

Anita Grandke, “Does the Working Woman Destroy Her Family?” (June 11, 1960)

Abstract

This article from the SED mouthpiece *Neues Deutschland* praised the ideal of the “socialist family” in which both spouses created the basis for a fulfilling family life through equal participation in work life. The upbringing of children “by society” in collective institutions outside of the home was not seen as a problem; rather, because of the professional care the children received there, it was seen as positive. According to the article, it increased equality of opportunity among the children.

Source

Does the Working Woman Destroy Her Family?

In the discussion of the question “Who is a better mother to her children?,” vocational work by the wife and mother has loomed large. Yet there are still a few questions in particular that require a more detailed answer. Mrs. Renate gave me a few letters from female readers in which, for example, the opinion was voiced that the working life of the wife and mother, along with the raising of children in the kindergarten or *Schulhort* [organized after-school care], threatened, indeed, destroyed the family. Responding to these views means saying something about the family in a socialist society.

Society and Family

While the family has not changed in its outward form – a union between husband and wife and their children – for centuries, it depends, in terms of its content, its survival, and its happiness, on the society to which it belongs. We are acquainted with the bourgeois family, which is entirely dominated by capital and its concerns. Here, people enter into “marriages of convenience,” and relationships between parents and children, whose upbringing is largely entrusted to paid persons unrelated to them, are centered on the future inheritance.

By contrast, the proletarian family in capitalism has a good, moral foundation: the mutual love between the spouses. But it is exposed to considerable pressures. Joblessness, crises, and the housing shortage are tearing at it. How terrible is child labor, how great the danger that the children will fall into bad ways because they are left to their own devices, while the mother must help secure their livelihood. How difficult it is for the worker to lead his child along the right path in the face of lies and poisoning by school, films, and so on. And let us not forget the immeasurable misery that the war, this monster of capitalist society, brought upon our families.

The family can truly flourish only in a socialist society. It banishes exploitation, egoism, joblessness, crises, and war. It creates the foundation for a happy family life. That is why participation in the task of building up socialism, why working in a job is the most valuable thing that we – also as mothers – can do for our family and the future of our children. Working, as many readers have written so correctly, means fighting for the peace, happiness, and security of our family. Work does not destroy the family, but creates for it the broad, golden foundation.

When both Parents Work

Mrs. M. Fischer from Neustadt (Orla) now asks: Do we not push family upbringing into the background

when we support both parents working at a job? No, that is not the case. The family plays a large part in raising the new socialist person. Here, the children get their first impressions and, above all, learn from the example of their parents. The family as a small collective can develop and strengthen a person's traits and the characteristics that determine his behavior toward society in socialism: mutual respect, loyalty, comradeship, and, most of all, a sense of responsibility toward society.

However, the family can fulfill this important social task far better if both parents, father and mother, are part of the workforce. Why? Family life is being borne by two individuals who know that they are giving their best every day for the building up of socialism, and thus for the preservation of peace and the future of their children. They are fulfilled by their work. They work to better themselves and continue their education. They carry the problems of work into the family with the desire to consult each other.

The harmony that is gained thereby, the deeper substance of the marriage, is reflected back upon the children. To them, it is not just the father who sets an example, but equally the mother, through her work, through the responsibility she bears, through the struggles she endures, and through the zeal with which she works to improve herself. The mother, in turn, understands the children better, because she knows what she must prepare them for, so that they may complete what she, too, has begun with her work. To be sure, the mother spends less time with her children than if she were working at home. But through her outside work she provides the precondition for a deeper and more substantive family life that has a much more beneficial effect on the development of the children.

A few female readers write that the working life of the mother brings with it a certain additional burden for both spouses. That is still true today, and both spouses must adjust to that. That doesn't always happen right away, and it is something that needs to be learned with good will – especially by the husband. Equally important is the comment by many mothers that parents must find time for their children in the evening, on weekends, and during vacation. Enterprises and social organizations must not forget this when dividing up their tasks.

The strain that the wife's outside work often still brings for both spouses will be gradually eliminated with the further building up of socialism, and it would be profoundly wrong to present it as an argument against the employment of the wife and mother. The benefit that her work brings to the family is a thousand times greater.

Focused on the Highest Goal

Two female readers wrote in their letters that the placement of children into kindergartens and the like turned the children into mass-produced humans, led to massification, and thus to the destruction of the family. These two readers have unconsciously absorbed the view that our opponents have been harping on decades.

You see, dear readers: the opponents of socialism are well aware of the great role of the family in raising children to become socialists, especially in families where both spouses work. And so they wish to drive a wedge between this small, personal community and socialist society. And here, once again, they seize upon the work of the wife and mother outside the home.

The danger of destruction threatens our families exclusively from one side, namely from aggressive German militarism, which has destroyed these communities by the millions twice already. The dangers of massification threaten the children; young people are threatened by Prussian military drills, by brutalization through comics, gangster films, and so on, by the preparation of the youth for war. Indeed, in the capitalist states, as well, the youth is educated daily by society, but for what goals!

We speak openly of the education of children by society; we secure it materially and direct it toward the highest humanistic goal: the education of the socialist person. This is a person with great specialized

knowledge, extensive general education, a person who develops in accordance with his proclivities and abilities, and whose behavior is shaped by his respect for people and his sense of responsibility toward society.

A Meaningful Complement

But let us ask the honest question now: can the mother – leaving aside the school – achieve this goal alone, without any further communal education? In my view, she cannot, no matter how much she would like to. How much time does she spend shopping, cooking, doing dishes, cleaning? How different are the degrees of receptivity and the ways of playing and learning among siblings of varying ages? Or how difficult is it already for many parents to keep up with their children’s homework in a serious way?

Moreover, the material preconditions for the development of the children’s abilities do not exist in most families. One thinks only of the many experts, the sports equipment, musical instruments, and so on that are available, for example, to the Young Pioneers – these things that are fully utilized only by the community and can be used by every child. In bourgeois society, it is still the privilege of the sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie to educate themselves, while at the same time thousands of talents wither away for lack of money. As mothers, we should be happy about the unlimited developmental possibilities for our children and not give ourselves over to worry. A person who embraces all art and science, all spiritual values of humanity and is able to develop his own abilities will not develop into a mass-produced person, but into a respected individual.

Our goal is in no way to replace or displace the family education through society’s education. Our children need both. They develop to the degree to which society’s education and family education work together consciously and with the same goal, while the parents are above all exemplars and confidants for them.

And if some female readers maintain that family education still has shortcomings here and there, and if we note that in our childrens’ facilities things are not always at their best, this reflects the current level of development, which we must quickly transcend. We can do this, among other things, precisely by having more and more wives put their abilities to use for society. Through the work of our hands, the children can be better cared for, our life will be made more beautiful and easier, and we will gain even more free time in the future, which we will devote also to our children.

Source: Anita Grandke, “Zerstört die berufstätige Frau ihre Familie?”, *Neues Deutschland*, June 11, 1960, Supplement “Für die Frau”; reprinted in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945*. Bd. 8: 1949–1961: *Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Im Zeichen des Aufbaus des Sozialismus*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004, no. 8/212.

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