

Consumer Options: Reflections on Fads in Sexuality and the Glass of Water Theory

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STRUGGLESESSIONS



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Reflections on Fads in Sexuality and The Glass of Water Theory

by Cathal

“The changed attitude of the young people to questions of sexual life is of course based on a ‘principle’ and a theory. Many of them call their attitude ‘revolutionary’ and ‘communist’. And they honestly believe that it is so. That does not impress us old people. Although I am nothing but a gloomy ascetic, the so-called ‘new sexual life’ of the youth – and sometimes of the old – often seems to me to be purely bourgeois, an extension of bourgeois brothels. That has nothing whatever in common with freedom of love as we communists understand it. You must be aware of the famous theory that in communist society the satisfaction of sexual desires, of love, will be as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water. This glass of water theory has made our young people mad, quite mad. It has proved fatal to many young boys and girls. Its adherents maintain that it is Marxist. But thanks for such Marxism which directly and immediately attributes all phenomena and changes in the ideological superstructure of society to its economic basis! Matters aren’t quite as simple as that. A certain Frederick Engels pointed that out a long time ago with regard to historical materialism.” –V.I. Lenin

Bourgeois society as it decays in the epoch of imperialism becomes increasingly decadent. This decadence is sometimes confused with social

progression as it undergoes the constant repackaging for expanded markets. Here we use markets in the loosest sense, and consumers in the sense of consuming ideas. The old “sexual revolution” and “free love” gets a name change, accompanied by only the most minor modifications; today we hear “open relationships”, “polyamory”, etc. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that these types of sexual or romantic relationships are “proletarian” or “revolutionary”; we see this is nothing new, as indicated by the above quotation from the great Lenin in his conversations with Clara Zetkin. The slight modifications to the old ideas still fail to impress us and we are no more inclined to accept the bogus glass of water theory as communist today than Lenin was back then.

This glass of water theory which proved fatal to many youths in Lenin’s time has gathered around itself a new mass. The conditions which provide this mass have only become more suitable for the extension of the bourgeois brothel, with the proliferation of postmodernist ideas, bourgeois commonsense from bourgeois queer culture and various other sources, which maintain themselves mostly as the intellectual activity of academics and their circles of followers. Lenin was absolutely correct when he insisted that the sex/marriage question was exaggerated and that “all the thoughts of women comrades, of the women of the working people, must be directed towards the proletarian revolution. It creates the basis for a real renovation in marriage and sexual relations.” He expressed to Comrade Zetkin that the youth movement was “attacked with the disease of modernity in its attitude towards sexual questions and in being exaggeratedly concerned with them.” We bear witness to the same issue today. We should not pretend that the repackaging of sexuality is a new condition itself, even if the invention of the internet and the dissemination of decadent bourgeois intellectual ideas has increased as a result.

Many of the great Lenin’s warnings are not heeded correctly; many comrades still lack clarity. It does not shock us any to hear that comrades and activists or “revolutionaries” who live in “collective housing” and practice “polyamory” have in short order devoured themselves, wrecked organizational work, and

burned out. Such is the wage of their decadence. To use the vivid language of Lenin, they are drinking from a glass with a rim greasy from many lips. Their sad status is hardly a thing to celebrate. The thing is to clarify, which Lenin did and does, continuing:

“The revolution demands concentration, increase of forces. From the masses, from individuals. It cannot tolerate orgiastic conditions, such as are normal for the decadent...Dissoluteness in sexual life is bourgeois, is a phenomenon of decay. The proletariat is a rising class. It doesn't need intoxication as a narcotic or a stimulus. Intoxication as little by sexual exaggeration as by alcohol. It must not and shall not forget, forget the shame, the filth, the savagery of capitalism. It receives the strongest urge to fight from a class situation, from the communist ideal. It needs clarity, clarity and again clarity. And so I repeat, no weakening, no waste, no destruction of forces. Self-control, self-discipline is not slavery, not even in love.”

Libertines, hedonists, the decadent etc. are not adherent to communism but to something else. They push the boundaries of bourgeois morality; they expand bourgeois morality on the basis of being open about what the bourgeoisie has always practiced in secret. Instead of finding flaws in the private bourgeois decadence, those gripped with glass of water theory are today more content with consoling themselves by making this private vice a public virtue of progression—this is derived from the mindset that the issue is with “stigma” and embracing the identity is “empowering.” This is useless, degenerated, and lacking proletarian morality. Now they will call us ascetic as well, a charge we too find repulsive, but at least we are in the company of Lenin; we must proclaim ourselves militants of Leninism.

Engels points out that monogamy was and is reactionary; it has the feature of enforcing monogamy for the woman (except for prostitutes) but for the man it has always been adultery (including consuming prostitution). Monogamy was never mutual or equal. Its opposite is not “polyamory”, which can only extend the stepping out to women as well as to men, creating a set of consumers and a set of consumer options in the personage of the sexual and romantic partners.

The rest of the bourgeois superstructure, stifling and oppressive, remains intact. In such a society these arrangements will continue being at the expense of women, with a devastating impact on working men as well. We cannot forget that Lenin already addressed the issue of the superstructure in the first quotation we have used.

Igor Mendes, the revolutionary intellectual and former political prisoner in Brazil, produced an excellent article in 2015 titled *Crítica à teoria do “amor livre”* which brought important perspective to this conversation. Comrade Mendes importantly links the issue to consumerism:

“The ‘free love’ theory is not new, but it has become fashionable in the current context of financialization of all social relations, exacerbated consumerism and individualism, increasing dehumanization of life. Marx... already said that capitalism is not limited to producing goods for consumers, it also produces—there the role of the dominant ideology and its diffusion apparatus—consumers for goods.”

Comrade Mendes approaches the matter of love from the class viewpoint:

“Once linked to the common struggle for social transformation, love can act as a genuinely liberating element. This is evident when it promotes, for example, contestation to stratifications and prejudices socially crystallized. What would become of the revolutionary cause if the militants felt the unrelenting hatred of oppressors without being accompanied by infinite love for the masses?”

Marx considered this as well. The relationship between men and women, according to Marx, is “the most natural” and exposed that the individual need is actually a component of the collective need:

“In this relationship it is also revealed to what extent man’s needs have become human needs...in his most individual existence, he is at the same time a collective being.”

Bourgeois “love” on the other hand is about fulfilling an individual need, and more often than not of self-gratification—the two conceptions of love have nothing in common. The Communist Party of Peru when administering the New State developed marital vows which summed up Marx:

“The relationship between a man and a woman is the most direct and strictly human, it constitutes a social relationship. When those who enter into this relationship are Communists (or revolutionaries) that union must contribute to the struggle that both carry out for communism (or for the revolution).”

The sanitization of prostitution operates on the same bourgeois basis of countering “stigma” with “empowerment” and in no small way weighs into the repackaging of trends. The matter is not reduced simply to the question of prostitution but extends toward any sexual commodity like pornography, which is all mangled into the postmodernist category of “sex work” in a vulgar effort to rehabilitate the most vile institutions preserved by the bourgeoisie. Bolshevik revolutionary and Communist leader Alexandra Kollantai exposes the psychological impact of such institutions, not circumstantially in her specific conditions, but from a universal, and indeed immortal, Marxist viewpoint:

“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...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.”

The psychological impact of bourgeois marriage and prostitution make themselves felt upon what Kollontai called “the free relationship” as well:

“...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.”

Beyond the infatuation with “open” or “poly” relationships, bourgeois love and all of its radical so-called “revolutionary” re-purposing has damning effects on individual, one-on-one romantic relationships, particularly in the way in which “heartbreak” and “longing” are culturally sanctified by armies of bourgeois poets, singers, and moving picture producers. Returning to Lenin, we can sum up the problem with this for both men and women. Lenin describes how a young comrade

“reels and staggers from one love affair to the next. That won’t do for the political struggle, for the revolution. And I wouldn’t bet on the reliability, the endurance in struggle of those women who confuse their personal romances with politics. Nor on the men who run petticoat and get entrapped by every young woman. That does not square with the revolution.”

We must conclude this brief examination on the only Marxist basis, outlined by Lenin, the PCP, and all the great Marxists: social relationships must strengthen and never weaken the revolutionary resolve of proletarian class fighters. Unions, recognized by the New State or the Communist Party, or whatever administrative body of the proletariat in development, are essentially different than those recognized legally by the bourgeois state or the numerous churches. For the proletarian revolutionary, such a union must serve to

support, help, and assist those entering into it to serve the revolution more and better.

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