Socialist Feminist Theory: the Issue of Revolution

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This paper explains the reproduction of sexual inequality in socialist systems with the argument that an emancipated role for women is strategic during the phase of revolutionary mobilisation but, given the productive priorities of the new state, equality will be downplayed during the period of consolidation. The case of China is used to illustrate the tension between female productive and reproductive roles and to support the argument that, since revolution is an engineered process, female status is partially determined by the priorities of the engineer.

Introduction

Socialist feminists are beginning to arrive at some common understanding of the role of women under capitalism, at least at a general level of analysis. We agree that we must focus on the interconnections between patriarchal relations and the historically-situated interests of capitalism, supporting our arguments with research detailing the relationship between the exigencies of evolving capitalism and the socio-political position of women.

The position, however, on the relationship of women to socialism is less clear. While Juliet Mitchell was calling for the "articulation" of our relationship to socialism over a decade ago, our response has been uneven, at times contradictory, and, above all, limited at the theoretical level. As with the proverbial donkey, we dangle the carrot of socialist revolution in front of our collective noses, with the implicit knowledge that its consumption may alleviate the hunger without eliminating it. We know that which we negate, but are not as sure of that which we affirm. But, that said, we still fall back on a precarious "after-the-revolution-trust" (Weinbaum, 1978:8). Accordingly, confronted by feminists who point to existing sexual inequalities in various contemporary socialist states, the response, though varied, contains one unifying theme, the attempt to 'explain away' the inequalities. This occurs in several ways:

On the one hand, there are those who would deny that inequality persists in socialism, citing bourgeois propaganda, liberal distortions, and North American ethnocentric standards as the sources of such conclusions. Essentially, they argue that female emancipation can be demonstrated through a comparison of pre-socialist and socialist female status. On the other hand, there are those who would argue that

persisting inequality is a consequence of cultural lag, the remnants of a feudal tradition which will eventually disappear. Finally, a similar strand focuses on technological underdevelopment, arguing that full emancipation must await sufficient development in the forces of production.

While obviously different in terms of their focus of analysis, each category of response assumes a processual transition from the pre-revolutionary period through to the post-revolutionary period. In other words, there is an implicit acceptance of the linear rationality of socialist revolution; namely, that ideology of women's role developed during the concrete revolutionary process is a pre-figurative version of the post-revolutionary regime's policy toward the role of women in the 'new' society. Underlying this assumption is an expectation of gradual elevation in female socio-political status as the socialist regime extends its control over the entire society. If the expectation remains unrealized, we are locked into either examining the pre-figurative version (i.e. where did Engels go wrong?) or arguing that the transitional process has not fully evolved (i.e. give us another ten years to get the 'kinks' worked out).

Essentially, the motivation for this paper lies in a dissatisfaction with the socialist feminist response to the feminist dismissal of socialism. What appears to have happened is that socialist feminists have felt we must either deny the 'accusations' or argue for patience in the face of impending cultural/economic development for the 'accused' regime. What I would argue is that neither approach sheds light on the role of women within a socialist revolution. To deny the reality of the phenomenon is as meaningless as to apologize for history by promising a better future.

The real theoretical problems are to account for the context of the participation of women relative to men, and to articulate the mechanisms of change. Female emancipation under socialism is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon; it is a process which has taken on different dimensions in different historical periods. It is precisely this fluctuating nature of progress and retrenchment in women's issues under socialist revolution which must be explained. To accomplish this, one must look at the historical process involved in the development of socialist revolution. In other words, we must use history to determine the mechanisms of change, not merely to "compare the present to the past and see progress" (Sidel, 1974:123).

A starting point in this task is to treat as problematic the assumption of a processual transition from pre-revolutionary ideology to post-revolutionary praxis. In other words, I will begin by treating as analytically separate the period of revolutionary insurgency and the period of post-revolutionary consolidation of power. The problem is to examine the interaction of the revolutionary Party/State exigencies in each period and policies concerning the productive and reproductive roles that women play in each period.[1] Hopefully this approach will avoid the error of treating ideology as determining praxis, by arguing that historical material realities necessitate a praxis which may have little to do with the ideology of liberation. In the following, I will attempt to suggest how one can proceed to investigate the interaction of socialist revolutionary requisites and policies regarding women, and how one can use the 'model' to make sense of certain developments in the Chinese Revolution.

Revolution: The Process and the Product

As suggested in the introduction, the analysis of socialist revolutions must take account of two distinct phases: the process of attempting seizure of the incumbent state apparatus; and the process of consolidation of the new state apparatus (in Marx's terms, the insertion of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat').[2] The problem is that there is a void within Marxism in terms of a political theory which addresses either process in any detail (see Miliband, 1977 and Boggs, 1977). Although there is a general framework with which to approach the issue of socialist revolution and transition (i.e. the notion of a proletariat achieving self-emancipation with the aid of an organizing party), the problem of HOW, and the problem of TRANSITION to a new stage was never fully worked out by Marx. The emphasis on the historical inevitability of the transition has subordinated the question of how a revolutionary movement actually brings about the process.

This problem becomes even more acute when an industrial proletariat is either weak or non-existent, and when capitalism is at an early stage of development (and often inserted from outside). The general framework, as mapped by Marx and Engels and modified by Lenin, seems even more remote in these cases, cases which become important when one looks at the growth of socialist movements in the Third World. The fundamental question becomes: how does a revolutionary socialist movement build socialism under those conditions? In other words, what is required of the organizing revolutionary party? And, how can those requisites affect policy toward women? I turn first to the process of seizure of power.

A. Phase of Insurgency

To begin, one can isolate two clear tasks of a revolutionary party at this stage. First, the movement, through the direction of the party, must seize effective control of the state apparatus from the incumbent elite. Thus, through force, the movement can remove a regime from power. This is essentially a military question concerning the strategic mobilization and deployment of armed forces. I am not concerned with the relation of this task to the role of women, other than to point out the necessity of replacing labour power displaced by military mobilization. Second, the movement, through the direction of the party, must destroy loyalties to the old regime. This task is essentially a question of dealing with the impact of traditionalism, an obstacle which cannot be dealt with by force alone. As Miliband (1977:47,50) argues, it involves a "battle for consciousness":

> The problem, for victorious revolutions, is to prevent tradition from corroding them and ultimately defeating them from within...traditions are sustained and mediated by a network of particular institutions, which are actively involved in the performance of a process of transmission.

It is in terms of this task that the relationship of women to revolutionary goals may be understood. What role do women play in the 'institutions of tradition' and how may a revolutionary party overcome this obstacle?

A significant contribution can be made to this set of questions by drawing upon the work of Gregory Massell (1974). Massell's intention was to study a 'revolution-from-above' in this case, the Soviet Union's extension into Central Asia (between 1919-1929), with the following questions in mind:

> ...how and to what extent, political power may be deliberately used in the revolutionary transformation of societies, especially those we call 'traditional' societies; conversely, how, and to what extent, traditional structures and life styles may serve as obstacles to engineered revolution. (p.xx)

The problems faced by the Soviets in Central Asia were typical of traditional society: no industrial proletariat to speak of and the minimal presence of a capitalist mode of production. Massell (75, 76) argues that their solutions essentially broke down into two possible responses: on the one hand, the use of force to 'excise' the traditional elites and coerce the population into compliance and, on the other, the discovery of "a weak link in society, a relatively deprived and hence potentially subversive stratum susceptible to militant appeal, a surrogate proletariat where no proletariat in the real Marxist sense existed". Both responses were used by the Soviets in Central Asia, but what is interesting for the issues at hand is their perception of the weak link and its strategic contribution to the subversion of traditionalism.

Through an analysis of Soviet documents, Massell (76) demonstrates that women in these traditional Moslem societies were defined as "crucial actors" whose mobilization would severely weaken the key institutions. This plan of action obviously assumes that class position was not the sole basis for expression of social conflict; rather, patriarchy vested in a range of authority relations was a key element (87-88).

Once the decision to mobilize women was taken, the task of the revolutionary party became to "maximize female discontent" and "channel" it into directions optimal to the revolutionary movement (Massell, 1974:131-132). The source of the discontent was fairly clear; a quick scan of female status in traditional Moslem societies gave clues as to the potential tension inherent in their roles. Thus, the 'payoffs' for women in mobilization were the wide range of citizen rights not

previously open to them (ranging from rights to education to protection from sentence of death for illegitimate loss of virginity).

The payoffs for the revolutionary movement were not as obvious. The links between the mobilization of women and the demise of traditionalism were more implicit than explicit. This is exactly where the significance of Massell's argument to the issues raised at the beginning of this paper emerges. He articulates those linkages by demonstrating the expectations the Soviets expressed through their policies and action regarding women. His analysis illustrates the leverage gained by the Soviet state through the strategic use of women to destabilize the traditional regime. Briefly summarized, the "payoffs of female mobilization" are (133-181):

1. Liberation and Humanitarian Implications:

   The moral legitimation of the Soviet movement on humanitarian grounds became an important rallying point for both appeals to Moslem women (who gained personal benefits) and for the recruitment of cadres to work for the cause.

2. Implications for Traditional Authority Relations:

   The role network links between authority, kinship, lineage and male superiority become vulnerable when the political cohesion afforded through the female role is removed.

3. Implications for Kinship and Community:

   The increased opportunities to women, the liberalization of divorce, and the stress on public participation subordinates local traditional loyalties based on clan, family and custom ties. In addition, the disruption of kinship control over sex and marriage strengthens loyalties to the new regime among women and young people. To undercut primary social units and induce 'fragmentation' makes individuals more accessible to mobilization and the society more open to penetration.

4. Implications for Religion and Custom:

   To challenge the legitimacy of religious control over daily life through the subversion of Islamic custom regarding women is a key to weakening the overall control of these religious institutions and their elites.

5. Implications for Property Relations:

The importance of the links between customs involving the female role and certain 'institutions of property' (arranged marriage, bride-price, etc.) suggests that mobilization of women can weaken patterns of property control. This is compounded with challenge to lack of control over property, including land. Moreover, the new accessibility of poor males to marriage increases the latter's attraction for the new regime.

6. Implications for Recruitment of Labour and Technical Cadres:

The mobilization of women involves the provision of a large, previously untapped labour pool which increases the scope of economic development and the optimal productive potential of the society.

7. Implications for Recruitment of Political Cadres:

The recruitment of indigenous cadres through appeals to Moslem women is useful not only in expanding party influence but also in their serving as prefigurative models of the role of women in the new society.

8. Implications for Revolutionary Potentials Abroad:

This theme, more historically tied to the nature of the Soviet 'satellite' system, involves the expectation that the pattern set for women in Central Asia could serve as a revolutionary model for societies on its borders.

The importance of Massell's analysis to socialist feminists lies in his focus on the strategic use of feminist issues both to weaken the traditional regime and to strengthen loyalties to the emerging regime. Again, this is not to say that 'liberation' motives played no part in their policies on women, only that these were secondary to the priorities of gaining a foothold in the society. This fact becomes even more apparent when Massell documents the retrenchment and, even, reversals in policies of mobilization within two and one half years of their origin (1974:322-389).

However, it is concerning the problem of explaining the retrenchment that I think Massell fails. He notes that the "imperatives of insurgency are not easily reconciled with imperatives of incumbency"

(1974:407-408) but, when faced with the elaboration of the latter imperatives, he falls back on the idealist argument that the threat posed by radical policies of liberation to male identity, vested in tradition, created a situation of tension which was unhealthy for a regime seeking stabilization. While one cannot ignore this dimension of resistance, to give it causal status is, I think, misleading. It obscures the question of what set of conditions emerges when a revolutionary party is transformed into a legitimate state apparatus.

It is necessary to specify the conditions under which the 'payoffs' became too costly. To do that one needs to question the role of the state in socialism, its tasks, and how they interact with the role of women in the new regime. In other words, is the new regime forced to retrench its position on women (for reasons of resistance, cultural lag or whatever) or, are there payoffs to the socialist state for retaining or reproducing particular elements of patriarchal relations?

B. Phase of Consolidation/Development

As I discussed earlier, there is a lack of analysis by Marxists of the role of the state in socialism. The explanation of the socialist state apparatus cannot be found, though, by merely equating the state's role in capitalist and socialist states as some convergence theorists would seek to do. The conditions within which the state operates cannot be ignored. Collective ownership of the means of production and the absence of an appropriating class cannot help but have an effect on the concrete operations of the socialist state.

What then can one say of the requisites the socialist party faces at this phase? On a general level, what is required is the replacement

of the seized state apparatus with a new organ of planning and control and the replacement of engineered separation from old regime loyalties with popular support and loyalty to the new regime. Moreover, it is important to recognize the broad constraints on the state in terms of its ability to meet those requisites. On this point, Miliband's discussion of the 'functions' of a state is incisive. Essentially, he argues that every state must carry out the following functions, although the conditions of doing so will vary (1977:90):

1. the repressive function (the state must maintain social order within its boundaries)
2. the idealogical-cultural function (the state must engineer and maintain consent to the form of the system)
3. the economic function (used in the broadest sense, the state must sustain the population and foster productive growth)
4. the international function (the state must foster and protect the 'national' interest in international matters)

The important question is how the 'nature' of socialism affects the role of the state in carrying out these functions. While it is fairly clear how the capitalist state operates as a class instrument (although we may debate its degree of autonomy) in the performance of these functions, the matter is complicated in the analysis of socialism by its economic context. As Miliband (1977:114, my emphasis) notes:

> ...the collectivist character of the society precludes it from being such an instrument...Instead, the state may be taken to 'represent' the collective society or system itself, and to have as its function the service of its needs as these are perceived and defined by those who control the state.

The role of the party/state (in socialism the terms are realistically interchangeable in terms of actual control) is, then, to define needs and the strategy for dealing with them. This is not to suggest that the state becomes an instrument for bureaucratic class

privilege although one cannot deny that privilege can accrue in this manner. Rather, the state is still constrained by the "rationality of state action" in a socialist context; i.e. "state-fostered economic growth...and state-fostered provision of social services and cultural developments" (Miliband, 1977:113-114). But, a factor which is significant is the degree of power wielded by the apex of the socialist state in the interpretation of needs and allocation of resources to meet them. This does not imply a purposeful conspiracy of those individuals who hold the reins of state power but it does recognize the place of the state in intersecting historical material conditions through planning direction and implementing policy. Certainly, one must recognize the genuine role of mass parties in socialist states, but these are parties which are "distinguished by their pyramidal structures, with an extreme concentration of power at the top of the pyramid" (Miliband, 1977:115).

To return to the issue of women in this process of consolidation and development: the above discussion focuses attention on the interplay of the historically situated material conditions which socialist regimes inherit; the role of the state in intersecting the material conditions and the necessity of growth and provision of services; and the policies regarding women in the consolidation of socialism as a reflection of the conditions proceeding from the first two factors rather than from a prefigurative ideology or their role in the insurgency phase.

My argument is that to talk about women's relationship to socialism is a complex matter. It requires that we first look at the conditions of taking power, its requisites and the strategic role women can play, and, secondly, look at the conditions of replacing and consolidating power, its requisites and the strategic role women can

play. This mode of analysis does not assume the party/state as an *a priori* monolith. Quite the opposite. It suggests, to rework an old Marxist adage, that socialist parties/states make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing. In other words, socialist ideology concerning women does not necessarily transform into socialist praxis towards women.

Case Application: China

I have been attempting to suggest that a focus on the stages or phases in the building of socialism in traditional societies and on their parallel requisites can lead to a better understanding of the unfulfilled promise of socialism for women. I would now like to suggest how one might make sense of particular developments in China with respect to policies regarding women. Obviously, in a paper of this scope, I cannot mount a full historical analysis of the role of women in China from the pre-revolutionary period through the present. What I will attempt is a selective discussion of the broad policies of the Chinese Communist Party (C.C.P.) relevant to the role of women. I will focus specifically on the phase of insurgency and the phase of consolidation/development.

A. The Phase of Insurgency

Keeping in mind the two periods of alliance between the C.C.P. and the Guomindang nationalist party (1923-27 and 1938-45), the important periods of insurgency are 1927-37 and 1945-49. The period of 1927-33 is important as the time during which the initial collectivist Soviets were established as rural bases in Central and Southeast China. They are especially important as a 'testing ground' for development of party policies regarding women, policies later expanded in the Liberated

Areas of northern China following the Long March of 1934. While there are many policies of significance in the insurgency period, those regarding marriage are of particular relevance. I will focus on these policies, and also make brief reference to labour and land policies.

Two key marriage policies in the insurgency period are the Marriage Regulations (1931) and the Marriage Law (1934).[3] Both policies contained an emphasis on:

1) freedom of choice in marriage by individuals involved
2) freedom of choice in divorce by individuals involved
3) registration of marriage and divorce with local party officials
4) responsibility of the male in divorce action to provide for wife and children (the latter remaining in custody of wife)

The Law of 1934 seems to have taken a qualifed stand on divorce.[4] The restrictions placed on women who were seeking divorce from males serving in the Red Army are particularly interesting since such a suit required the husband's consent. As Croll notes, several documents appeared during this period which stressed the difference between freedom and 'absolute' freedom in marriage and divorce. This was, apparently, a response to negative reaction to the Law (1978:195) on the part of peasants. While recognizing that the implementation of the Law was uneven, what can we say about its links to revolutionary goals at large? Following is a brief summary of what I think are some of the important linkages:

(i) The C.C.P. policies on marriage most certainly reflected liberation and humanitarian themes. Their recognition of the impact of such practices as marriage, bride-price and widow suicide on women as individuals became an important inducement for the feminist organizations in China at that time to join with the communist cause.

(For discussion of this engineered alliance, see Croll, 1978:117-152).

(ii) The impact of the Marriage Law on traditional authority relations is particularly significant in China where a women was subject to three authorities in her lifetime: that of her father, her husband, and her son. The granting of unprecedented female rights disrupted that entire role network. With respect to the attack on an arranged marriage system, the Law significantly affected the practice of the land-holding classes to use marriage as a mechanism for social mobility (See Wolf, 1969:107). The disruption of traditional authority is particularly evident with respect to the role of Confucian ideology in sustaining a hierarchy of authority. At the root of the Confucian system of 'proper relations' was the notion of patriarchy, vested in the dominance of the male 'yang' over the female 'yin.' Indeed, to challenge the legitimacy of this domination was to challenge the whole Confucian system of authority relations.

(iii) The granting of equal rights to women in marriage and divorce seriously undermined the control of the kinship system over such processes. In so doing, it undermined a crucial link between the peasants and the ruling class; namely, the clan system. As Barrington Moore notes (1966:207), peasant conservatism in feudal China can largely be explained through the extended kin groups, the clan. It was the one binding link between ruled and ruler and it was determined by patrilineal descent. To 'equalize' women as partners in a freely-chosen marital arrangement (including the retention of maiden name) is a direct challenge to the lineage system and the control exercised by the clan. This is even more significant when the locus of 'approval' is transferred to the C.C.P. through registration of marriage and divorce. The local officials had significant discretion in the recognition of

such arrangements.

Also important is the fact that it was the middle and upper class members of a clan who really controlled the clan itself, generally because of the importance accorded to literacy as a requisite of political power (Wolf, 1966:108-109). Thus, the undermining and subordination of clan authority to party control was a blow against class authority as well. In this manner, radical reform in marriage custom provided important leverage for the C.C.P. in breaking the strong clan ties, ties which often encompassed entire villages. In addition, the new accessibility of the sexes encouraged the loyalty of poor male peasants (known as 'bare sticks') who previously could not afford brides, and of young people in general.

(iv) The impact of the Marriage Law on religious tradition is important with respect to the place of Confucian ideology in sustaining traditional authority, as discussed above. Not only did the Law challenge the legitimacy of Confucian beliefs and values in relation to women, it extended the challenge to the fundamental axis of filial duty and to ancestoral worship (again based on patrilineal descent).

(v) The links between the Marriage Law and property relations are quite clear. The former fundamentally challenged the tradition of females as property to be used and disposed of at will by father or husband. In outlawing arranged marriage and bride-price, it took away significant control from fathers. In liberalizing divorce, it eroded the control of husbands over their wives. In both cases, it increased the accessibility of women to the revolutionary movement, a significant consequence when a party is seeking the quick mobilization of individuals for revolutionary tasks.

In addition to marriage policies, the linkages of land and labour

reform policies to female mobilization are significant. The Land Reform laws[5] formulated during the period of the early Soviets, withdrawn during the 2nd United Front and expanded during the civil war period, contained one important theme, the equal right of all individuals to land allotments, and went so far as to issue separate deeds to husband and wife to specify the share of each. The impact of this law was clear in one respect. Redistribution of land on an individual basis rather than on a family unit basis broke the village network apart at its base by undermining the crucial link between property and kinship and forging a new link between the individual and the C.C.P. Thus, while C.C.P. documents of this time contain explicit reference to the equation of land reform and female liberation (see Davin, 1976:26-27) the more obvious consequence was the subversion of the traditional property network. This becomes clearer when one notes the refusal of the C.C.P. to extend allotments to all 'landless' women. Class position of the husband was a determinate boundary.

Policies regarding the labour of women in the insurgency phase contained one dominant aim: the mobilization of women for the war effort. In a society dependent upon labour-intensive agriculture for subsistence, the ability to recruit military forces was directly tied to the ability to provide for the dependents left behind. Lack of financial resources for 'welfare support' leaves but one choice, to replace the lost labour power. This was the primary role of Chinese women in the revolutionary process, engaging in support activities for the Red Army. They were not recruited into combat activity. We know, for example, that only fifty women went along on the Long March of 50,000 (Salaff and Merkle, 1970:82).

In contributions other than agricultural labour, their tasks were

consistently of a domestic nature. This selectivity of participation was reflected in the issues dealt with by the Women's Congresses of this period. Davin summarizes the major subjects of debate of the 1933 Women's District Congress as: enlarging and giving aid to the Red Army, caring for dependents of the latter, learning to plough, and selling personal valuables to finance the movement (1976:26). Issues such as literacy, health care, footbinding, and feudal marriage were relatively ignored by these 'feminist' organizations in the pursuit of the party priorities. For those feminists, like Ding Ling in 1941, who protested the subordination of these questions, the party response was that sexual liberation was already established and further feminist action was harmful to the cause (see Davin, 1976:36). Apparently, the strategic use of women had its limitations, imposed by party priorities.

The general Labour Law of this period, modelled after the Soviet Union Labour Code, did not have much impact on women's labour due to its emphasis on industrial workers, a significant minority in the Liberated Areas. It is significant as a prefigurative version of protective legislation restricting women's labour, limiting certain industries, night work, and 'heavy' labour (see Croll 1978:263-264 and Davin 1976:31). Also included was a policy to arrange day care services at the female's place of employment so that she might better organize her dual responsibilities.

The above discussion provides, I think, some clues as to the relationship of women and revolutionary requisites in the insurgency phases in China. Certainly, there were payoffs for Chinese women and to ignore this fact is to do a gross injustice to the real successes of the revolution. The equally interesting question, however, is the degree to which these payoffs were in keeping with party requisites in seizing

power and combatting traditionalism. The admittedly brief summary of certain policies and their links to revolutionary goals seems to suggest that feminism had its value, but only to a point. The retrenchment in divorce during the civil war, the emphasis on the war effort over particular female-specific reforms, the segregation of women from active military participation, and the extension of domestic-type tasks indicate some of the boundaries of patriarchy that the party was not willing to cross.

B. The Phase of Consolidation/Development

As elaborated earlier, the essential requisites of the socialist state in this phase are the fostering of economic growth and the provision of necessary services to the population. These are carried out under the restraints of particular material conditions which the state intersects through the implementation of policies defined as necessary by those in control of 'problem perception'. To understand the role of women in the Chinese socialist state, one must first examine the conditions under which policies regarding their role emerged. Again, there is a significant body of literature addressing various developments in post-revolutionary China which time does not permit me to pursue here. Rather, I will attempt to summarize what seem to have been the major shifts in policy regarding women. I will restrict the time period in question to 1953-1960, for reasons involving the 'statistical blackout' of 1961 and policy shifts and factional struggles in China since 1960 which reflect the competing models (the "two roads to socialism") which emerged in the first decade.

Two quite different approaches to economic development emerged in China following the demise of the New Democratic Period in 1953 and the

break with a capitalist mode of production. The first was a Soviet-modelled, urban-oriented and capital-intensive strategy, the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957). The second model was really Mao Zedong's version of a dual approach to economic development, the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960). Based on mass mobilization of labour power, it stressed the simultaneous development of small-scale and large-scale industry, employing labour-intensive means in the former and capital-intensive means in the latter. These alternative strategies for promoting growth led to differing and sometimes contradictory policies on women.

1. The First Five Year Plan

The problems facing post-war China were severe: a fragmented, war-torn economy, a weak industrial base, technological backwardness and low labour productivity in agriculture, and a population of about five hundred million (see Eckstein et al., 1968). With Soviet guidance and support, the C.C.P. attempted a massive industrial drive by increasing the state capital investment by sixty percent by 1956, by sharply increasing industrial output, and by creating a massive in-flow to urban areas (see Yeh, 1968). The difficulties contained in this approach were the inordinate share of fixed investment in heavy industry, about eighty-six percent in the 53-57 period according to Cheng (1974:55), and stabilization of the agricultural sector at low growth levels.

The impact of these conditions on women was a significant retrenchment of previous policies. During the contraction of the urban market in 1955-1957, the "whole apparatus of persuasion and propaganda was mobilized to keep women out of the labour force" (Howe, 1971:97). It was also in 1955 that Davin notes a significant increase in women's

organizations known as Dependents' Associations, groups whose purpose was to encourage the participation of women, not as productive workers, but as wives and mothers (1976:59-61).

An additional consequence of the focus on heavy industry was a decline in the state's investment in consumer goods to about nine percent of total investment (Cheng, 1974:55). As Weinbaum argues, the slack led to inflated consumer prices and thus to higher wage demands by state workers. To deflect rising wage costs, the state encouraged women to engage in domestic production of consumer goods for use (Weinbaum, 1976:42-43). Again, women's organizations played an important role in implementing this policy. Indeed, the slogan of the Women's Congress of 1957 became "Build up the country economically; manage the household thriftily; and struggle for socialist construction" (Davin, 1976:65).

Finally, family solidarity was an important theme in this period and divorce became increasingly difficult to obtain (see Kristeva, 1975:65). The overall thrust was a resurgence in traditional female roles (including arranged marriage) during the period of urban-centered industrial expansion.

By the end of the Plan, industrial growth was impressive, but it was not in any way matched by growth in agriculture. Intersectoral imbalances led to raw material shortages, supply bottlenecks and inadequate consumer goods provision (Eckstein et al., 1968:6). It was in the context of these conditions that the Leap policy was implemented. The problem they faced was that of maintaining industrial growth in addition to fostering agricultural growth.

2. The Great Leap Forward

Mao's solution, that of 'walking on two legs' was the

simultaneous development of agriculture and industry, heavy and light industry, and modern and traditional technology (Hou, 1968:379). In a context of scarce capital, the state's solution was to use capital-intensive means in heavy industry and substitute labour for capital in other development (Hou, 1968:381).

The impact on the policies regarding women was clear. Mass mobilization of labour power for socialist development demanded the large scale entrance of women into production. What is interesting, however, is the context of their entrance. In rural areas, where male cadres significantly controlled the production process, women were overwhelmingly represented in seasonal labour and in sectors of traditional technological organization such as irrigation, reclamation and flood-control (see Andors, 1976:91 and Hou, 1968).

In urban areas there were several consequences of significance. First, between 1958 and 1960, the state set up a state-controlled sector of urban commune or 'street' industry. This sector employed a total of two million workers, of whom eighty-five percent were women (Hou, 1968:381). Organized for small-scale production of consumer goods, this sector allowed several advantages: it alleviated the state's need for consumer goods production given its low rate of investment; it brought private supplementary income into the household, lowering the necessary wage bill to the state, and, finally, it was a means of absorbing a large supply of labour in the urban area (Weinbaum, 1977:43). In addition, a sectoral division of labour by sex tended to peripheralize women into either service sectors or the traditionally organized, low investment sectors of industry (see Hou, 1968).

Finally, in 1959 the birth control campaign of earlier periods was halted (Hou, 1968:383). Apparently the strategy of using labour as

a primary form of capital implies a renewed emphasis on the role of women as reproducers. Unfortunately, the state expected women to serve both productive and reproductive roles with no compensation and little service support for the latter.

The Leap period was a dismal failure for several reasons, not the least of which were a variety of natural disasters. In the years to follow, what occurred was really a power struggle concerning approaches to development. While right-wing strategists controlled the state, a reversion to social conservatism and material incentives was accompanied by a retrenchment in the role of women, including the revival of feudal customs such as bride-price in certain areas (Andors, 1976:94). When Mao regained control, a re-emphasis on Leap strategies led to policies on women similar to those of 1958-60. While historical conditions obviously differed, the real patterns for fluctuating state policies on women in socialism stem from the first decade of Chinese development.

While an in-depth historical treatment of these periods is required to fully explore the role of the state and its manipulation of female status, I think the above discussion is suggestive of the linkages. Essentially, it indicates that women are used to 'absorb' the costs of production in socialism. I emphasize that the tenor of this analysis is not to suggest that socialist revolution is, therefore, a dead-end for socialist feminists. Certainly in China, the position of women has progressed remarkably relative to pre-revolutionary conditions. What I am suggesting is that there have also been blocks in that process toward liberation, blocks which do not seem to wither away with time or technology. The task seems to be that of articulating the process of revolution, the process of transition to socialism, and above all, our place in these processes. Glib references to historical

inevitability can only bind us to a naive faith in the historical moment. Ultimately, it is necessary to realize that revolution is an engineered process and, consequently, that female status is partially determined by the priorities of the engineer.

NOTES

[1] The distinction as employed here refers to the type and organization of labour performed. 'Productive' refers to labour performed in the public sphere and 'reproductive' refers to labour (including actual reproduction) performed in the private sphere of the family unit.

[2] It is perhaps important to note at this point that I am not concerned in this paper with the issue of conditions leading to socialist revolution in the pre-revolutionary period. Rather, I am interested in the point at which the revolutionary movement is already in progress and, subsequent to success, is transformed into a socialist regime.

[3] Documents available in English in Meijer (1972).

[4] For extended discussion, see Croll (1978:194-196) or Davin (1976:28-29).

[5] For extended discussion, see Wong (1973) and Hsiao (1969). Hsiao also contains English translations of documents.

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