

"Mao pitted against women"

Was there an independent women's movement in China before the revolution such as we are seeing now develop in this country?

The organized movement for women's rights goes back to 1911, although before this several individuals advocated change in the miserable status of women. Women in China have a long right history of struggle. This movement which encompassed masses of women, fought for the vote, right to education, property rights, to organize in unions, for maternity leave, day care, etc. This was one of the most powerful women's movements ever seen in history - it's a great pity we aren't taught about it.

In the early days women organized "Speak Bitterness" sessions where they talked about the oppression they each suffered. These were similar to the consciousness raising sessions we had in our own women's movement. Women in China soon generalized their problems and began to see it as a social problem that needed a social solution.

The role of women was crucial to the victory of the Chinese revolution - if they hadn't seen in the revolution a solution to their problems the revolution would not have been successful. The revolt against the old patriarchal feudal family added great strength to the revolutionary movement.

In your book you describe in gruesome detail the subjugation and slave-like existence of women before 1949. Are women liberated in China today?

Women have come a long way. The revolution was the first

huge step in the direction of liberation. They quickly received the vote, won property rights and received adequate day care for their children. In the urban areas 50% of the children from the ages of one to three and 80% of those three to six receive day care. Over 90% of women are employed outside the home. Many traditional male jobs have become open to women. Free birth control and abortion is available, however only to married women.

Certainly the position of women in China has been greatly advanced through the revolution and the worst abuses of women have been eliminated. However, you can by no means say as the Chinese Communist Party (C.C.P.) has at times, that women are liberated or indeed that the current regime is doing its utmost to advance women's equality. Backwardness and patriarchal traditions still exist, particularly in rural areas. There has not yet been the material basis to eliminate housework. The government does not try to consistently integrate women into the economic, social and political life of the country. The Communist Party's membership is less than 20%. At the Tenth Party Congress in 1973, there were still no women elected to the all powerful Political Bureau Standing Committee.

Only 17% of industrial workers, the highest paid part of the labor force, are women. There are still assigned sex roles to many occupations, for instance all the daycare workers are women. Divorces are very difficult to obtain due to extreme social pressures from the Party. Pre-marital sexuality is

outlawed. K.S. Karol, a long time resident of China, noted at the time of the Cultural Revolution, that China was even more sexually repressive than Stalinist Russia. He said that in the universities you could be expelled because of flirtations or affairs. Unmarried women can not get birth control. These policies hit women worst, for it is they who get pregnant, and must suffer the consequent loss of job and repression.

Housework is still done primarily by women. They have a double burden.

Since 1953 the C.C.P. has told women they were liberated and that they no longer need to engage in militant struggles around their rights. Since then independent women's groups have been unable to exist. Since there is no freedom of speech, there can be no criticism except self-criticism. The Chinese Communist Party has played no consistent role in defending women's rights.

Many feminists around the world see the nuclear family as an important instrument for subjugating women. What is the position of the Chinese government on this question?

In China under the C.C.P., a privileged bureaucratic caste exists. In order to maintain itself this caste has to fight all kinds of backward prejudices about women and maintain the family, which is a basic unit necessary for any authoritarian society.

It its early days the C.C.P. carried a Leninist position on the family, seeing it as a reactionary institution that binds its members together through economic dependence. Later they dropped these positions to the point that now the Chinese

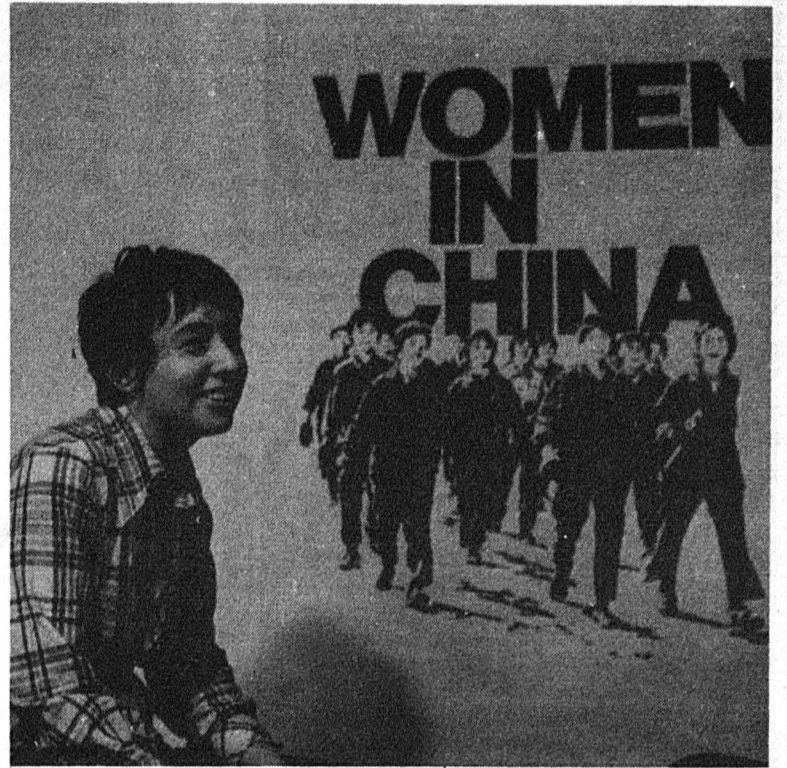


Photo by John Kenney

constitution upholds the family. The banning of pre-marital sex and the pressures against desire aid in this.

Do you think the present government in China can liberate women?

As I think I have illustrated, Mao and his bureaucratic caste are firmly pitted against women. It uses its monopoly of political power to guarantee itself material privileges. Many of these privileges, such as huge mansions, better food and clothes, and exclusive recreation facilities, were expanded during the very brief "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" period. Globe and Mail reporter John Burns reports wage differences of 20 to 1 between

Party men and workers.

The problems of women are connected to the more general problems of Chinese society today. These include the lack of development of industrialization, and the total suppression of democratic rights.

The road to liberation lies in the independent mobilization of the Chinese masses, who through a political revolution will sweep away and destroy the ruling bureaucracy. This combined with the extension of the world revolution, will usher in a period when society is cleansed of all sexism. It will herald the end of women's age-old oppression unleashing her full creative talents for the benefit of the entire society.

Arts & Science Faculty By-Election

Nominations will be accepted between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm on Wed., November 5, 1975 in Roo 271 SUB for the following positions:

Arts
1 SU Council Rep

Science
1 SU Council Rep

Nomination forms are available in the SU General Office 256 SUB.

Ken Reynolds
Returning Officer

University of Alberta Area

Transportation Study

Communities affected:

Garneau
Windsor Park
Belgravia
McKernan
Parkallen
Allendale
Queen Alexandra

Public meetings - to inform residents about nature and purpose of study, and to give citizens opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

Nov. 5/75 8:00 PM
Mount Carmel Separate
School
10524-76 Ave.

For further information
contact Tom McColl at
439-6391