says, “The prostitute offended not because she represented decadence and vice, but because she failed to conform, to fit into the collective. She was work shirker not sexual deviant.”<sup>38</sup> Thus this issue of prostitution was not about sexual immorality but rather an issue of participation in the workers’ state.

Prostitution also related to bourgeois marriage. Waters refers to Alexandra Kollontai’s position that legal wives and prostitutes were similar, one exchanging sex for financial support on a long-term basis and the other on a short-term basis.<sup>39</sup> Yet the view of prostitute as the passive victim of bourgeois society diminished during the NEP period. As women were encouraged to be strong and independent, prostitution was also viewed an act of one’s agency.<sup>40</sup> This act of agency contradicted the principles of communism advocated by Zetkin, Lenin, and other Bolsheviks.

Because prostitutes threatened the communist system, Soviet Russia enacted measures to rehabilitate them. In the February 1923 issue of *KFI*, authors N. Semaschko, A. Beloborodv, and A. Dogadov wrote “Prostitution: Maßnahme zur Bekämpfung der

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<sup>37</sup> Clara Zetkin, *Die Frau bei der Verteidigung und beim Aufbau Sowjet-Rußlands: Referat der Genossin Klara Zetkin auf der Frauenreichskonferenz der Vereinigt. Kommunistischen Partei am 8. Dezember 1920 in Berlin* (Leipzig: Frakes Verlag, n.d.), 12-13. In English, “Woman and the Defense and Development of Soviet Russia: Essay of Comrade Klara Zetkin to the Women’s Conference of the United Communist Party on 8 December 1920 in Berlin.”

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Waters, “Victim or Villain: Prostitution in Post-revolutionary Russia,” in *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Linda Edmondson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 172.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Prostitution in Sowjetrußland” to discuss issues related to the fight to end prostitution.<sup>41</sup> After the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia made many immediate improvements. Included in these was the decline of prostitution. However, with the establishment of NEP, prostitution rose.<sup>42</sup> One of the authors, Semaschko, was the People’s Commissar for Public Health, and, along with Beloborodov and Dogadov, also state administrators, proposed suggestions for addressing issues related to prostitution. These suggestions included career training for women, establishing homes for unemployed women, developing methods to care for unsupervised children, and giving greater public attention to venereal disease.<sup>43</sup> The authors assured readers that government organizations were already mindful of the prostitution issue and would continue attending to its remedies. An important aspect of combating prostitution was to focus on the crime rather than the criminal. The authors stated: The fight against prostitution should never degenerate into a fight against the prostitutes.<sup>44</sup>

Particularly troublesome for communists was the idea that prostitution and venereal disease went hand in hand. As discussed in the previous chapter, Soviet Russia sought ways to ease social disease and promote a healthy populace. Those concerned most with prostitution were doctors, as they hoped to eliminate the spread of venereal disease. According to Waters, it was the doctors who held meetings and published

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<sup>41</sup> N. Semaschko, A. Beloborodv, and A. Dogadov, “Prostitution: Maßnahme zur Bekämpfung der Prostitution in Sowjetrußland.” *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* 3, no. 2 (February 1923): 25-28. In English, “Prostitution: Measures for Fighting Prostitution in Soviet Russia.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. “Der Kampf gegen die Prostitution darf auf keinen Fall ausarten in einen Kampf gegen die Prostituierten.”

pamphlets to try and help prostitutes. The doctors' efforts confirmed that proposed in *KFI*: The struggle was against prostitution and not the prostitutes themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Zetkin and the Bolsheviks proposed that prostitution had no place in the workers' state.<sup>46</sup> They advocated the arguments established much earlier by Bebel: prostitution was "a necessary social institution of the capitalist world."<sup>47</sup> Certainly, women suffered greatly as prostitutes, so getting rid of prostitution in Soviet Russia meant ending an oppressive capitalist structure. In addition, aiding prostitutes helped strengthen a proletarian dictatorship as it liberated women and encouraged them to work. Zetkin knew that removing prostitution as a lingering, harmful effect of capitalism would ensure the rise of a great communist state.

The rapid social and economic changes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provoked great concern over women in the workforce. Women's entrance into a traditionally masculine sphere meant that women now had to compete with men under men's own terms. This led to wages differences and promotion opportunities that favored men and kept women unskilled and underpaid. Zetkin recognized women's inferior position and admitted that working women in Soviet Russia did not enjoy all the same benefits as men, similar to women's lot in capitalist nations. Zetkin, however, did show that the lot of women had actually improved greatly since Tsarist times. Women joined labor unions in great numbers and benefited from training programs. In addition, she was

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<sup>45</sup> Waters, 167.

<sup>46</sup> Semaschko, Beloborodv, and Dogadov, 28. "Im Staate der Werktätigen darf für die Prostitution kein Platz sein."

<sup>47</sup> August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1903), 146.

optimistic that training opportunities for women would continue, as education was the key to equality in the workplace.

*KFI* articles also glorified the female worker in Russia. Zetkin portrayed her as humble, patient, clean, and eager to strengthen communism. *KFI* readers could relate to these women and feel sympathy for them. They also felt sympathy for prostitutes, who had been victims of capitalism. The Soviet government took steps to end prostitution, making these women contributing members of society. Every piece of legislation, every new program, and every new establishment had that goal for women: aid them in becoming more effective workers, loyal to strengthening the new Soviet Union. Zetkin knew that women working in capitalist countries had similar grievances as women in the Soviet Russia, but she showed through *KFI* articles that the possibility for improving women's lot was much more possible under communism.



## CONCLUSION

Clara Zetkin recognized that the early twentieth-century world was engaging in a great competition to win the allegiance of women. Which would win: capitalism or communism? In order to convince women that true equality would come only through communism, she published articles in *KFI* that portrayed the greatness of Soviet Russia. Zetkin had long admired the Russians and had grown a strong attachment to many Bolshevik leaders. After the Bolshevik Revolution, her allegiance to communist revolution intensified because now, finally, the world could witness an example of communism in practice, with all its benefits.

Communism promised great things for women who had been disappointed with capitalism and bourgeois family life. Women seeking liberation from a stifling marriage or relief from household drudgery looked to communism as an escape. In addition, women who wanted to progress in their careers hoped that a communist revolution would grant them the opportunity to work side-by-side with men, as equal partners, for the betterment of the collective. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia pledged to completely transform society and thus liberate both the proletariat and women.

Emancipation for women came through the development of state institutions designed to care for mothers and children. The burdens of household duties would be transferred to the collective, so women could be relieved from the stresses of balancing

home life and employment. The end of bourgeois marriage would also provide complete equality between men and women. As the burdens of motherhood lifted, women could devote themselves to their employment. The Soviet model showed that, statistically, women had gained increased opportunities to progress in their occupations. In addition, the state promised more training opportunities to aid female workers.

Articles in *KFI* indicated that the Soviet Union in the early 1920s did, in fact, keep its promises. Zetkin and her colleagues assumed that the troubles of the tsarist era, including high infant mortality and low literacy rates, had disappeared. Day care centers, medical facilities, and communal dining all aided mothers and children. In addition, women joined labor unions and became representatives in their local governments. According to *KFI*, the Soviet Union created a communist utopia. Zetkin, in her interview with Lenin, confirmed the successes of the Soviet Union. After Lenin had argued that the proletarian dictatorship meant complete equality between men and women, both legally and in practice, Zetkin declared, “Soviet Russia proves this. This will be our great example!”<sup>1</sup> But was the equality in Soviet Russia more complete than that found in capitalist nations?

Despite Zetkin’s enthusiasm for the Soviet model, Lenin himself recognized that the Soviet Union had not fully accomplished its goals in relation to women. He said:

We know perfectly well that all this is still too little, considering the needs of the working women, and that it is still far from sufficient for their real emancipation. Yet it is an immense stride forward from what there was in tsarist and capitalist Russia....It is a good start in the right direction, and we shall continue to develop it consistently, and with all available energy, too. You abroad may rest assured.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin, “Lenin on the Women’s Question,” interview by Clara Zetkin (Moscow, Autumn 1920), *My Memorandum Book* (International Publishers, 1925). Available from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1925/lenin/zetkin2.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Lenin's determination mirrored that of Zetkin. Many contributors to *KFI* praised the Soviet Union's successes but recognized room for improvement. They were filled with hope that the future would finally provide equal opportunities for women in developing them as workers and relieving the burdens of motherhood.

The promises of communism were never fully realized. By the end of 1925, communist women began to comprehend that their lot would not improve anymore. The stresses placed on the new regime affected them negatively. Barbara Clements states, "The more stress there was on hierarchy and order in the party, the more certain it was that notions about women's equality would suffer."<sup>3</sup> After the initial successes of the Soviet Union brought hope to women, the pressures placed on the new government forced women's enthusiasm to die down. Men's and women's views of emancipation and the building of the communist society also differed. While women emphasized the development of daycare centers and public dining halls, male leaders, such as Trotsky and Lenin, promoted the belief that "huge, centralized organizations would construct communism by rearranging economic structures, producing as a result the social transformation of which women's emancipation was a part."<sup>4</sup> Thus the manifestation of communism's success differed by gender. Because the government was still male driven, communism was built using male methods.

By the end of the 1920s, women had realized that their initial inclinations and proposals would not be realized. The Zhenotdel argued in 1925 that women themselves had to be responsible for emancipation. They needed to use self-initiative and could not

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 233.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Clements, "The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 487-88.

rely on men to make a revolution for them.<sup>5</sup> Clements terms these women “reluctant realists.”<sup>6</sup> Conflict between socialist feminist goals and those of the male leadership intensified as women’s sections were threatened with liquidation in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this was one of many possible reasons why *KFI* was only published through the middle of 1925.

Especially after Lenin’s death, women’s needs were ignored. The “Old Bolsheviks,” including Zetkin, sought to reconcile their confidence in communism with the terror of leaders such as Joseph Stalin. By 1931, Zetkin’s internationalist efforts had lessened. In a letter to Elena Stasova, Zetkin told her Russian friend that the communist group in Germany was not so small and without influence as Stasova assumed. There were still active supporters who ran the organizations, propaganda, and who influenced both workers and intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> As communism in Germany disappeared and fascism gained support, Zetkin clung to the hope that worldwide revolution was still possible. She grew impatient for it and wrote to Nadezhda Krupskaja in March 1931 that she had marched as a soldier for the revolution for over fifty years, and she could not make light of her impatience.<sup>9</sup> Zetkin had dedicated her life to periodicals and other writings that promoted international communist revolution that would alleviate women’s suffering. Up until her death, she would not allow defeat of these lifelong efforts.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 492-93.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 494.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 130.

<sup>8</sup> Clara Zetkin to Elena Stasova, 15 January 1931, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

<sup>9</sup> Clara Zetkin to Nadezhda Krupskaja 15 March 1931, transcript typed, Clara Zetkin Collection, IISH.

Zetkin's final work addressed her firm commitment to the Soviet model for bringing hope to women throughout the world. While Zetkin was deathly ill, she dictated "Lenins Vermächtnis für die Frauen der Welt" to Nadezhda Krupskaya.<sup>10</sup> This work showed that even in 1933, Zetkin firmly believed that the Soviet Union liberated women as it had promised to do. She noted that women made up thirty-three percent of the workforce.<sup>11</sup> Workers in the Soviet Union received a minimum of two weeks paid vacation.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the amount of women in positions of skilled work had risen so that by 1932, between seventeen and seventy percent of faculty members at various schools were women.<sup>13</sup> These statistics provided hope to Zetkin that perhaps, even after her death, communism would roll forth. Maybe her dying words would sustain the dreams of communist women everywhere as they looked to Zetkin's own example of praise and admiration for Soviet Russia.

The words found in *KFI*, along with Zetkin's discouragement at delayed revolution, assume that Zetkin did not have complete understanding of life in Soviet Russia. This is unbelievable given the fact that she spent so much of her time among the Soviets. She participated in celebrations throughout the country, was elected as a representative in the soviets of Moscow, Petrograd, and Baku, and had various schools and factories named after her.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Zetkin comprehended the reality of the situation in the Soviet Union, whether or not the articles in her periodical supported this fact.

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<sup>10</sup> Clara Zetkin, *Lenins Vermächtnis für die Frauen der Welt* (Basel: Universum Bücherei für Alle, 1933).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Zetkin's perception of Soviet Russia was confirmed by other women's experiences. In 1926, a group of female delegates from the German proletariat visited the Soviet Union. These women shared their impressions of Soviet Russia with Zetkin, who wrote about them in her pamphlet "Was sagen die deutschen Proletarierinnen über die Sowjetunion?." <sup>15</sup> The thoughts shared by the delegates solidified Zetkin's own attitudes towards the Soviet example of liberating women from chains of capitalism. The women traveled to Leningrad, Moscow, Novosibirsk, and throughout the rural portions of the country. They noticed that, even in the countryside, villages maintained order, men and women worked diligently, and peasants praised the Soviet regime. <sup>16</sup>

The delegates also agreed with Zetkin that the Soviet Union gave women equality not just on paper but also in practice. Equality was exercised first of all through aid to mothers. Women in the Soviet Union did not see motherhood as a curse, as did women in Germany, because mothers in the Soviet Union were nurtured. The delegates also noted that society took care of them, and illegitimate and unbaptized children were not persecuted. <sup>17</sup> To view the practical equality brought to working women, the delegates looked at women in various industries, including food service and textiles. They noticed that these women worked shorter days and had a cleaner, healthier work environment than women in Germany. <sup>18</sup> Through these observations, the female German delegates concluded that democracy was not found in Germany; true democracy was found in the

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<sup>14</sup> Gilbert Badia, *Clara Zetkin: Eine neue Biographie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1994), 222.

<sup>15</sup> Clara Zetkin, *Was sagen die deutschen Proletarierinnen über die Sowjetunion?* (Berlin: Verlag die Einheit, n.d.).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

Soviet Union. They hoped to bring such ideas back to Germany with them.<sup>19</sup> For these delegates, women's emancipation through communist revolution was not a delusion; it had been practically implemented in Russia, which now presented a shining model for communist women worldwide. Zetkin added that the words and observations of the delegates were not empty words. These words were deeply felt, honest praises of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> For readers of *KFI*, such promises of a better life, as found in Soviet Russia, were taken seriously. If Zetkin had been tricked, so had these female delegates.

Although Zetkin must have known what life was truly like for Soviet women, she never publicly showed any sense of disappointment. True to her nature, she fought on for the cause of communism even when reality conflicted with theory. Perhaps her remedy for problems under communism was optimism: if she dedicated herself to spreading communism among women throughout the world, the accomplishments she discussed in *KFI* would eventually become as real as her articles made them seem. Jonathan Wolff insightfully noted the following: "In celebrating the end of the 'evil empire' we forgot that the thinkers who inspired Eastern European communism were not evil people. On the contrary, they saw themselves as our saviours."<sup>21</sup> Through *KFI*, Zetkin became a savior to women as she presented a portrait of idyllic life under communism. Using the Soviet model, Zetkin convinced her readers that communism was the only means possible for liberating women from household drudgery and inequality in the workplace. *KFI* gave

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Wolff, *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1. Spelling in original.

hope to women as they eagerly believed Zetkin's words, but perhaps true equality was nowhere to be found.

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