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The Position of Women in Today's Society (Eirini P. Dimitriadou) (Speech Text)

Historical Note

This speech was given by Eirini P. Dimitriadou at the Limassol Workers' Centre in March 1926. It is probably the first recorded speech of a female worker in Cyprus.¹⁾

The text of the speech was published in the newspaper Xronos (Χρόνος) on March 13, 1926.

Content

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

Speech by Miss Eirini P. Dimitriadou

But to tell the truth, when I thought that I, too, as a woman, could say something from the workers' podium, it didn't cross my mind—as was only natural—that I might be the first woman in our town, and more broadly, on the entire island, to make this gesture, i.e., to come up to the workers' podium.

But it occurred to me that workers had passed by this podium, and that was enough for me, a female worker, to find the courage to say something useful to the unhappy people, because there is no way, in the minds of awakened women, that women should stay away from men because that is supposedly their nature. But it is deeply rooted in our minds that a woman's place is beside the working man. Not only the daughter beside her father, the sister beside her brother, the mother beside her son, and the wife beside her husband, but every working woman beside every working man, uniting their strength to march boldly, hand in hand, without gender discrimination, along the historical path of the Proletariat, and break the chains of slavery, thus reaching to the history of human life; because [unintelligible passage] the life of the worker, male and female, human. No. We say that our life is not human, it is an animal's life, as it has been made for us by the unjust and unequal social conditions of today: a life without individual will, without thought, without purpose.

The dark days of worker slavery, as was natural, enslaved woman as well. They threw her into the same factory, the same workshop, the same warehouse, because the male worker's hands could no longer support the whole family. Today's exploitative society has done its job by enslaving woman in the workplace, denying her the time she needs to think about her miserable condition and to rise up and join the global uprising.

The lord, the exploitative capitalist, was dissatisfied with the worker's wages, the beast thirsted for more, and he threw the woman into the factory. But if the worker is once a slave, if the worker can go and relax in a tavern after his incessant work, because he thinks that only there will he forget his troubles, or if he is more conscious, to go to his association, to listen to something, to say something, to read, but his wife is a double slave. After ten hours, and often even more, she will go home. And there, how much does she have to do? She will tidy the house, cook something for her children, patch clothes, sweep, wash, until midnight finds her exhausted from work, when she can finally lie down to rest her body for a few hours, just a few, and those few hours are fewer than normal. You see, they have reduced even her sleep, that natural need of the human body. And she will get up again in the morning, before dawn breaks, to start the same miserable life all over again, until one day exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and hunger throw her into bed, where she will continue her miserable, wretched, brutal life, until, most likely defeated by illness, she meets her inevitable end. And yet, if she does not meet her end, what will her life be? Do not be silent, workers. Tell me. You who have known many times and see every day this sad story. Imagine now what the upbringing, the path, and the development of this working-class family will be. What kind of upbringing will the children have, when they have no mother's supervision and no father's advice, when their mother leaves for work before dawn and their older sister is a slave in the lord's house? Often, the poor child does not even know who his sister is. Will he not end up on the streets, getting mixed up with the street urchins? We refer to the street urchins, and who are these street urchins, may I ask? Are they not the children of the poor, who did not have, or rather did not know at all, the care of a mother and father? Won't such a child become a street child, an unhappy child, who will quickly forget his mother, having never known what a mother's love is?

Will he not forget his father, not having known his advice? Since what advice can an unhappy father give, what appetite for advice will he have, when he comes home exhausted from work? And it's not just that. How many thoughts must be tormenting his mind? And we can see the result clearly before our eyes. Behold, as soon as you leave here, you will meet the children of these unhappy workers. Of our class. And it's not just that. The prostitute, that despicable woman, on whom everyone takes out their anger, is she not the victim of today's depraved society? Is she not the innocent daughter of a worker or a peasant who shyly served in the palace of the lord, of the master, until one day, violated, either by the son, or by the father, or by someone else, she was forced to give up her honor, her only jewel, her only amulet. And then, alas, the master will chase her away, the master will shout: "Out, prostitute, I do not feed such vile women in my house." The innocent girl will protest, she will cry out for her justice, but there is no room for protest; the road is now open for her. Neither her father's house will take her in, nor will the lord's palace accept her. She will take to the streets and go to the brothel, to join other unfortunate women like herself, to forget herself, to forget that she is a woman, to sell her body. But alas, time passes and the prostitute will lose her beauty, she will grow old and even the brothel, that filthy house, as many call it, and which we call the home of the most unhappy, will not take her in. Her flesh is useless now and will remain unsold. Begging in the street is her only refuge. But will she be able to live when she hears "get away, prostitute" and so many other insults everywhere she goes?

The end will soon be near, a terrible death, from misery, from decay, and from hunger, in the alleys of the city. But it will be rare to be long-lived, because a thousand aphrodisiac diseases will show her very early on the way to Hades, on a dirty straw mattress in her small chamber.

The prostitute is the creation of today's unjust and vulgar society, because, in truth, it would be ridiculous to imagine that a woman willingly chooses the bad path. I am talking about the unhappy creatures of common brothels, not the prostitutes of the salon. No, misfortune drags her by the hand and pushes her into the door of the brothel. Such is the misery and wretchedness of the working family, so terrible is the degradation of the working woman that each of us is horrified to think about

it, and dare to say that this [incomprehensible], this life of ours, is human. Alas, you cannot call human a society in which woman's flesh is sold and bought, in which there are houses built solely for this purpose, that is, for the sale of women's bodies.

Let us now turn to the issue of marriage and examine the position of women in this regard. First of all, gentlemen, tell me, can a father marry off his daughter when marriage has become a commercial enterprise? Can a worker, even if he has only one daughter, prepare her for marriage when he needs so much dowry, a courtyard, houses, and cash for the groom? In order to marry off his first daughter, a worker must give away his house, if he has one, to his daughter and her groom, and he himself must move into some damp little room, for which he will still have to pay rent.

[Needs Turkish Translation](#), [Other Material](#), [Decade 1920-1929](#), [1926](#), [Undefined](#), [Limassol](#)

¹⁾

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