

# The New Soviet Woman, or, Soviet Feminism

Roland Boer

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The real achievements of the Bolsheviks are usually written out of any history of feminism, since as we all know, it is really a Western phenomenon. The catch is that the likes of Kollontai, Zetkin and others did not like to be known as feminists, since they saw it a distinctly bourgeois phenomenon. So perhaps Marxist or materialist feminism is a better term.

Already in the world's first 'affirmative action' constitution from 1936, we find Article 132:

Women in the U.S.S.R. are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life. The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured to women by granting them an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by state protection of the interests of mother and child, prematernity and maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.

This is by no means the first time questions of gender arose; Here is Stalin's statement on International Women's Day in 1925:

There has not been in the history of mankind a single great movement of the oppressed in which women toilers have not participated. Women toilers, the most oppressed of all the oppressed, have never kept away from the high road of the emancipation movement, and never could have done so. As is known, the movement for the emancipation of the slaves brought to the front hundreds of thousands of great women martyrs and heroines. In the ranks of the fighters for the emancipation of the serfs there were tens of thousands of women toilers. It is not surprising that the revolutionary working-class movement, the mightiest of all the emancipation movements of the oppressed masses, has rallied millions of women toilers to its banner.

International Women's Day is a token of the invincibility of the working-class movement for emancipation and a harbinger of its great future.

If the working class pursues a correct policy, they can and must become a real working-class army, operating against the bourgeoisie. To forge from this reserve of women toilers an army of working women and peasant women, operating side by side with the great army of the proletariat—such is the second and decisive task of the working class.

International Women's Day must become a means of transforming the working women and peasant women from a reserve of the working class into an active army of the emancipation movement of the proletariat.

Long live International Women's Day! (Works, vol. 7, pp. 48-49).

Time and again, we find discussions (at some length and often with local people) of the new Soviet woman, released from the restrictions of pre-revolutionary social and economic life and now involved in everyday working life, in the factories, collective farms and management of Soviet work. Older traditions of Russian life may still influence the attitudes of some men, so much so that they laugh at the new women, but Stalin reminds them of the crucial role of women in the socialist offensive, with an increasing number at the forefront of management and congresses. In an address to women collective farm shock workers in 1935, Stalin reflects on the extraordinary changes he has seen. He compares the women of old Russia, enslaved as they were to men at all stages of life, to the new emancipated and independent women of the collective farms who are in control of their own lives. These 'heroines of labour' represent a 'slice of the new life', of 'socialist life':

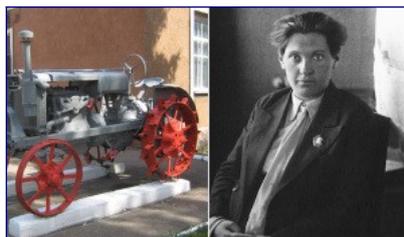
Comrades, what we have seen here today is a slice of the new life we call the collective life, the socialist life. We have heard the simple accounts of simple toiling people, how they strove and overcame difficulties in order to achieve success in socialist competition. We have heard the speeches not of ordinary women, but, I would say, of women who are heroines of labour, because only heroines of labour could have achieved the successes they have achieved. We had no such women before. Here am I, already 56 years of age, I have seen many things in my time, I have seen many labouring men and women. But never have I met such women. They are an absolutely new type of people. Only free labour, only collective farm labour could have given rise to such heroines of labour in the countryside. (Works, vol. 14, p. 85).

## **Pasha Angelina**

Perhaps one of the best examples of the new Soviet woman was Pasha Angelina (Praskovia Nikitichna Angelina). The story goes that after the first collectivisation wave, in 1933 Pasha organised an all-female tractor brigade in the Donetsk region. It exceeded its quota by 129%, producing more than any other team in their region. She became a new labour hero: young, strong, enthusiastic, from an ethnic minority.



Invited to the Kremlin, elected to the supreme soviet of the USSR, organiser of even more women's tractor teams, winner of the Stalin Prize in 1946 ... still, she preferred to drive tractors. As [this article](#) puts it, she became a symbol what might now be called Soviet feminism – except that by now such feminism was almost half a century old.



There is even some rare footage of Pasha at the Kremlin, with Stalin and the others.



You can watch it [here](#), with subtitles

Of course, there's a down side to all of this. Her husband didn't know how to relate to a strong woman, eventually leaving and drowning his sorrows in vodka (any excuse, really). And a lifetime working with tractor fuels and oils destroyed her body's ability to clear the toxins, so she died at 46.