

**ALEXANDRA  
KOLLONTAI**

**SEXUAL RELATIONS AND  
THE CLASS STRUGGLE**

**LOVE AND THE NEW  
MORALITY**

**TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED  
BY ALIX HOLT**





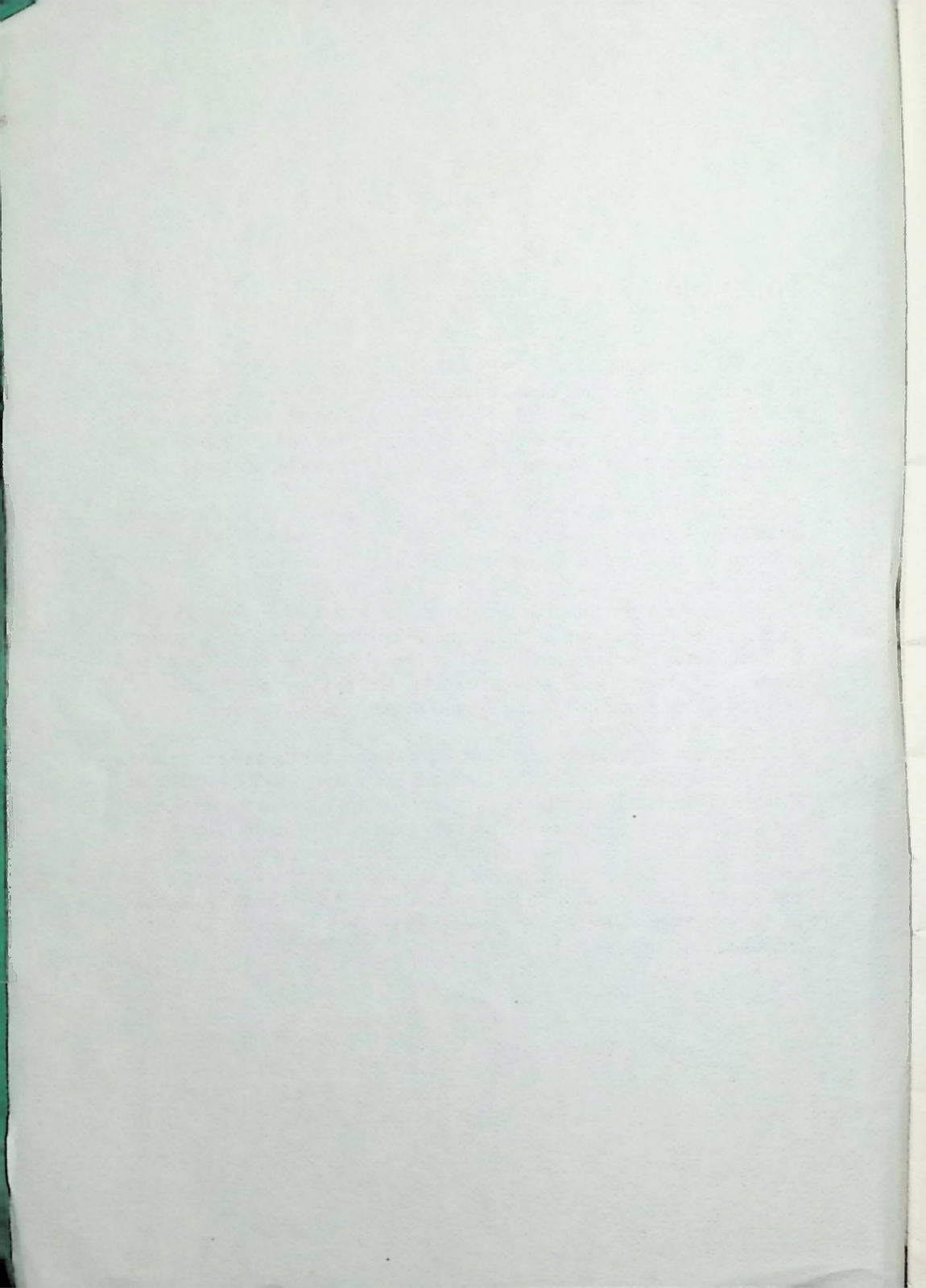
## FOREWORD

We are publishing here two of the three essays originally published in Russia in 1919 in one book, under the title of *The New Morality and the Working Class*. (The third essay, *The New Woman*, has already been published in English as part of the volume *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, produced by Orbach and Chambers.)

These two essays both examine how the ways in which people relate to each other in the most 'private' of personal relationships are affected by the kind of society in which they live.

They were published as a contribution to a debate taking place in Russia after the Revolution, at a time when their authoress, Alexandra Kollontai, was arguing urgently for her belief that the Bolshevik party should be taking a lead in understanding and explaining the nature of changes taking place in the family and in personal relationships.

The introduction by Alix Holt – who translated the two essays into English – describes some of the developments in Russia which gave rise to changes in the family structure and in relationships between the sexes, and as such provides both an insight into the magnitude of the problems that people were having to cope with, and a sense of the atmosphere in which these essays were published. (It is not an introduction to Kollontai's life and work – for this see Sheila Rowbotham's introduction to the pamphlet *Women Workers Struggle for their Rights* by Alexandra Kollontai published by this press.)



# Introduction

## THE SITUATION IN RUSSIA

When the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, Russia was in a state of complete chaos and disintegration. The first world war had been going on for three years. For three years millions of peasants had been fighting far from their fields, and those who had been left behind were in continuous rebellion against their landlords. What little grain was being produced in the countryside could not be taken to the towns, because the old established forms of communication had broken down.

Capitalism came late to Russia, and it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that factories were set up and an industrial proletariat created, but the working class quickly developed a tradition of fighting spirit and strike action. In 1917 working class militancy resulted in the setting up of soviets (i.e. workers' councils) demanding food, better conditions and an end to the war as the only way to improve the situation. The Bolsheviks came to power on the slogan of 'Land, Peace and Bread'. They passed a land decree authorising the taking over of land by the peasants which was already taking place, and negotiated a peace treaty with Germany, but the reorganisation of the country and the re-establishment of the economy were obviously more difficult tasks. The Civil War that developed complicated matters further. For several months the dictatorship of the proletariat seemed hardly to extend beyond Moscow, and the city lived under the constant fear of attacks from the Whites (those fighting to re-establish the old government) aided by interventionist armies from other countries, including England.

The first few years of Soviet power were hours and days of continuous fighting by the new government for its very existence. 1919 was in many ways a most critical period. The external enemies were still undefeated—in October, the White leader Yudenich fought his way to the outskirts of Petrograd—and industrial and social organisation was tending towards dangerous fragmentation.

At the 8th Party Congress, the different conceptions of how, in such a situation, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be established and



defended were becoming apparent. Argument particularly centred around the nature and organisation of the Party and its relationship with the trade unions. How was the new society to be realised and where was ultimate control to lie? How was initiative on the part of the masses to be guided by the 'vanguard of the proletariat' as represented by the Bolshevik party?

It is important to remember that these problems were faced not as academic debates, but were immediate problems facing living people involved in making history, who had experience of past struggle to guide them, but no blueprints or models on which to rely.

It might be thought, and it was argued then, that to bring up the question of women's inequality and their liberation at such a time of chaos was irresponsible, and that to talk about personal relationships was unforgivable indulgence. Kollontai, however, saw personal relationships as an essential part of each individual's experience, and as such central to the struggle of each individual for a better life. Because the breakdown of the old bourgeois morality affected all sections of society, she argued that the solution of the problems of personal and sexual relations which this breakdown created was part of the struggle for a new society, and that socialists must understand the problems and discern the embryonic forms of a new morality—the new morality of the working class.

The early years of the revolution were a period of enormous change in every sphere of life. This was reflected in the ferment of experimental ideas on every aspect of living. It has been argued that these experimental and revolutionary theories were held and expounded only by those who were of middle class origin and had no grasp of the 'level of consciousness' of the mass of peasants and working people, and that none of these ideas had any meaning to most Russians.

This criticism has been levelled against Kollontai, on the grounds that the demands and concrete proposals to change women's lot which she suggested were not understood by most people and were irrelevant in the situation. But it is essential to understand the position in which, for instance, women of the time were placed and the ways in which their lives were changing. Large numbers of working women had become involved in social and political activity before the revolution, and many concrete measures were being taken, even in the midst of civil war and economic breakdown, to establish organisations for working women and to involve them in the political and public decisions of the day.

The number of women working in industry had been growing steadily during the early period of the twentieth century, and the first

world war brought a sharp increase in the number of women working outside the home. With so many men at the front, women were left alone to cope with problems of domestic and factory conditions. In such a situation women began to organise around demands for shorter working hours, better conditions of work, maternity benefits etc., while pointing out that their lives could only be altered if the war was ended and the Tsarist regime toppled. This type of programme made sense to working women, and many of them took an active part in strike activity and the events of 1917. One of the first problems that the bourgeois Provisional government (set up immediately after the overthrow of the Tsar, and governing for a few months before the October Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power) had to face was a strike of 4,000 laundresses demanding the abolition of private laundries and the establishment of municipal facilities. After the October revolution and the establishment of soviet power, a first congress of working and peasant women was organised in Moscow in 1918. It was difficult to get in contact with many areas but instead of the expected 300 delegates over 1,000 arrived. This was not a sleepy congress of self-congratulatory speeches. From the discussion it was obvious that there were many women eager to leave their pots and pans, who were well aware of the fact that where in the past they had been shut away from public affairs and kept in the home, this was linked to the function expected of them in capitalist society. Now they were anxious to leave no topic untouched in their search for the best ways of enabling women to make their contribution to the creation of the workers' republic.

It was at this conference that Kollontai presented her paper *Communism and the Family*.† Other issues discussed were the education of children, prostitution, how to abolish housework as a domestic and private activity, and 'working women and the international revolution'. The resolutions adopted revealed not just revolutionary enthusiasm but considerable political understanding. There must have seemed grounds for hoping that the times were coming when women would take their place as equal members of society. The working women and peasants also discussed at this conference the new marriage laws, and relationships between men and women, as specific topics and not just as these problems came up in discussing the family and children etc.

That the conditions of change were leading to the disintegration of the old forms of family life was undeniable. But many were reluctant to admit this. It was one thing to establish political power and start

† republished in England by Pluto Press (12p).



economic reconstruction, but the change of personal life, the century old ways of thinking and behaving, was obviously a painful process. And just because the family had always been considered a private matter, people were slow to discuss their difficulties. "Domestic life is more conservative than economic, and one of the reasons for this is that it is still less conscious than the latter. In politics and economics the working class acts as a whole and pushes on to the front rank its vanguard the Communist Party, accomplishing through its medium the historic aims of the proletariat. In domestic life the working class is split into cells constituted by families!"† Since creating the conditions through which and by which women will be liberated from their private oppressive existence and take part in the life of the collective is a part of the struggle for socialism, it was essential that the importance and implications of this fact be understood and discussed. But many of the Bolsheviks who had taken an active part in the revolution were unwilling to take their theories to their logical conclusion when it came to matters of women, the family, and personal relationships.

These articles constitute a criticism of that attitude, and an explanation of why these matters are a part of the revolutionary struggle and should not be avoided. Kollontai is arguing against those socialists who are dismissive of these 'secondary' 'digressions', pointing to the place of these questions in the dynamic move forward towards socialism. She stresses the need for the Party to understand that the strains obvious in working class families are not simply the influence of bourgeois decadence on the proletariat, but that new forms of living are being evolved. The role of the Party must be to distinguish what is a reaction to the confusion of the present from what is the embryo of the future, so as to be in a position to guide this process. Trotsky was emphasising the same point when he wrote "We must learn to judge them (personal relationships) in their right light, to understand their proper place in the development of the working class and consciously to direct the new conditions towards socialist forms of life."

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Alix Holt

†Trotsky, "From the old family to the new", *Pravda*, July 13th, 1923; reprinted in *Trotsky's Women and the Family*, Pathfinder Press, 1970 (30p).



# Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle

Among the many problems that demand the consideration and attention of contemporary mankind, sexual problems are undoubtedly some of the most crucial. There isn't a country or a nation, apart from the legendary 'islands', where the question of sexual relationships isn't becoming an urgent and burning issue. Mankind today is living through an acute sexual crisis which is far more unhealthy and harmful for being long and drawn-out.

Throughout the long journey of human history, you probably won't find a time when the problems of sex have occupied such a central place in the life of society; when the question of relationships between the sexes has been like a conjuror, attracting the attention of millions of troubled people; when sexual dramas have served as such a never-ending source of inspiration for every sort of art.

As the crisis continues and grows more serious, people are getting themselves into an increasingly hopeless situation, and are trying desperately by every available means to settle the 'insoluble question'. But with every new attempt to solve the problem, the confused knot of personal relationships gets more tangled. It's as if we couldn't see the one and only thread that could finally lead us to success in controlling the stubborn tangle. The sexual problem is like a vicious circle, and however frightened people are and however much they run this way and that, they are unable to break out.

The conservatively inclined part of mankind argue that we should return to the happy times of the past, we should re-establish the old foundations of the family and strengthen the well-tried norms of sexual morality. The champions of bourgeois individualism say that we ought to destroy all the hypocritical restrictions of the obsolete code of sexual behaviour. These unnecessary and repressive 'rags' ought to be relegated to the archives—only the individual conscience, the individual will of each person can decide such intimate questions. Socialists, on the other hand, assure us that sexual problems will only be settled when the basic

re-organisation of the social and economic structure of society has been tackled.

Doesn't this 'putting off of the problem until the future' suggest that we still haven't found that one and only 'magic thread'? Shouldn't we find or at least locate this 'magic thread' that promises to unravel the tangle? Shouldn't we find it now, at this very moment?

The history of human society, the history of the continual battle between various social groups and classes of opposing aims and interests, gives us the clue to finding this 'thread'. It isn't the first time that mankind has gone through a sexual crisis. This isn't the first time that the pressure of a rushing tide of new values and ideals has blurred the clear and definite meaning of moral commandments about sexual relationships. The 'sexual crisis' was particularly acute at the time of the 'Renaissance' and the 'Reformation', when a great social advance pushed the proud and patriarchal feudal nobility who were used to absolute command into the background, and cleared the way for the development and establishment of a new social force—the bourgeoisie. The sexual morality of the feudal world had developed out of the depths of the 'tribal way of life'—the collective economy and the tribal authoritarian leadership that stifles the individual will of the individual member. This clashed with the new and strange moral code of the rising bourgeoisie. The sexual morality of the bourgeoisie is founded on principles that are in sharp contradiction to the basic morality of feudalism. Strict individualism and the exclusiveness and isolation of the 'nuclear family' replace the emphasis on 'collective work' that was characteristic of both the local and regional economic structure of patrimonial life. Under capitalism the ethic of competition, the triumphant principles of individualism and exclusive private property, grew and destroyed whatever remained of the idea of the community which was to some extent common to all types of tribal life. For a whole century, while the complex laboratory of life was turning the old norms into a new formula and achieving the outward harmony of moral ideas, men wandered confusedly between two very different sexual codes and attempted to accommodate themselves to both.

But in those bright and colourful days of change, the sexual crisis, although profound, did not have the threatening character that it has assumed in our time. The main reason for this is that in 'the great days' of the Renaissance, in the 'new age' when the bright light of a new spiritual culture flooded the dying world with its clear colours, flooded the bare monotonous life of the Middle Ages, the sexual crisis affected only a relatively small part of the population. By far the largest section of the population, the peasantry, was affected only in the most indirect way and only as, slowly, over the course of centuries, a change in the economic



base, in the economic relations of the countryside, took place. At the top of the social ladder a bitter battle between two opposing social worlds was fought out. This involved also a struggle between their different ideals and values and ways of looking at things. It was these people who experienced and were threatened by the sexual crisis that developed. The peasants, wary of new things, continued to cling firmly to the well-tryed tribal tradition handed down from their forefathers, and only under the pressure of extreme necessity modified and adapted this tradition to the changing conditions of their economic environment. Even at the height of the struggle between the bourgeois and the feudal world the sexual crisis by-passed the 'class of tax-payers'. As the upper strata of society went about breaking up the old ways, the peasants in fact seemed to be more intent on clinging firmly to their traditions. In spite of the continuous whirlwinds that threatened overhead and shook the very soil under their feet, the peasants, especially our Russian peasantry, managed to preserve the basis of their sexual code untouched and unshaken for many centuries.

The story today is very different. The 'sexual crisis' does not spare even the peasantry. Like an infectious disease it 'knows neither rank nor status'. It spreads from the palaces and mansions to the crowded quarters of the working class, looks in on the peaceful dwelling places of the petty-bourgeoisie, and makes its way into the heart of the countryside. It claims victims in the villas of the European bourgeoisie, in the fusty basement of the worker's family, and in the smoky hut of the peasant. There is 'no defence, no bolt' against sexual conflict. To imagine that only the members of the well-off sections of society are floundering and are in the throes of these problems would be to make a grave mistake. The waves of the sexual crisis are sweeping over the threshold of workers' homes, and creating situations of conflict that are as acute and heartfelt as the psychological sufferings of the 'refined bourgeois world'. The sexual crisis no longer interests only the 'propertied'. The problems of sex concern the largest section of society—they concern the working class in its daily life. It is therefore hard to understand why this vital and urgent subject is treated with such indifference. This indifference is unforgivable. One of the tasks that confronts the working class in its attack on the 'beleaguered fortress of the future' is undoubtedly the task of establishing more healthy and more joyful relationships between the sexes.

What are the roots of this unforgivable indifference to one of the essential tasks of the working class? How can we explain to ourselves the hypocritical way in which 'sexual problems' are relegated to the realm of 'private matters' that are not worth the effort and attention of the collective? Why has the fact been ignored that throughout history one of the constant features of social struggle has been the attempt to change relationships between the sexes, and the types of moral codes that

determine these relationships; and that the way personal relationships are organised in a certain social group has had a vital influence on the outcome of the struggle between hostile social classes?

The tragedy of our society is not just that the usual forms of behaviour and the principles regulating this behaviour are breaking down, but that a spontaneous wave of new attempts at living is developing from within the social fabric, giving man hopes and ideals that cannot yet be realised.

We are people living in the world of property relationships, a world of sharp class contradictions and of an individualistic morality. We still live and think under the heavy hand of an unavoidable loneliness of spirit. Man experiences this 'loneliness' even in towns full of shouting, noise and people, even in a crowd of close friends and work-mates. Because of their loneliness men are apt to cling in a predatory and unhealthy way to illusions about finding a 'soul mate' from among the members of the opposite sex. They see sly Eros as the only means of charming away, if only for a time, the gloom of inescapable loneliness.

People have perhaps never in any age felt spiritual loneliness as deeply and persistently as at the present time. People have probably never become so depressed and fallen so fully under the numbing influence of this loneliness.

It could hardly be otherwise. The darkness never seems so black as when there's a light shining just ahead.

The 'individualists', who are only loosely organised into a collective with other individuals, now have the chance to change their sexual relationships so that they are based on the creative principle of friendship and togetherness rather than on something blindly physiological. The individualistic property morality of the present day is beginning to seem very obviously paralysing and oppressive. In criticising the quality of sexual relationships modern man is doing far more than rejecting the outdated forms of behaviour of the current moral code. His lonely soul is seeking the regeneration of the very essence of these relationships. He moans and pines for 'great love', for a situation of warmth and creativity which alone has the power to disperse the cold spirit of loneliness from which present day 'individualists' suffer.

If the sexual crisis is three quarters the result of external socio-economic relationships, the other quarter hinges on our 'refined individualistic psyche', fostered by the ruling bourgeois ideology. The 'potential for loving' of people today is, as the German writer Meisel-Hess puts it, at a



low ebb. Men and women seek each other in the hope of finding for themselves, through another person, a means to a large share of spiritual and physical pleasure. It makes no difference whether they are married to the partner or not, they give little thought to what's going on in the other person, to what's happening to their emotions and psychological processes.

The 'crude individualism' that adorns our era is perhaps nowhere as blatant as in the organisation of sexual relationships. A person wants to escape from his loneliness and naively imagines that being 'in love' gives him the right to the soul of the other person—the right to warm himself in the rays of that rare blessing of emotional closeness and understanding. We, individualists, have had our emotions spoiled in the persistent cult of the 'ego'. We imagine that we can reach the happiness of being in a state of 'great love' with those near to us, without having to 'give' up anything of ourselves.

The claims we make on our 'contracted partner' are absolute and undivided. We are unable to follow the simplest rule of love—that another person should be treated with great consideration. New concepts of the relationships between the sexes are already being outlined. They will teach us to achieve relationships based on the unfamiliar ideas of complete freedom, equality and genuine friendship. But in the meantime mankind has to sit in the cold with its spiritual loneliness and can only dream about the 'better age' when all relationships between people will be warmed by the rays of 'the sun god', will experience a sense of togetherness, and will be educated in the new conditions of living. The sexual crisis cannot be solved unless there is a radical reform of the human psyche, and unless man's potential for loving is increased. And a basic transformation of the socio-economic relationships along communist lines is essential if the psyche is to be re-formed. This is an 'old truth' but there is no other way out.

The sexual crisis will in no way be reduced whatever kind of marriage or personal relationships people care to try.

History has never seen such a variety of personal relationships—indissoluble marriage with its 'stable family'; 'free unions'; secret adultery; a girl living quite openly with her lover in the so-called 'wild marriage'; pair marriage, marriage in threes and even the complicated marriage of four people—not to talk of the various forms of commercial prostitution. You get the same two moral codes existing side by side in the peasantry as well—a mixture of the old tribal way of life and the developing bourgeois family. Thus you get the permissiveness of the girls' house<sup>1</sup> side by side with the attitude that fornication, or men sleeping with

their daughters-in-law, is a disgrace. It's surprising that, in the face of the contradictory and tangled forms of present-day personal relationships, people are able to preserve a faith in moral authority, and are able to make sense of these contradictions and thread their way through these mutually destructive and incompatible moral codes. Even the usual justification—'I live by the new morality'—doesn't help anyone, since the new morality is still only in the process of being formed. Our task is to draw out from the chaos of present-day contradictory sexual norms the shape, and make clear the principles, of a morality that answers the spirit of the progressive and revolutionary class.

Besides the already mentioned inadequacies of the contemporary psyche—extreme individuality, egoism that has become a cult—the 'sexual crisis' is made worse by two characteristics of the psychology of modern man:

1. the idea of 'possessing' the married partner
2. the belief that the two sexes are unequal, that they are of unequal worth in every way, in every sphere, including the sexual sphere.

Bourgeois morality, with its introverted individualistic family based entirely on private property, has carefully cultivated the idea that one partner should completely 'possess' the other. It has been very successful. The idea of 'possession' is more pervasive now than under the patrimonial system of marriage relationships. During the long historical period that developed under the aegis of the 'tribe', the idea of a man possessing his wife (there has never been any thought of a wife having undisputed possession of her husband) did not go further than a purely physical possession. The wife was obliged to be faithful physically—her soul was her own. Even the knights recognised the right of their wives to have chichesbi (platonic friends and admirers) and to receive the 'devotion' of other knights and minnesingers. It is the bourgeoisie who have carefully tended and fostered the ideal of absolute possession of the 'contracted partner's' emotional as well as physical 'I', thus extending the concept of property rights to include the right to the other person's whole spiritual and emotional world. Thus the family structure was strengthened and stability guaranteed in the period when the bourgeoisie were struggling for domination. This is the ideal that we have accepted as our heritage and have been prepared to see as an unchangeable moral absolute! The idea of 'property' goes far beyond the boundaries of 'lawful marriage'. It makes itself felt as an inevitable ingredient of the most 'free' union of love. Contemporary lovers with all their respect for freedom are not satisfied by the knowledge of the physical faithfulness alone of the person they love. To be rid of the eternally-present threat of



loneliness, we 'launch an attack' on the emotions of the person we love with a cruelty and lack of delicacy that will not be understood by future generations. We demand the right to know every secret of this person's being. The modern lover would forgive physical unfaithfulness sooner than 'spiritual' unfaithfulness. He sees any emotion experienced outside the boundaries of the 'free' relationship as the loss of his own personal treasure.

People 'in love' are unbelievably insensitive in their relations to a third person. We have all no doubt observed this strange situation—two people who love each other are in a hurry, before they have got to know each other properly, to exercise their rights over all the relationships that the other person has formed up till that time, to look into the innermost corners of their partner's life. Two people who yesterday were unknown to each other, and who come together in a single moment of mutual erotic feeling, rush to get at the heart of the other person's being. They want to feel that this strange and incomprehensible psyche, with its past experience that can never be suppressed, is an extension of their own self. The idea that the married pair are each other's property is so accepted, that when a young couple who were yesterday each living their own separate lives are today opening each other's correspondence without a blush, and making common property of the words of a third person who is a friend of only one of them, this hardly strikes us as something unnatural. But this kind of 'intimacy' is only really possible when people have been working out their lives together for a long period of time. Usually a dishonest kind of closeness is substituted for this genuine feeling, the deception being fostered by the mistaken idea that a physical relationship between two people is a sufficient basis for extending the rights of possession to each other's emotional being.

The 'inequality' of the sexes—the inequality of their rights, the unequal value of their physical and emotional experience—is the other significant circumstance that distorts the psyche of contemporary man and is a reason for the deepening of the 'sexual crisis'. The 'double morality' inherent in both patrimonial and bourgeois society has, over the course of centuries, poisoned the psyche of men and women. These attitudes are so much a part of us that they are more difficult to get rid of than the ideas about possessing people that we have inherited only from bourgeois ideology. The idea that the sexes are unequal, even in the sphere of physical and emotional experience, means that the same action will be regarded differently according to whether it was the action of a man or a woman. Even the most 'progressive' member of the bourgeoisie, who has long ago rejected the whole code of current morality, easily catches himself out at this point since he too in judging a man and a woman for the same behaviour will pass different sentences. One simple example is

enough. Imagine that a member of the middle class intelligensia who is learned, involved in politics and social affairs—who is in short a 'personality', even a 'public figure'—starts sleeping with his cook (a not uncommon thing to happen) and even becomes legally married to her. Does bourgeois society change its attitude to this man, does the event throw even the tiniest shadow of doubt as to his moral worth?

Of course not. Now imagine another situation. A respected woman of bourgeois society—a social figure, a research student, a doctor or a writer, it's all the same—becomes friendly with her footman, and to complete the scandal marries him. How does bourgeois society react to the behaviour of this hitherto 'respected' woman? They cover her with 'scorn' of course! And remember, it's so much the worse for her if her husband, the footman, is good-looking or possesses other 'physical qualities'. "It's obvious what she's fallen for" will be the sneer of the hypocritical bourgeoisie.

If a woman's choice has anything of an 'individual character' about it she won't be forgiven by bourgeois society. This attitude is a kind of throw back to the traditions of tribal times. Society still wants a woman to take into account, when she is making her choice, rank and status and the instructions and interests of her family. Bourgeois society cannot see a woman as an independent person separate from her family unit and outside the isolated circle of domestic obligations and virtues.

Contemporary society goes even further than the ancient tribal society in acting as woman's trustee, instructing her not only to marry but to fall in love only with those people who are 'worthy' of her.

We are continually meeting men of considerable spiritual and intellectual qualities who have chosen as their friend-for-life a worthless and empty woman, who in no way matches the spiritual worth of the husband. We accept this as something normal and we don't think twice about it. At the most friends might pity Ivan Ivanovich for having landed himself with such an unbearable wife. But if it happens the other way round, we flap our hands and exclaim with concern, "How could such an outstanding woman as Maria Petrovna fall for such a nonentity? I begin to doubt the worth of Maria Petrovna".

Where do we get this double criterion from? What is the reason for it? The reason is undoubtedly that the idea of the sexes being of 'different value' has become, over the centuries, a part of man's psychological make-up. We are used to evaluating a woman not as a personality with individual qualities and failings irrespective of her physical and emotional experience, but only as an appendage of a man. This man, the husband or



the lover, throws the light of his personality over the woman, and it is this reflection and not the woman herself that we consider to be the true definition of her emotional and moral make-up. In the eyes of society the personality of a man can be more easily separated from his actions in the sexual sphere. The personality of a woman is judged almost exclusively in terms of her sexual life. This type of attitude stems from the role that women have played in society over the centuries, and it is only now that a re-evaluation of these attitudes is slowly being achieved, at least in outline.

Only a change in the economic role of woman, and her independent involvement in production, can and will bring about the weakening of these mistaken and hypocritical ideas.

The three basic circumstances distorting the modern psyche—extreme egoism, the idea that married partners possess each other, and the acceptance of the inequality of the sexes in terms of physical and emotional experience—must be faced if the sexual problem is to be settled. People will find the ‘magic key’ with which they can break out of their situation only when their psyche has a sufficient store of ‘feelings of consideration’, when their ability to love is greater, when the idea of freedom in personal relationships becomes fact, and when the principle of ‘comradeship’ triumphs over the traditional idea of ‘inequality’ and submission. The sexual problems cannot be solved without this radical re-education of our psyche.

But isn't this asking too much? Isn't the suggestion utopian, without foundation. . .the naive notion of a dreaming idealist? How are you honestly going to raise mankind's ‘potential for loving’? Haven't wise men of all nations since time immemorial, beginning with Buddha and Confucius and ending with Christ, been busying themselves over this? And who can say if the ‘potential for loving’ has been raised? Isn't this kind of well-meaning day dream about the solution of the sexual crisis simply a confession of weakness and a refusal to go on with the search for the ‘magic key’?

Is that the case? Is the radical re-education of our psyche and our approach to sexual relationships something so unlikely, so removed from reality? Couldn't one say that, on the contrary, while great social and economic changes are in progress, the conditions are being created that demand and give rise to a new basis for psychological experience that is in line with what we have been talking about? Another class, a new social group, is coming forward to replace the bourgeoisie, with its bourgeois ideology, and its individualistic code of sexual morality. The progressive class, as it develops in strength, cannot fail to reveal new ideas about relationships between the sexes that form in close connection with the

problems of its social class.

The complicated evolution of socio-economic relations taking place before our eyes, that changes all our ideas about the role of women in social life and undermines the sexual morality of the bourgeoisie, has two contradictory results. On the one hand we see mankind's tireless efforts to adapt to the new changing socio-economic conditions. This is manifest either in an attempt to preserve the 'old forms' while providing them with a new content (the observance of the external form of the indissoluble strictly monogamous marriage with an acceptance, in practice, of the freedom of the partners), or in the acceptance of new forms which contain however all the elements of the moral code of bourgeois marriage (the 'free' union where the compulsive possessiveness of the partners is greater than within legal marriage).

On the other hand we see the slow but steady appearance of new forms of relationships between the sexes that differ from the old norms in outward form and in spirit.

Mankind is not groping its way toward these new ideals with much confidence, but we need to look at its attempt, however vague it is at the moment, since it is an attempt closely linked with the tasks of the proletariat as the class which is to capture the 'beleaguered fortress' of the future. If, amongst the complicated labyrinth of contradictory and tangled sexual norms, you want to find the beginnings of more healthy relationships between the sexes—relationships that promise to lead humanity out of the sexual crisis—you have to leave the 'cultured quarters' of the bourgeoisie with their refined individualistic psyche, and take a look at the huddled dwelling-places of the working class. There, amidst the horror and squalor of capitalism, amidst tears and curses, the springs of life are welling up.

You can see the double process which we have just mentioned working itself out in the lives of the proletariat, who have to exist under the pressure of harsh economic conditions, cruelly exploited by capitalism. You can see both the process of 'passive adjustment' and that of active opposition to the existing reality. The destructive influence of capitalism destroys the basis of the worker's family and forces him unconsciously to 'adapt' to the existing conditions. This gives rise to a whole series of situations with regard to relationships between the sexes which are similar to those in other social classes. Under the pressure of low wages the worker inevitably tends to get married at a later age. If twenty years ago a worker usually got married between the ages of 22 and 25, he now shoulders the cares of a family only towards his 30th year. The higher the cultural demands of the worker—the more he values the opportunity of



being in contact with cultural life, of visiting theatres and lectures, of reading papers and magazines, of giving his spare time to struggle and politics or to some favourite pursuit such as art or reading etc.—the later he tends to get married. But physical needs won't take a financial situation into consideration: they insist on making themselves felt. The working-class bachelor, in the same way as the middle-class bachelor, looks to prostitution for an outlet. This is an example of the passive adjustment of the working-class to the unfavourable conditions of their existence. Take another example. When the worker marries, the low level of pay forces the worker's family to 'regulate' childbirth just as the bourgeois family does. The frequent cases of infanticide, the growth of prostitution—these are all expressions of the same process. These are all examples of adjustment by the working class to the surrounding reality. But this is not a process characteristic of the proletariat alone. All the other classes and sections of the population caught up in the world process of capitalist development react in this way.

We see a difference only when we begin to talk about the active, creative forces at work that oppose rather than adapt to the repressive reality, and about the new ideals and attempts at new relationships between the sexes. It is only within the working class that this active opposition is taking shape.

This doesn't mean that the other classes and sections of the population (particularly the middle-class intelligentsia who, by the circumstances of their social existence, stand closest to the working-class) don't adopt the 'new' forms that are being worked out by the progressive working-class. The bourgeoisie, motivated by an instinctive desire to breathe new life into their dead and feeble forms of marriage, seize upon the 'new' ideas of the working-class. But the ideals and code of sexual morality that the working-class develops do not answer the class needs of the bourgeoisie. They reflect the demands of the working-class and therefore serve as a new weapon in its social struggle. They help shatter the foundations of the social domination of the bourgeoisie. Let us make this point clear by an example.

The attempt by the middle-class intelligentsia to replace indissoluble marriage by the freer, more easily broken ties of civil marriage destroys the essential basis of the social stability of the bourgeoisie. It destroys the monogamous-property-orientated family.

On the other hand, a greater fluidity in relationships between the sexes coincides with, and is even the indirect result of one of the basic tasks of the working-class. The rejection of the element of 'submission' in marriage is going to destroy the last artificial ties of the bourgeoisie

family. This act of 'submission' on the part of one member of the working-class to another, in the same way as the sense of possessiveness in relationships, has a harmful effect on the proletarian psyche. It is not in the interests of that revolutionary class to elect only certain members as its independent representatives, whose duty it is to serve the class interests before the interests of the individual, isolated family.

Conflicts between the interests of the family and the interests of the class which occur at the time of a strike or during an active struggle, and the moral yardstick with which the proletariat views such events, are sufficiently clear evidence of the basis of the new proletarian ideology.

Suppose family affairs require a businessman to take his capital out of a firm at a time when the enterprise is in financial difficulties. Bourgeois morality is clear-cut in its estimate of his action: "The interests of the family come first". We can compare with this the attitude of workers to a strike-breaker who defies his comrades and goes to work during a strike to save his family from being hungry. "The interests of the class come first". Here's another example. The love and loyalty of the middle-class husband to his family are sufficient to divert his wife from all interests outside the home and end up by tying her to the nursery and the kitchen. "The ideal husband can support the ideal family" is the way the bourgeoisie look at it. But how do workers look upon a 'conscious' member of their class who shuts the eyes of his wife or girl-friend to the social struggle? For the sake of individual happiness, for the sake of the family, the morality of the working class will demand that women take part in the life that is unfolding beyond the doorsteps. The 'captivity' of women in the home, the way family interests are placed before all else, the widespread exercise of absolute property rights by the husband over the wife—all these things are being broken down by the basic principle of the working class ideology of 'comradely solidarity'. The idea that some members are unequal and must submit to other members of one and the same class is in contradiction with the basic proletarian principle of comradeship. This principle of comradeship is basic to the ideology of the working class. It colours and determines the whole developing proletarian morality, a morality which helps to re-educate the personality of man enabling him to be capable of positive feeling, capable of freedom instead of being bound by a sense of property, capable of comradeship rather than inequality and submission.

It is an old truth that every new class that develops as a result of an advance in economic growth and material culture offers mankind an appropriately new ideology. The code of sexual behaviour is a part of this ideology. However it is worth saying something about 'proletarian ethics' or 'proletarian sexual morality', in order to criticise the well-worn idea that proletarian sexual morality is no more than 'superstructure', and



that there is no place for any change in this sphere until the economic base of society has been changed. As if the ideology of a certain class is formed only when the breakdown in the socio-economic relationships, guaranteeing the dominance of that class, has been completed! All the experience of history teaches us that a social group works out its ideology, and consequently its sexual morality, in the process of its struggle with hostile social forces.

Only with the help of new spiritual values, created within and answering the needs of the class, will that class manage to strengthen its social position. It can only successfully win power from those groups in society that are hostile to it, by holding to these new norms and ideals.

To search for the basic criteria for a morality that can reflect the specific interests of the working class, and to see that the developing sexual norms are in accordance with these criteria—this is the task that must be tackled by the ideologists of the working class.

We have to understand that it is only by becoming aware of the creative process that is going on within society, and of the new demands, new ideals and new norms that are being formed, only by becoming clear about the basis of the sexual morality of the progressive class, that we can possibly make sense of the chaos and contradictions of sexual relationships and find the thread that will make it possible to undo the tightly rolled up tangle of sexual problems.

We must remember that only a code of sexual morality that is in harmony with the problems of the working class can serve as an important weapon in strengthening the working class's fighting position. The experience of history teaches us that much. What can stop us using this weapon in the interests of the working class, who are fighting for a communist system and for new relationships between the sexes that are deeper and more joyful?

The first part of the report deals with the general situation in the country and the progress of the work of the various departments. It is followed by a detailed account of the work of the various departments and the results of their work. The report concludes with a summary of the work done during the year and a statement of the work to be done in the future.

The second part of the report deals with the work of the various departments and the results of their work. It is followed by a detailed account of the work of the various departments and the results of their work. The report concludes with a summary of the work done during the year and a statement of the work to be done in the future.

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# Love and the New Morality<sup>1</sup>

In the period from 1910–1911 onward there was less talk in Russia about the problems of sex. But in Germany a psycho-sociological study of the sexual crisis was written by Grete Meisel-Hess. The book wasn't a success with the general public. Whereas the novel, *Karin Michaelis*, published not long before and not daring to say anything more than is proper in writing of 'good taste', created a great stir (although it is of little artistic value). The main criticism of Meisel-Hess was that her work was interesting but not scientific. The book only made an impression amongst the intelligentsia, the so-called 'cream' of German society, who greeted her ideas either with sympathy and agreement or with hissing disapproval. This generally happens when someone sets out to find the truth.

Even though Meisel-Hess's book lacks a whole number of scholarly qualities—her method of research is at fault, she is unsystematic, her argument jumps and twists and often repeats some point already made—this doesn't affect the importance of her work.

The book has a freshness of approach. Its arguments are set down in the strong vigorous way of someone trying to get at the truth. You sense that this woman has seen and experienced much in life. Her thoughts are not new in the sense that these ideas are in the air, they are implied in the whole climate of attitudes towards morality.

Every person has secretly been living out and thinking out these problems. In trying to come to grips with them every thinking person has come by one path or another to the conclusions printed on the pages of *The Sexual Crisis*. But hypocrisy still persuades us to bow down in public before the old and dead idol of bourgeois morality. Meisel-Hess is like the child in Anderson's fairy story: she has had the courage to cry out in a fearless and composed voice that the Emperor has no clothes on; that contemporary sexual morality is a piece of empty fiction.

Moral norms regulating sexual life can in fact have only two aims:

1. To guarantee human beings health and the birth of healthy offspring: to bring the selection of sexual partners in line with

the interests of the human race.

2. To develop and refine the human psyche; to develop in the human spirit feelings of comradeship, solidarity and the emotional experience of being part of the collective.

Contemporary morality fulfils neither of these aims; it serves only the interests of Mammon, the interests of property. The whole complicated code of present-day sexual morality—indissoluble monogamous marriage, based only in rare cases on 'Eros', the widespread institution of commercial prostitution—far from leading humanity to health and to improvement creates the situation where 'sexual selection' is turned upside-down. Contemporary morality leads mankind in the path of degeneration.

People who marry have to practise 'self-control' during those years most suitable for child-bearing. Prostitution, which has no result as far as the perpetuation of the race is concerned, flourishes. There is no 'ecstasy of love' in marriages of convenience and this has an effect on the physical health of the children of such families. With the acceptance of indissoluble, legal marriage as the norm, the most 'magnificent examples of womanhood', those women most capable of bringing out the erotic in men, are filtered off into prostitution and remain without children. We pronounce the 'sentence of death' on the illegitimate 'children of love' who are often the more healthy, flourishing and valuable representatives of the race. These are the indirect results of the current morality. This morality leads to deformity and physical deterioration, to the physical and moral degeneration of the human race.

Meisel-Hess's attempts to square sexual morality with the demands of race hygiene deserve our full attention. Her arguments are of special interest to those who accept the materialist interpretation of history. The demands of the socialist programme, the defence of the young working population, the protection of maternity and childhood, the struggle against prostitution etc., also have 'race hygiene' in the widest sense as their object. To dislodge the halo that sexual morality possesses of being an unchanging and 'categorical imperative', to bring sexual morality in line with the practical demands of living people and the demands of the progressive sections of humanity: these are the tasks which, without a doubt, are standing in the queue and waiting for a serious and inspired response from socialists.

Although Meisel-Hess has valuable ideas on these questions, an analysis of this special part of her work would mean leaving the bounds of a brief essay. Therefore we are limiting ourselves to a review of the other side of the sexual problem. We shall deal with the no less interesting



and valuable answers that Meisel-Hess gives to the question of whether present day personal relationships serve to enrich the human psyche with feelings of solidarity and friendship.

Subjecting to analysis all three basic forms of relationships between the sexes—legal marriage, prostitution and the ‘free union’—Meisel-Hess comes to the pessimistic conclusion that in a capitalist system all three forms equally block up and distort the human soul; they smash every hope of continuous and real happiness, and of genuinely human relationships between people. While there is no change, while the human psyche remains in its present state, there is no way out of this continuing sexual crisis.

We can fling open the locked door leading out into the fresh air, and on to the path to closer, more loving and consequently happier relationships between the sexes only if the human psyche is changed radically and man’s ‘potential for loving’ is increased. Such a change inevitably demands the basic transformation of socio-economic relations: in other words it demands the transition to communism.

What are the chief inadequacies, what are the dark sides, of legal marriage? Legal marriage is based on two equally false principles: that marriage should be forever and that the partners belong to each other and are each other’s property.

The idea of marriage-for-ever is in contradiction to all that psychological scientists know about how the psyche changes during the long course of a human’s life. The demand made by contemporary morality deserves to be laughed at: each person must at all costs ‘find their happiness’. People are obliged to select straight away and without making a mistake the one person from among the millions of their contemporaries with whom their soul is in harmony. Only by discovering their “second self” will they be guaranteed a successful marriage. If a person—especially if that person is a woman—in groping for the ideal, tears the heart on the sharp thorns of life’s disappointments, society, perverted by current morality, instead of coming forward to help a fellow human being in distress starts victimising that person. “Society must coerce people into their ‘happiness’—this is the fine flower of our sexual morality.” Modern society doesn’t care about individual happiness or even about ‘appearances’. Society has the interests of property at heart and for this reason is prepared to look on an open change of relationship as a great personal insult. Meisel-Hess drily points out that “marriage is like a flat: you become aware of its dark corners only when you’ve lived in it a while. It’s hard luck, of course, if you have to change flats all the time because they turn out to be uncomfortable and inadequate. But that’s

better than being forced by circumstances to stay in an unsuitable place. It must be completely accepted by society that a person, in the course of his long life and in the process of the development of his personality, will change sexual partners."

It seems even more absurd that marriages should be indissoluble when you bear in mind that most legal marriages are contracted 'in the dark'; the marriage partners have only the vaguest idea of each other. They know little about the personality of the other and more than that they have absolutely no idea if they are suited physically—and happiness in marriage is not possible unless there is this physical harmony. 'Trial nights' which according to Meisel-Hess were common practice in the Middle Ages, are far from being 'absurdly lacking in decency'. In a different social environment people might, in the interest of the human race and in order to ensure the happiness of individuals, exercise this right.

The idea of property and the 'undisputed rights of possession' that one partner has over the other is the second factor poisoning legal marriage. In fact you get this ridiculous situation. The complicated, many-sided personalities of two people who are close to each other only in a few ways are 'obliged' to suit each other in every way. 'Undisputed possession' leads to the partners being always and inconveniently with each other. You no longer have your own time, your own will, and because of the economic dependence involved, you often don't have even your 'own separate corner'. The continual presence of the other person and the inevitably unreasonable demands made on one, as on a piece of property, turn even a passionate love into indifference and lead to an insufferable nagging over little things. You really have to agree with Meisel-Hess that when two people live on top of each other all the time the tender spring flower of even the most loving attachment will be killed. You need to have so much consideration for the other person, such a great supply of 'warmth', if you are to develop out of the first rush of passion the rich fruits of a deep irrevocable emotional attachment, formed in the sun of mutual warmth.

The sense of 'property' and of the 'foreverness' of legal marriage has a harmful effect on the psyche; a man has to make only the smallest emotional effort to preserve the external trappings of an attachment since the partner is in any case rivetted to him for life. The modern form of legal marriage impoverishes the soul and in no way helps mankind to gather the store of 'great love' which the Russian genius Tolstoy talked of and longed for.

But the other form of sexual contact—mercenary prostitution—



distorts the human psyche even more. "What could be more monstrous than the act of love reduced to the level of a profession?" Leaving aside all the social poverty connected with prostitution—all the physical suffering, illness, deformity and degeneration—let us stop to consider the question of the influence of prostitution on the human psyche. Nothing so empties the human soul as the buying of physical love from a stranger or the selling of love in this way. Prostitution extinguishes the love in people's hearts. Eros flies away in terror fearing to soil his golden wings in a bed so bespattered with dirt.

Prostitution deforms a normal attitude towards sex. It cripples and impoverishes the spirit, it cuts out and takes away what is most valuable—the ability to feel the passion and love that extend and enrich the individual by giving him a store of emotional experience. Prostitution distorts our understanding. It makes us see something shameful, low and coarsely animal in one of the most serious moments of human life—in the act of love, in the final harmony of complicated emotional experience.

When men purchase their pleasure they don't achieve psychological fulfilment, and this has a particularly pernicious effect on the male psyche. With a prostitute a man finds no moments of deeply-felt, truly-erotic ecstasy that are somehow transforming. He learns to come to a woman with 'lowered' needs, with a psyche oversimplified and faded. Used to submissive 'obliging' caresses he no longer watches the complicated emotional process working itself out in the woman, his partner. He ceases to 'hear' and catch the subtle shade of her emotions. How many of the scenes that women make are sparked off by this 'simplification' of the male psyche, a simplification that takes place in the brothel! Prostitution inevitably spreads dark shadows even over the heads of the 'independent' lover, and over the woman who loves naively and is thus expecting a lot. Prostitution ruthlessly poisons the joy of loving for those women who see the sexual act as the 'final harmony' of mutual all-absorbing passion.†

A woman normally looks to personal relationships for fulfilment

† What Meisel-Hess says about the distortion of the male personality in prostitution is the key to another fact that has never before been discussed. A man is not used to having to think about a woman's psychological and emotional experience. This means not only that he is unable to 'hear' a woman's soul, but with surprising naivety he ignores her physical experience during the sexual act. The dissatisfaction that women feel because of this is known only to doctors; it frequently causes illness. It is surprising that Meisel-Hess in talking about the selfishness of the male personality is silent on this point, which throws light on many a domestic conflict. When Maupassant dared to touch on this question in his novel *A Life (The History of One Life)* most men greeted his revelation with naive bewilderment.

and harmony. But a man educated in prostitution has lost sight of the intricate vibrations of feeling. He follows only the pale monotony of physical attraction and ends up with a feeling of unfulfilment and emotional hunger. The mutual 'misunderstanding' of the sexes grows. The greater the individuality of the woman, the more complicated her emotional needs and the more acute the sexual crisis becomes. Prostitution is dangerous just because it has an influence far beyond the confines of the brothel.

Meisel-Hess talks of venereal disease and the physical weakening of the race. We shall leave this question aside and consider the other psychological moment that casts a shadow on the emotional impulses, that blocks and distorts the erotic consciousness, and leads to a situation where the mutual understanding of the man and woman disappears, and they are unable to enjoy each other without misusing each other. On the boundary between physical and psychological emotions is the feeling which determines the activity of man that involves the continuation of the race. And it is this feeling, on which all hangs, on which both the individual and the society depend, that is ruthlessly distorted.

The third form of personal relationship, the 'free relationship' also has its dark sides. A 'free relationship' does not succeed because it is a reflection of the total situation. The man of today begins a 'free' relationship with his psyche already deformed by false and unhealthy ideas about morality. He has already been educated on the one hand by legal marriage and on the other, by prostitution. The 'free union' inevitably comes up against two obstacles: our inability to love (an inability that is the essence of our atomised individualistic world) and the absence of the necessary leisure time for truly emotional experience. Modern man has no time to 'love'. In a society based on competition, in a society where the battle for existence is fierce and everyone is involved in a race for profit, for a career, or for just a crust of bread, there is no room left for the cult of the demanding and fragile Eros. Poor Aspasia<sup>2</sup> would wait in vain these days for the feast of love and joy and for friendship decorated with roses. She could not bring herself to be with a man of coarse and unworthy emotions and the man of 'noble spirit' would not have the time to spend his evenings with her.

Meisel-Hess rightly points out how widespread this attitude is: modern man looks upon love and passion as the 'greatest misfortune', as something that can only be a burden and prevent him attending to the proper and really important things—the conquest of position, capital, the acquisition of a secure job, of praise etc. Man avoids the poisoned arrows of Eros, he avoids being caught up in a 'great love' that might divert him from the 'main things' in life. And a 'free union' in the whole context of



modern life demands a much greater amount of time and emotional energy than either registered marriage or momentary and purchased pleasure. 'Free' lovers are usually more attached to each other than legal partners and spend more time with each other.

How many valuable 'business' hours are lost over one 'rendez-vous'. There are thousands of other demons lying in wait for the pair that are bound by the tie of love alone—there are misunderstandings, there is temporary estrangement and conflict. A 'union of love' in the conditions that exist today ends either by breaking up or by taking on the form of legal marriage.

The strong and complete man who could include love without risk in the complex of his living has not yet, in Meisel-Hess's opinion, emerged. That is why we see the men of today, absorbed by the cares of business, preferring to open their wallets and acquire for themselves a 'kept woman', or pay a woman with their 'name' and shoulder the burden of a legal family, rather than waste their 'precious' time and energy on experiencing love.

The same dilemma faces women, particularly those women who support themselves (and in developed countries that means 30–40%). Love or a profession? The problem of maternity further complicates the position of the working woman. It is in fact worth looking through the biographies of all outstanding women to be convinced of the inevitable conflict between on the one side love and having children and on the other a career and a vocation. Perhaps it is just *because* the independent 'spinster' woman, in giving her love to someone, throws on the scales of happiness not only her emotions but also work that is dear to her that she expects from the man in return a generous payment, 'the richest gift'. She demands his soul.

The 'free union' suffers because there is no sense of moral responsibility, no consciousness of an inner duty. While the complicated structure of social inter-relations remains unchanged there is no ground for thinking, as the supporters of 'free love' do, that this type of personal relationship will lead humanity out of the sexual crisis.

It could be an answer only if the psyche had been radically re-educated. This re-education would demand as a necessary precondition that the basis of social life, which determines ideas about morality, be also changed.

There is nothing fundamentally new in the suggestions brought forward by Meisel-Hess concerning social politics, legislation and reform.

They are already implied in the relevant demands of the socialists' programmes. The demands made by socialists—the economic independence of women, protection in every possible way for mothers and children, the struggle against prostitution at its economic base, the end of the concept of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' children, the replacement of church marriage by easily altered civil marriage, and a radical reconstruction of society along communist lines—cover all the points she makes. Meisel-Hess's merit is not that she has taken all her socio-political demands from the socialists. Much more important is the fact that although not an 'active socialist' she has, in her sincere desire for truth in sexual matters, unconsciously found the only way to settle the sexual question. However, if all social reforms had been passed and all the essential pre-requisites for new personal relationships existed, the sexual crisis would still not be settled unless the great creative force that can increase humanity's 'potential for loving' had been developed.

Meisel-Hess has reached this conclusion through intuition and the sincerity of her approach. She sees that all the energies that society spends in the education and moulding of human emotions to cope with personal relationships must be directed to this end.

According to Meisel-Hess, a marriage relationship based on deep feeling and emotional and physical harmony will continue to be the ideal in the future. But one should not forget that 'great love' is a gift that destiny rarely gives, it falls only to a few chosen ones. The magician 'great love' doesn't often touch our hearts with his enchanting rod, painting our grey life with sunny colours. Millions of people never know these all-powerful charms. What are we to do with these unfortunate people? Are they to be left to the cold embraces of marriage without Eros? Or to prostitution? Will people always be faced with the same cruel dilemma that confronts us in contemporary society: either 'great love' or erotic hunger?

Meisel-Hess seeks and finds an alternative. Where there is no 'great love' 'game-love' should take its place. To be capable of 'great love' humanity must pass through the difficult 'school of love' where the emotions are refined. 'Game-love' is this school; it is the way for the human psyche to develop its 'potential for loving'.

In different forms you come across 'game-love' at all stages of the long history of humanity. It is not difficult to trace the basic elements of this relationship in the behaviour of the *haetaera*<sup>3</sup> of Ancient Greece and her 'friend'; in the 'gallant love' between the courtesan and her 'patron' lover at the time of the Renaissance; in the erotic friendship of the 'grizetka'<sup>4</sup>, free and carefree as a bird, and her 'comrade-student'.



You don't find here the all-absorbing Eros with a tragic face demanding full and undivided possession, or a crude sexualism that confines itself to the physical act. Sanis with his over-simplified psycho-physiological make-up would be a poor partner in the 'game-love' that Meisel-Hess describes. Because human emotions are being educated and formed in the process, 'game-love' demands a great delicacy, psychological awareness and genuine and responsive sensitivity.

'Game-love' is very demanding. "People coming together on the grounds of mutual attraction alone expect the smiles of life from each other. They won't allow someone to play with their emotions and go unpunished; they are not prepared to adopt a casual attitude toward someone's psyche, an attitude that ignores the internal world. 'Game-love' demands a far more careful, considerate and thoughtful relationship between people: one that will gradually break them from that fathomless egoism which accompanies all contemporary emotional experience." "A close relationship with someone that encourages mutual feeling develops sensitivity, consideration and delicacy in a person. . ."

Thirdly, 'game-love' does not derive from the principle of 'undisputed' possession, and teaches people to give only that part of their 'self' which is not a burden to the other, and which helps the other person to lead a brighter life. This would teach people, in Meisel-Hess's opinion, a 'great wisdom' in that they can only give the whole self when there exists feelings that are irrevocable and of 'solemn' depth. At the moment we are too inclined, after 'the first kiss', to encroach on the whole personality of the other person, to bind absolutely the other's heart before there is any call for this. We have to remember that only a 'great love' gives these 'rights'.

'Game-love' or 'erotic friendship' has yet another advantage—it is an armour against the murderous arrows of Eros. It teaches people to withstand the burden of love and passion that enslaves and crushes the individual. According to Meisel-Hess, it encourages, in the way that no other form of love does, the self-preservation of the individual.

There is no room in such a relationship for that awful kind of development which could be called 'the violent assault' on another person's 'self'. 'Game-love' does not involve the great 'fall', the loss of one's personality in the waves of passion. Contemporary humanity lives under 'the sinister sign' of passion that always tries to overwhelm the other 'I', the other person. In the novel *Lassvitsa* the girl from Mars makes this reply to the man who professes love for her: "If I were inspired to play the game of feelings I would fall under the violent power of passion, I would lose my freedom and would have to go with you to

earth. Your earth is perhaps bigger and more luxurious, but I would rather die in this harsh atmosphere. Your hearts are like your air: they are heavy . . . ”

Our time is exceptional in that it has no ‘art of love’. People are absolutely unable to develop light and carefree relationships. People do not recognise the value of ‘erotic friendships’. Love is either a tragedy that tears the soul apart or it is a vulgar vaudeville. We have to lead mankind from this blind-alley. We have to teach people to experience bright and beautiful emotions that burden no one. Only by passing through the school of erotic friendship is man’s psyche capable of feeling a ‘great love’ that is completely free of any dark aspect. Any emotional experience (that is not just the coarse physical act) enriches rather than impoverishes the soul. “A rich and healthy human heart, capable of experiencing love is not”, says Meisel-Hess, “a sandwich to be gradually eaten.” Love is a force which multiplies as you use it up. “To love the more intensely, the more often and the more self-assuredly is the passionate way of every great heart.” Love is in itself a great creative force: it develops and enriches the psyche of the person who experiences love and of the person to whom love is given.

“Without love humanity feels itself fobbed, unfortunate and beggarly. There is no doubt that love will become the cult of mankind in the future. And even now in order to struggle to live, to work, and to create man needs to feel ‘sure’ of himself, he needs to feel ‘accepted’. The man who feels himself loved also feels himself to be accepted and this makes him more joyful at being alive.”

But the recognition of the ‘I’, the self, is not achieved, and the desire to escape the ever-present spiritual loneliness is not fulfilled by simply satisfying physical hunger. “Only the feeling of being in complete harmony with the loved one will satisfy a person. Only ‘great love’ gives full satisfaction. The crisis is more acute when social barriers restrict the potential for loving that is in the human soul—when the human psyche has had few experiences of friendship and togetherness.”

The task of ‘erotic friendship’ is to prepare and educate this potential for loving so that man is ready for ‘great love’.

‘Game-love’ is of course only a deputy and substitute for ‘great love’. Some people will say it is not enough. If that’s what they think, replies Meisel-Hess, let them look at what passes for love at the present time, at the prostitution ‘dressed’ up as great feeling. What incredible falsehood, what a stack of lies are accumulating on this subject! One example that springs to mind—a man and his fiancée are in each other’s



arms but the strict morality cries: "You must wait". The fiancé visits a prostitute, who doesn't want to sleep with him, but has to. The girl friend wants the man but has to wait until the priest gives the word. It would be much more natural and more moral if two people who wanted each other were to seek fulfilment in each other instead of condemning a third person to the service of their flesh.

Apart from its roots in the socio-economic structure, prostitution is determined by something psychological that is deeply rooted in the human soul—the desire to overflow with 'erotic inspiration' without having to lose freedom and give the future as payment, without having to place the entire 'I', the entire self, at the feet of the partner who is really a stranger. You have to accommodate such a natural drive. You can't cast the marriage bridle over every unguarded lover. 'Game-love' is the answer that people have been looking for. "If we are sincere, if we dispense with the sexual lie and the hypocrisy of our morality, there is no reason to doubt that mankind at a higher level of cultural development might find this kind of answer, *if* certain social reforms had been achieved." (Meisel-Hess emphasises that these reforms are a necessary pre-condition for all her suggestions about a different morality) ". . . there would be nothing wrong in 'erotic ecstasy' throwing two people into each other's arms. . . 'heaven' and 'hell' have got nothing to do with it."

Finally, the exact limits of 'erotic friendship' are very vague and undefined. It is quite possible that people coming together on the grounds of slight contact and attraction will find each other, and from the 'game' will grow the treasure of 'great love'. The question remains of creating the objective conditions for this to happen. What are Meisel-Hess's conclusions and practical demands?

Society must above all learn to accept all forms of personal relationships however unusual they may seem, provided they comply with two conditions. Provided that they do not affect the physical health of the human race and provided they are not determined by the economic factor. The monogamous union based on 'great love' still remains the ideal. But this is not a permanent or set relationship. The more complicated the individual psyche the more inevitable are the changes. "A succession of monogamous relationships" is the basic structure of personal relationships. But side by side there are a whole range of possible forms of 'erotic friendship' between the sexes.

The second demand is the acceptance in practice and not only in words that maternity is 'sacred'. Society must arrange all forms and kinds of 'aid-stations' for women, that will give them moral and material support during this very important period of their lives.

Lastly, it is essential to take a look at the moral equipment which a girl setting out on life's journey is given, otherwise women will be afraid of and crushed by freer relationships.

The entire present-day education of a woman is directed to confining her life to emotions of love. And so we get these 'broken hearts', these images of women drooping from the first strong wind. We must open up the wide gates to a many-sided life. We must steel a woman's heart and armour her will. It is time to teach woman to treat love as a step, as a way of finding her true 'I', her true self, and not as her whole existence. Let her learn to come through an emotional conflict as a man does, with a stronger spirit and not with broken wings. Goethe's motto was "Be able at any moment to do away with the past and accept life as if it began today." There is already hope, the new type of woman is emerging—the 'bachelor woman' for whom love is not the only thing in life. She doesn't let the waves of life have absolute control over her emotional experience, a seasoned helmswoman is at the wheel of the boat. Her spirit has been forged in the battle of life. The 'bachelor woman' re-paraphrases the philistine exclamation 'She has a past!'. 'She has a past'. . . How cruel can fate be!

There may not be many of these women for a long time yet, and a new sexual order, the child of a more perfect social structure, won't begin immediately. The long sexual crisis won't end and give way tomorrow to the morality of the future. But the path has been found and the forbidden door is wide open and beckoning in the distance. Meisel-Hess's book gives us 'Ariadne's thread' to the complicated labyrinth of sexual relationships and involved psychological dramas. We should use the valuable points that she makes, throw out some of her suggestions, rid others of irrelevancies and of slight inaccuracies. We should bring her conclusions in line with the basic tasks of the rising class. We should try to find in the problems of, and the attitudes to, sexual relationships, and in the psychology of love, the embryo of a new, developing and inevitably victorious 'proletarian culture'.



## NOTE for 'Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle'

1. In the traditional Russian villages, the young girls would often get together to rent an old hut or a room in someone's house. They would gather there in the evenings to tell stories, do needlework and sing. The young men would come to join in the merrymaking. Sometimes it seems that the merrymaking would become an orgy, though there are conflicting ideas about this.

## NOTES for 'Love and the New Morality'

1. This article was written as a book review of *The Sexual Crisis*, by the German writer Meisel-Hess. It is a reminder that Kollontai's ideas on sexual relations and women's liberation were part of a more general ferment of ideas on these questions in Western Europe at the beginning of this century. The essay reflects some of the psychological and scientific thinking of sixty years ago, which now appears more dated than the social and political thinking of the same period.

2. Aspasia was a Greek courtesan of 440 B.C. She was renowned for her wisdom as well as her beauty, and was the mistress of Pericles, an Athenian statesman. He left his wife for Aspasia, whose brilliance made her house a centre of Athenian literary and philosophical life.

3. Haetaera—a Greek courtesan. Greek courtesans at one time were highly respected (see note on Aspasia above) and took part in public life much more than wives did.

4. Grizetka: taken from the French word 'grisette'—a young and 'coquettish' working girl.

