

What one needs to know about the International Women's Day – 8 March **Professor emeritus Svenka Savić**

The goal of the survey was to investigate the changes that occurred in the celebration of the International Women's Day – 8 March in Serbia over the period of one century: 1910 – 2010.

The research includes analysis of the texts published in daily newspapers *Dnevnik*, over the last three decades: 1980 - 2010.

At the Copenhagen Conference of Socialist Women (1910) the proposal of Clara Cetkin to celebrate *International Women's Day* was accepted with the following goals:

- fighting for peace
- equal rights for women and men to work, wages and education
- fighting against human trafficking

The term *international* in the title of the holiday refers to socialist countries.

Both women who directly influenced the creation of the program of the holiday, Clara Cetkin and Rosa Luxembour, were feminists.

Since the socialist ideology had already been well established in Serbia at the end of the 19th century, the celebration of the *International Women's Day* was accepted already in 1911, and then continued in Yugoslavia (from 1918) until the beginning of the Second World War.

It always strongly emphasized that gender equality was a matter of social class.

The celebration of the holiday has three dimensions. The day involves:

reading of the manifest about the purpose of the *POLITICAL* holiday
performing of a program which promotes the values of *EDUCATIONAL* the holiday
an entertainment part which includes presents for *ENTREAINMENT* women – usually flowers

During the Peoples Liberation Movement (1941 – 1945) and immediately after the Second World War, *the International Women's Day* was a significant date for the affirmation of the goals of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia:

- peace building
- promotion of brotherhood and unity among nations
- fighting fascism
- building socialism

During the Second World War, a unique Women's Antifascists Front was formed (1941-1953) as a body which brought together women for the advancement of the Party's goals. After the Second WW, the goals were expanded to:

- the reconstruction of the country
- the development of self-governing socialism through which women will gain full equality by resolving class issues.

After the breach with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1947), the Communist Party of Yugoslavia engaged women in the implementation of its policies, with an important contribution from the Antifascist Front of Women.

In the one-party system in Yugoslavia, throughout all phases of the development of the socialist society, networking of Yugoslavian women with women in other socialist countries has been encouraged.

The holiday's three dimensions remained.

After the dissolution of the Antifascist Front of Women (1953), the celebration of *the International Women's Day* was still directed by the centre of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, from the Socialist Alliance of the Working People as the broadest platform of civic activism, from its body called Federal Conference for the Social Standing of Women.

During the construction of the new self-governing socialist system in Yugoslavia, during the sixties and seventies of the 20th century, the focus was on the building of a new society.

The holiday's three dimensions emphasized the exceptional contributions that individual women gave to the development of society with their work and personality.

At the same time, the continuity of the memory of individual women from the previous phases of social development (partisans, revolutionaries, workers) was preserved. The Party thus re-affirmed the contribution of women to the development of the entire society.

The memory also involves visits to the graves of notable women and ceremonial speeches about the class struggle for gender equality.

The main principle in the process of the establishment of self-governing socialism is that workers share the gained profit. In the light of such a vision, women had the opportunity for joint travels or receiving (more expensive) gifts from their working organization.

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, in Serbia the int. meaning of the holiday has been made subordinate to national features.

The holiday is most commonly referred to as *Women's Day*, most often leaving out the *international* linkage among women. There are no speeches about the achievements of the past or visits to the graves of notable women. The memory of women role-models fades away.

A discontinuity in memory starts.

The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), having been in power in Serbia for an entire decade, through women and this holiday secured the promotion of the national interest.

Gender equality is still a class issue and neglect of the contributions of the feminist movement is reinforced.

At the same time, a woman is increasingly given patriarchal attributes of a mother and a wife.

This creates an opportunity for transforming the worn-out revolutionary *Women's day* for the commemoration of the struggle for women's rights into the traditional (Christian) *Mothers' Day*.

Of the initial three dimensions the continuity of the memory is left out.

Some elements of the program and entertainment (giving of a flower) are preserved.

At the beginning of the ninth decade in different towns in Serbia the establishment of women civil organizations started simultaneously. They see the opportunity to express their civil revolt during the holiday:

- against the wars on the territory of Yugoslavia,
- against the discrimination of women,
- for peace in the world and the region.

The emphasis is on the importance of women's human rights, not on the class bases of gender equality.

This is actually a continuity of the initial ideas for which the holiday was established a century ago.

The holiday is celebrated publicly in all towns with a clear message sent to the government.

This type of activism and celebration of the holiday as a symbol of fight for peace, anti-fascism and gender equality, will continue to spread in the country during the following 10 years.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the new multiparty structures connected the International Women's Day with the socialist ideology, from which they want to distance themselves. For these reasons the celebration no longer had the support of one single party ideology at its basis, but it remained to be occasionally celebrated without structured support. More and more it is named just as a date in the calendar: 8 March.

It lost:

- the historic dimension
- the international dimension
- the antifascist dimension

The holiday is taken over by those who want to earn some money in the country which quickly turns towards capitalism and profit.

In the light of the celebration entertainment is offered, and a wide range of presents for women for their beauty and pleasure are sold.

It is only a flower that remained as a link between the new and old meaning of the holiday. And the flower became a commodity as well.

Women's nongovernmental organizations, now united and numerous, are continuing to remind the public of the main meaning of the holiday. However, still without predominant media influence and with clear pressure.

A protest march on the International Women's Day in 2008 organized by "Women in Black" in the streets of Belgrade was forbidden by police!

In the light of celebrating 100 years of the International Women's Day, the challenge for the women's civic organizations remains:

- to continue development of civil society in Serbia,
- to fight for peace in the country and the world, and against fascism on the state and international levels,
- to continue working on the realization of the women's human rights.

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