

The Immorality of the Bolsheviki

A Study in Myths and Facts

PUBLICITY, second only to that received by the notorious Sisson Documents, is being given to certain decrees regarding marriage and the relation of the sexes generally which Roger E. Simmons, former representative in Russia of the Department of Commerce, has laid before the Senate Committee on Bolshevism. Mr. Simmons gives these documents as the official decrees of the Bolshevik Government through a local Soviet. The whole tendency of the report of the proceedings is to show that the Bolsheviki consider women not as human beings but merely as sexual machines.

The interference of Mr. Simmons' testimony is that marriage is completely abolished, that "Free Love" in the bourgeois sense is forced upon women and that the entire sex is organized on a scheme of state prostitution, a working card being tendered instead of money. It is well to remember when considering some of these "facts" about Russia those other facts which are not denied even by the most violent enemies of the Bolsheviki. One such fact to be remembered in connection with the question of how Soviet Russia deals with women is that working women participate in the Soviet Government on an equality with men and that some of the highest administrative offices in Russia are held by women.

One of the decrees which Mr. Simmons testifies to as official is in part as follows:

This decree is proclaimed by the Free Association of Anarchists in the town of Saratov. In compliance with the decision of the Soviet of Peasants' and Soldiers' and Workmen's Deputies of Kronstadt, the abolition of the private possession of women.

MOTIVES

Social inequalities and legitimate marriage having been a condition in the past which served as an instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie, thanks to which all the best species of all the beautiful women have been the property of the bourgeoisie, have prevented the proper continuation of the human race. Such ponderous arguments have induced the present organization to edict the following decree:

1. From March 1 the right to possess women having reached the ages 17 to 32 is abolished.
3. This decree does not affect women having five children.
4. The former owners may retain the right of using their wife without awaiting their turn.
5. In case of resistance of the husband he shall forfeit the right of the former paragraph.
6. All women according to this decree are exempted from private ownership and are proclaimed the property of the whole nation.
7. The distribution and management of the appropriated women in compliance with the decision of the above organization are transferred to the Anarchist Saratov Club. In three days from the publication of this decree all women given by it to the use of the nation are obliged to present themselves to the given address and give the required information.
9. Male citizens have the right to use one woman not oftener than three times a week, for three hours, observing the rules specified below.
10. Each man wishing to use a piece of public property should be a bearer of certificate from the Factories Committee, professional union, or Workmen's, Soldiers', and Peasants' Council, certifying that he belongs to the working class family.
12. Male citizens not belonging to the working class in order to have the right equally with the proletariat are obliged to pay 100 roubles monthly into the public funds.
14. All women proclaimed by this decree to be the national property will receive from the funds an allowance of 238 roubles a month.
15. All women who are pregnant are released of the direct State duties for four months, up to three months before and one month after childbirth.
16. The children born are given to an institution for training after they are one month old where they are trained and educated until they are 17 years of age at the cost of the public funds.
19. Those who are guilty of spreading venereal disease will be held responsible and severely punished.
20. Women having lost their health may apply to the Soviet for a pension.

The provisions of this decree could only emanate from petty bourgeois minds. Even the wildest Anarchists would not produce such a pornographic document; moreover, the "Free Association of Anarchists," quite clearly is not the Soviet Government—the Anarchists, in fact, are violently opposed to the Bolsheviki.

Editorials sizzling with righteous wrath accompany the publication of this and other decrees. The American public is invited to behold what is in store for it if it ever attempted to stray from the pleasant and virtuous ways of Capitalism, broadsides of indignation are poured forth against the Bolsheviki libertines and outraged virtue assails this wholesale immorality and violation of all the sacred ideals of sex virtue and family love. When, however, it is remembered that these editorial writers are constantly engaged in upholding the present system of society and that their virtuous wrath is curbed when dealing with our own system of prostitution, white slavery and female degradation one is forced to wonder whether the indignation is as real as it appears.

Even the horrible examples cited by Mr. Simmons do not deprive women of their liberty of choice and their personal freedom in other matters. Under Capitalism (the system of society which gentlemen like Mr. Simmons, the personnel of the Senate Committee and newspaper editors are so vigorously supporting), things are different. The details of the white slave traffic are so revolting that they cannot be put into print, the particulars of prostitution are so hideous that they cannot be published. Under our present system women are sold into slavery at so much a pound, young girls are decoyed from their homes and sent into brothels there to do the bidding of their owners, women are kept confined to houses lest they would run away. In these brothels they are forced, sometimes by bodily punishment, into relations with diseased men and when they have contracted disease are forced to contain their "trade." Statistics give the average life of these women as five years and the number of suicides is appalling. But statistics do not compute the sufferings and degradation that are crowded into the five years, the shame, the misery, the loneliness, the bodily agony, the mental torture. An investigation in the British House of Commons some time ago resulted in the disclosure of the fact that houses of prostitution were maintained with the connivance, if not open support, of the English army authorities, in which each woman had relations with over 100 men in a week and often with over 20 men in one day. The streets of the great cities of all "civilized" countries are swarming with women plying this "trade."

But all these things are matters of little moment to these virtuous men because the women who swell the ranks of the prostitutes are the women of the working class. The bodily and mental anguish of these women is of no importance!

In Russia the incentive for traffic in women's bodies is removed—there is no longer a profit to be derived out of their agony. The Soviets had to revise the old system with regard to the sexes as it has revised it in all other matters. It is quite true that decrees have been issued on the subject. Some changes have been made in the marriage system but no decree has been issued abolishing marriage.

Decrees have been issued regarding divorce in which a commonsense attitude is taken towards the question. If both parties desire the divorce it is granted without any obstacles being placed in the way, if only one side wishes the separation the matter comes before a local judge and his decision is not acceptable to both parties then the case is laid before a jury. Notice of divorce is published in the local official paper both before and after the decree has been granted. Where there have been children to the marriage the court decides which party shall have custody and whether the children will take the father's or the mother's name. In the event that the application for divorce hinges on the question of the validity of the marriage a jury decides the case.

The following decree regarding marriage has been issued by the Council of People's Commissaires, the central government of Soviet Russia:

The Russian Republic from now on recognizes civil marriages only.

A civil marriage is performed in accordance with the following rules.

1. Persons, desiring to enter into marriage, announce their intention verbally or in written form to the Department for Registration of Marriages and births (in their locality), attached to the City Board of Aldermen.

Note: The desire to perform a religious marriage together with a civil marriage is considered solely private affair of the parties entering into marriage.

2. Announcements of the desire to enter into marriage are not accepted: a) from male persons under 18 years of age; from female—under 16; the Male natives of Transcaucasia may enter into marriage on their 16th birthday, and female natives, on the 13th; b) from relatives, from brothers and sisters and half brothers and half sisters; in such cases the relationship between an illegal child and his posterity on one hand and his father and the relative on the other hand—is recognized; c) from persons who have already entered into marriage and d) from insane persons.

3. Persons desirous of entering into marriage go to the Department for Registration of Marriage and sign their names in regard to the absence of obstacles mentioned in Article 2 of this Decree, and also give their signatures to the effect that they enter into marriage voluntarily.

Persons who intentionally give false statements as to the absence of obstacles, enumerated in Article 2 are brought to court for giving false information, and their marriage is declared void.

4. Having taken the signatures, the Chief of the Department for Registration of Marriages enters the marriage into the Record Book and declares the marriage act valid.

The parties entering into marriage are free to determine whether they will use the name of the man or the wife, or both names jointly.

The parties entering into marriage receive a copy of their marriage certificate.

5. Complaints in regard to refusal to perform marriage or in regard to mistakes in registering it may be presented within an unlimited period of time to local judge (where the marriage is registered); complaints of the judges decision may be made in accordance with the general rules.

The inference from the reports of the Senate Committee published in the press is that children have ceased to be under the care of their parents or, in fact, to in any sense retain their identity as members of a family. The following decrees, one signed by Alexandra Kollontay, Commissaire of Social Welfare (Mme Kollontay is the only woman in the world to hold a high executive government office and the Soviet Government is the only government in the world which has an executive government department of Social Welfare) and the other by Lenin shows in what light the Bolsheviki treat the question of child welfare:

Two million young lives were yearly dwindling in Russia because of the darkness of the oppressed people, because of apathy of the class State. Two million suffering mothers were saturating yearly the Russian earth with tears and were covering with their blistered hands the early graves of the innocent victims of the hideous social order. The human thought, which had for centuries sought a path, has at last reached the bright epoch of workers' reforms, which will safeguard the mother for the child and the child for the mother. Bright samples of capitalist moral—homes for orphans filled above their capacity, having a colossal mortality rate and a hideous form of nursing the infants, which form was an insult to the sacred feelings of a helpless laboring mother and which made the mother-citizen a dull nursing animal—all these horrors of a nightmare have fortunately, sunk in the dark mist of the past since the victory of the workers and the peasants. A morning, bright and pure as the children themselves has come.

You, working women, laboring mother-citizens, with your responsive hearts,—you brave builders of the new social life,—you ideal pedagogues, children's physicians and nurses,—all of you are called by the new Soviet Russia to contribute your minds and feelings to the building of the great structure of social welfare of the future generations. All the small and large institutions of the Commissariat of Social Welfare which serve the children,—all of them from the day of publication of this decree, mould into one state organization and are transformed to the supervision of the Department for safeguarded mothers and children, so as to create an inseparable chain together with the Institutions for the care of pregnant women, for the purpose of bringing up mentally and physically strong citizens. The Petrograd Home, with all the auxiliary branches, becomes part of the "Palace for Safeguarding Motherhood and Infancy", as one of its departments and is named "The Palace of Infancy". The Moscow Home becomes part of the Moscow Institute of Motherhood and is named "The Moscow Institute of Infancy".

For the purpose of precipitating the realization of the necessary reforms for the safeguarding childhood in Russia, at the Department for Safeguarding Motherhood and Infancy a Committee is being organized. It is to be composed of representatives of the Soviet of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, of Workers' organizations and of specialists, interested in the question of social welfare of the infants. The following principles are to be the Committee's guiding principles:

1. Safeguarding the mother for the child: the best drop of milk for the child—is the milk from its mother's breast.
2. Bring up the child in an atmosphere of a widely developed Socialist family.
3. To create for the child conditions, which would lay a foundation for the development of its physical and mental strength and for a bright understanding of life.

People's Commissaire: A. Kollontay.

Member of the Collegium, supervising the Department for Safeguarding Motherhood and Infancy: N. Koroleff.

Sect'y: Zvetkoff.

January 31, 1918.

DECREE ON COMMISSIONS FOR CARE OF MINORS

Article 1. Trial and imprisonment for children and those under age are abolished.

Article 2. The cases of those not of age of both sexes who have been guilty of acts detrimental to the society are to be dealt with by special Commission for Care of Minors.

Article 3. The above mentioned Commissions are under the sole jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat of Social Welfare and are composed as follows: One representative each of the Commissariats of Social Welfare, People's Education and Justice—not less than three people in all, one of whom must be a physician.

Article 4. On investigating the cases of those under age, the Commission either frees them or sends them to one of the institutions of Social Welfare, corresponding with the offence.

Article 5. The Commissaire of Social Welfare is charged with the task of working out instructions to the Commissions and the selection of types of institutions of Social Welfare.

Article 6. All cases of those under age which are pending in the courts of which have led to imprisonment, must be retried.

Chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissaires: V. Ulianoff (Lenin).

People's Commissaire of Justice: E. Z. Steinberg.

Chief Clerk: Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич.

Secretary of the Soviet: N. Gorbounoff.

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