

Peter Hallama

Socialist fatherhood.

Revolutionary visions of the future family in 19th and 20th-century Europe

Abstract

Since the 19th century, efforts have been made to re-articulate the roles of men and women in family. Early Marxists and socialists believed that equality could be established if private property – the source of masculine domination – was abandoned. However, at the end of the 20th century, one has to state that these utopian visions got stuck halfway. Despite the important progress of state-socialist countries regarding female work and education or the equality before law, one aspect is striking when it comes to the everyday life under communism: the “double”, or “triple burden” of women going to work, caring for the children und managing the household.

How did the socialists react to the continuity of the gendered separation of homework? Several authors emphasized that they simply did not address the question of paternity. I suggest, on the contrary, that there was, since the 19th century, a socialist way of redefining of masculinity and fatherhood, changing necessarily the meaning of family and of paternal identities. In the 1970s, the Bulgarian communist party stated that “[t]he reduction and alleviation of woman's household work depends greatly on the common participation of the two spouses in the organization of family life.” It found therefore that it was “imperative” to “prepare young men for the performance of household duties from childhood and adolescence”. This attempt to change the roles of fathers in families was nothing new. Clara Zetkin, a famous German socialist and feminist, suggested already in the early 20th century that the fathers have to be included in the care and education of the children.

The project aims thus to retrace the theoretical conceptions and feminist discussions, but also the everyday constructions of fatherhood in communist movements in the 19th and 20th century. In order to integrate it in a broader history of Europe's struggle for modernity, I will analyze communist movements in state-socialist countries (the GDR and Czechoslovakia) as well as in democratic societies (the FRG and France).