The Feminist Demands*

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The first feminist concerns are latent in Peru. There are some cells, some nuclei of feminism. The proponents of ultra-nationalism would probably think: here is another exotic idea, another foreign idea that is grafted in the Peruvian mentality.

Let's calm these apprehensive people down a bit. Feminism should not be seen as an exotic idea, a foreign idea. We must simply see it as a human idea. An idea characteristic of a civilization, peculiar to an epoch. And, therefore, an idea with the right of citizenship in Peru, as in any other segment of the civilized world.

Feminism has not appeared in Peru artificially or arbitrarily. It has appeared as a consequence of the new forms of women's intellectual and manual labor. The women of real feminist affiliation are the women who work, the women who study. The feminist idea thrives among women of intellectual or manual trades: university professors, workers. It found a favorable environment for its development in the university classrooms, which attracted more and more Peruvian women, and in the workers' unions, in which factory women joined and organized with the same rights and the same duties as men. Apart from this spontaneous and organic feminism, which recruits its adherents among the various categories of female labor, there exists here, as elsewhere, a somewhat pedantic and somewhat mundane feminism of dilettantes. Feminists of this rank turn feminism into a mere literary exercise, a mere fashionable sport.

No one should be surprised that all women do not come together in a single feminist movement. Feminism has, necessarily, several colors, several

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tendencies. One can distinguish in feminism three fundamental tendencies, three substantive colors: bourgeois feminism, petty-bourgeois feminism and proletarian feminism. Each of these feminisms formulates its demands in a different way. The bourgeois woman solidarizes her feminism with the interests of the conservative class. The proletarian woman consubstantiates her feminism with the faith of the revolutionary multitudes in the future society. The class struggle - historical fact and not theoretical assertion - is reflected on the feminist plane. Women, like men, are reactionary, centrist or revolutionary. They cannot, therefore, fight the same battle together. In the present human landscape, class differentiates individuals more than sex.

But this plurality of feminism does not depend on the theory itself. It depends, rather, on its practical distortions. Feminism, as a pure idea, is essentially revolutionary. The thought and attitude of women who feel themselves to be both feminist and conservative lack, therefore, intimate coherence. Conservatism works to maintain the traditional organization of society. This organization denies women the rights that women want to acquire. The feminists of the bourgeoisie accept all the consequences of the existing order, except those that oppose the demands of women. They tacitly maintain the absurd thesis that the only reform that society needs is feminist reform. The protest of these feminists against the old order is too exclusive to be valid.

It is true that the historical roots of feminism are in the liberal spirit. The French Revolution contained the first seeds of the feminist movement. For the first time, the question of women's emancipation was raised in precise terms. Babeuf, the leader of the conjuration of the equals, was an asserter of the feminist demands. Babeuf harangued his friends: "Do not impose silence on this sex that does not deserve to be scorned. Enhance rather the most beautiful part of yourselves. If you do not count women at all in your republic, you will make of them little lovers of the monarchy. Their influence will be such that they will restore it. If, on the contrary, you count them for something, you will make of them Cornelias and Lucrecias. They will give you Brutes, Gracchi and Scevolas." Polemicizing with the anti-feminists, Babeuf spoke of "this sex that the tyranny of men has always wanted to annihilate, of this sex that has never been useless in revolutions." But the French Revolution did not want to grant women the equality and freedom advocated by these Jacobin or egalitarian voices. The *Rights of Man,* as I have once written, could rather have been called *Rights of Male.* Bourgeois democracy has been an exclusively male democracy.

Born of the liberal matrix, feminism could not be implemented during

the capitalist process. It is now, when the historical trajectory of democracy comes to an end, that women acquire the political and juridical rights of men. And it is the Russian revolution that has explicitly and categorically granted women the equality and freedom that more than a century ago Babeuf and the egalitarians claimed in vain from the French revolution.

But if bourgeois democracy has not realized feminism, it has unintentionally created the conditions and the moral and material premises for its realization. It has increased the value of her as a productive element, as an economic factor, by making an ever more extensive and intense use of her work. Work radically changes the female mentality and spirit. Woman acquires, by virtue of work, a new notion of herself. Formerly, society destined women to marriage or to concubinage. Today, she is destined, first and foremost, to work. This fact has changed and elevated the position of women in life. Those who challenge feminism and its progress with sentimental or traditionalist arguments claim that women should be educated only for the home. But, practically speaking, this means that woman should be educated only for female and maternal functions. The defense of the poetry of the home is, in reality, a defense of the servitude of women. Instead of ennobling and dignifying the role of women, it diminishes and demeans it. Woman is something more than a mother and a female, just as man is something more than a male.

The type of woman produced by a new civilization must be substantially different from that which has formed the civilization now in decline. In an article called *Woman and Politics,* I have thus examined some aspects of this subject: "The troubadours and lovers of female frivolity have no reason to worry. The type of woman created by a century of capitalist refinement is condemned to decadence and sunset. An Italian writer, Pitigrillo, classifies this type of contemporary woman as a type of mammal of luxury.

Well, this mammal of luxury will be gradually depleted. As the collectivist system replaces the individualist system, female luxury and elegance will decline. Humanity will lose some mammal of luxury; but it will gain many women. The clothes of the woman of the future will be less expensive and lavish; but the condition of that woman will be more dignified. And the axis of female life will shift from the individual to the social. Fashion will no longer consist in the imitation of a modern Madam Pompadour dressed by Paquin. It will consist, perhaps, in the imitation of a Madam Kollontai. A woman, in short, will cost less, but will be worth more."

The subject is very vast. This brief article attempts only to ascertain

the character of the first manifestations of feminism in Peru and to rehearse a very summary and rapid interpretation of the physiognomy and spirit of the world feminist movement. Sensible men to the great emotions of the times should not and cannot feel strange or indifferent to this movement. The female question is a part of the human question. Feminism seems to me, moreover, a more interesting and historical subject than the wig. While feminism is the category, the wig is the anecdote.