

A Fundamental Necessity of the Revolution

The main objective of the Conference lies in the study of questions dealing with women's emancipation, and in the search for the types of action which will bring about her liberation. But a question arises: Why the concern for women's liberation? And still another question arises: What is the reason for the holding of this Conference?

There are among us - the organization is well aware of this fact - people who believe that we must consecrate all our efforts to the struggle against colonialism, and that the task of women's liberation, in this case, is purely secondary since it is a useless and strength-consuming task. And further, they add that the present situation in which we live, with its lack of schools, few educated women, tradition-bound women, does not provide us with the basis for any significant action; for this reason, we must await independence, the construction of an economic, social and educational base before undertaking the battle.

Some others, interpreting the Statutes tendentiously, state that it is necessary to respect certain traditional local particularisms, since attacking them at this stage makes us risk loss of support by the masses. These people ask: What is the relevance of a women's liberation movement when the majority of the women are totally indifferent to the question? Their conclusion is that it is an artificial liberation, imposed on the women by FRELIMO. This is a very serious question. It requires study and clear ideas.

The liberation of women is not an act of charity. It is not the result of a humanitarian or compassionate position. It is a fundamental necessity for the Revolution, a guarantee of its continuity, and a condition for its success.

The Revolution's main objective is to destroy the system of the exploitation of man by man, the construction of a new society which will free human potentialities and reconcile work and nature. It is within this context that the question of women's liberation arises.

In general, the women are the most oppressed, the most exploited beings in our society. She is exploited even by him who is exploited himself, beaten by him who is tortured by the palmatorio, humiliated by him who is trod underfoot by the boss or the settler. How may our Revolution succeed without liberating women? Is it possible to liquidate a system of exploitation and still leave a part of society exploited? Can we get rid of only one part of exploitation and oppression? Can we clear away half the weeds without the risk that the surviving half will grow even stronger? Can we then make the Revolution without the mobilization of women? If women compose over half of the exploited and oppressed population, can we leave them on the fringes of the struggle?

In order for the Revolution to succeed, we must mobilize all of the exploited and oppressed, and consequently the women also. In order for the Revolution to triumph, it must liquidate the totality of the exploitative and oppressive system, it must liberate all the exploited and oppressed people, and thus it must liquidate women's exploitation and oppression. It is obliged to liberate women.

Considering that the fundamental necessity of Revolution is its continuance by future generations, how may we assure their revolutionary training if the mother, as the first educator, is marginal in the revolutionary process? How can we make of the home of the exploited and oppressed a centre of revolution and militancy, a transmitter of our views, a stimulus of commitment for the family, if the woman is apathetic to this process, indifferent to the society which is being created, and deaf to the people's appeal?

To say that women do not feel the necessity to defend their liberation is an argument that holds no water when looked at carefully.

Women do feel the impact of domination and the necessity of changing their situation. What happens is that the domination of society upon them, by choking their initiative, frequently prevents them from expressing their aspirations, and from conceiving of the appropriate methods for their struggle.

It is at this stage that FRELIMO intervenes, as a vanguard aware of the men and women of Mozambique, of the oppressed people. FRELIMO formulates the line to be followed and indicates the methods of struggle. We must understand this phenomenon in order to avoid useless and dishonest discussions.

The question, therefore, is which is the most suitable moment to launch the struggle for women's liberation. We cannot limit the revolutionary process to certain aspects only and neglect others, because the Revolution is a global process. Otherwise, the Revolution will be blocked and destroyed. The evil roots which we neglect to remove or whose removal is postponed until later will become cancerous roots before that 'later' ever arrives.

Under present conditions FRELIMO can no longer undertake an armed struggle without the making of the Revolution itself. The condition for the development of the armed struggle is striking at the roots of exploitation. It is erroneous to believe that we must postpone the liberation of women until later, for that would mean that we allow reactionary ideas to gain ground and to combat us when they are strong. It is not sensible not to fight the crocodile when it is still on the banks of the river, but to wait and fight it when it is in the middle of the river.

Our armed struggle, acting as an incubator, creates the necessary conditions for receptivity by the masses to ideas of progress and revolution. Not to undertake a battle when conditions are ripe shows a lack of political vision, i.e. a strategic error...

It is obvious that if we speak of the liberation of women we must mean that we consider her oppressed and exploited. One must understand the bases of such oppression and exploitation.

Let us begin by saying that women's oppression is a consequence of her exploitation, since oppression in a society is always the result of an imposed exploitation. Colonialism did not come to occupy our lands in order to arrest us, to whip us or beat us on the palms. It invaded us in order to exploit our riches and our labour. It has introduced the system of oppression in order the better to exploit us, to overcome our resistance and to prevent a rebellion against exploitation. Physical oppression with courts, police, armed forces, prisons, torture, and massacres. Moral oppression with its obscurantism, superstition, and ignorance, whose purpose is to destroy the spirit of creative initiative, to eliminate the sense of justice and criticism, to reduce a person to passivity, and to the acceptance of the normality of a condition of

exploitation and oppression. Humiliation and contempt become part of this process since the person who exploits and oppresses has a tendency to humiliate and to scorn his victim, and to consider him an inferior being. Racism thus appears as the ultimate form of humiliation and contempt.

The mechanism of the alienation of women is identical to the mechanism of alienation of the colonized man in a colonial society, or to that of the worker in capitalist society.

From the moment that primitive humanity began to produce more than it was able to consume, the material bases were created for the creation of a social stratum which would from then on appropriate the results of the work of the majority.

It is this appropriation of the work of the masses by a handful of elements of a society which is at the basis of the system of man's exploitation of man and at the heart of the antagonistic contradiction which has been dividing society for centuries.

Ever since the appearance of this process of exploitation, women as a group, like men, have been submitted to the domination of the privileged classes.

The woman is also a producer and a worker, but with certain special' qualities. To possess women is to possess workers, unpaid workers, workers the totality of whose labour power may be appropriated without resistance by her husband, i.e. her boss and sovereign.

To marry women in an agrarian society is a sure means of accumulating much wealth. The husband has at his disposal unpaid manpower, which makes no claims, which does not rebel against exploitation. We can see the importance of polygamy in the rural areas of an agrarian economy. And since society understands that the woman is a source of wealth, it demands that a price be paid. The parents thus require from the future son-in-law a price - lobolo - in exchange for their daughter. The woman is bought, inherited, as if she were a material good, a source of wealth.

But still more important, and quite different from the slave, for example, who is also a source of wealth and an unpaid worker, the woman offers two other advantages to her owner; she is a source of pleasure; and above all she is a producer of other workers, a producer of new sources of wealth.

This last aspect is particularly significant. Thus the husband has the right, in such a society, to repudiate the woman or to demand the return of his lobolo if she is sterile or if he thinks she is. We thus observe that, in many societies where there is a consciousness of the value of the labour of the children borne by the women, the principle is established that the children belong to the mother's family, or clan. In our society, this is also the practice until the husband pays the totality of the lobolo, i.e. the price for the purchase of his wealth. It is in this context that we find the over-emphasis on the fertility of women, the transformation of the man-woman relation ship into a mere act of procreation.

There is a further problem. The exploiter, due to his control of the masses, acquired great wealth, large fields, cattle, gold,jewellery, etc. In spite of these riches, as any man, he was still mortal. The problem thus arose as to the future of that wealth; in other words, the question of inheritance came to the fore. The woman is the producer of heirs. We can thus understand how the point of departure for the exploitation of

women and her consequent oppression is to be located in the system of private property, in the system of man's exploitation of men.

It is important to understand correctly the nature of the contradiction, or contradictions, which are at play, since it is only in the light of such understanding that we shall be in a condition to define the objects of our attack, and to conceive of an adequate strategy and tactics.

We have seen that the basis of the domination of women was to be found in the system of organization of the economic life in society: in private property of the means of production, which necessarily leads to the exploitation of man by man.

This means that the essential contradiction between women and the social order, over and above the specific conditions of her situation, is the contradiction between herself and the exploitation of man by man, between woman and private property over the means of production. In other words, the contradiction is the same as that which exists between the popular working masses and the exploitative social order.

Let us be clear on this point: the antagonistic contradiction is not found between man and woman, but rather between woman and the social order, between all exploited women and men, and the social order. It is her condition of exploitation which explains her absence from all tasks of thought and decision in society, which causes her to be excluded from the elaboration of the thought and decisions which organize economic, social, cultural and political life, even when her interests are directly at stake. This is the main aspect of the contradiction: her exclusion from the decision-making sphere of society.

This contradiction may only be resolved by means of the Revolution, since it is only the Revolution which can destroy the pillars of an exploitative society, and reconstruct society on a new basis which may liberate woman's initiative, integrate her as a responsible agent in society, include her in the taking of decisions. Consequently, in the same way as there cannot be a Revolution without the liberation of women, the struggle for the liberation of women cannot succeed without the victory of the Revolution itself.

We must add that the ideological and cultural bases of the exploitative society which keep women under control are destroyed by the ideological and cultural processes of Revolution which impose new values, methods, new content in education and culture onto society.

Besides this antagonistic contradiction between the woman and social order, there arise also other contradictions which, even if secondary, oppose women to men. The marriage system, the marital authority based exclusively on sex, the frequent brutality of the husband, his systematic refusal to consider women his equal, are all sources of friction and contradiction.

There are even times, in certain extreme cases, when secondary contradictions, because they are not correctly solved, become severe enough to result in serious consequences, such as divorce. But it is not such happenings, serious as they may be, that will alter the nature of contradiction.

We must emphasize this aspect, since we witness at present, mainly in the capitalist world, an ideological offensive which, under the aegis of women's liberation, pretends to transform into an antagonistic

relationship the contradiction with man, thus dividing men and women - exploited beings who ought to combat together the exploitative society. In reality, beyond the demagogy which masks the real nature of this ideological offensive, it is an offensive by capitalist society in order to confuse women and to divert their attention from the real aim.

In our ranks there occur small manifestations of this ideological offensive. We hear, here and there, women murmuring against men as if it were the sex difference that was the cause of their exploitation, as if men were sadistic monsters who take pleasure in women's oppression.

Both men and women are the products and victims of the exploitative society which has given birth to them and educated them. It is essentially against this society that both women and men must together struggle. Our practical experience has proved that the progress that has been obtained in the liberation of women is the result of the successes achieved in the common struggle against colonialism and imperialism, against the exploitation of man by man, and for the building of the new society.