

**communism versus stalinism no. 4**

**A WOMAN'S PLACE  
IN THE U.S.S.R.**



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**preface by Branka Magas**

**IMG**

**25p**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This is the fourth of a series of pamphlets attempting to provide information, analysis and polemic concerning Eastern Europe. The series, 'Communism versus Stalinism', is produced by members of the International Marxist Group, the British Section of the Fourth International, in the hope that the pamphlets will be of use in assisting socialist militants in Britain to make sense of developments in Eastern Europe today.

The original text of this pamphlet contained an important section on the Bolsheviks and women. But we decided to hold this over and publish it in a separate pamphlet which we hope will appear shortly. The present text deals with the contemporary position of women in the USSR and is based entirely on the most up-to-date Soviet sources. It is the first serious Marxist analysis of the place of women in Soviet society to appear in English. Branka Magas of New Left Review has written a preface setting the pamphlet in an overall theoretical perspective on woman's position under capitalism and socialism.

Our first number consisted of one of the most important documents from the revolutionary left in Eastern Europe, Pyotr Grigorenko's Open Letter to the 1969 Conference of Communist Party leaders in Budapest, along with a lengthy critical introduction by Joe Greenwood. The second number contained an analysis of the movement of dissident intellectuals in Russia along with two documents on strategy from the Chronicle of Current Events. Our third number combined a history of the Prague Radicals and Jiri Mueller by Joe Greenwood, as well as the Manifesto of the Czechoslovak Revolutionary Socialist Party and the agreement between the Czech students' union and Metal Workers' Union on joint action against the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968.

We are at present preparing a pamphlet comprising a number of articles by Rakovsky, the founder of the Romanian Communist movement, leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party after the October revolution, and leader of the Left Opposition in the Russian Communist Party, who perished in the Moscow trials. Most of these articles have never before been published in English.

In addition to this series, we would like to recommend to our readers the journal 'Critique', which will be of great interest to those following the debates among Marxists on Eastern European society today. Copies of this journal can be obtained from Red Books, 97, Caledonian Road, London N.1. Other publications on Eastern Europe and in various Eastern European languages, such as those advertised at the end of this pamphlet, can also be obtained from Red Books.

In conclusion, we would welcome any comments on our pamphlets, suggestions or materials for future pamphlets. We can also supply extra copies of all the numbers so far produced, except the first by Grigorenko. Finally, members of the editorial board of 'Communism versus Stalinism' will be very willing to speak on the position of women in Eastern Europe, or on other aspects of East European society, putting forward the views of the International Marxist Group on these questions. We are also prepared to debate with other tendencies in the working-class movement.

To contact us on any of the above points, write to: Oliver MacDonald, c/o the International Marxist Group, 97, Caledonian Road, London N.1.

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## PREFACE by Branka Magas

The position of women under capitalism is characterised by a fundamental contradiction: while the immense growth of productive forces demands female labour outside the home, the capitalist relation of production precludes the socialisation of domestic labour. Capitalism allows women to escape economic dependence – by enabling them to become wage labourers – but it also blocks the possibility of their real equality by privatising their responsibilities in the home and in the family. Capitalism's separation of the domestic unit from production is a condition both of woman's independence and of her continuing inequality. When the pre-capitalist bond between the family and production is formally broken, women can appear as independent labourers. But the link between the production of material things and the production and reproduction of human life cannot in reality be broken: capitalism reconstitutes it through the form of the bourgeois family, that is, as a privatised concern of individual men and women, demanding tiring work by women in particular. The gap between the home and the general economic process is bridged in the lives of millions of women workers. Inside production this produces a pattern of labour distribution and earnings which is detrimental to women: low pay, lack of qualifications, concentration in certain branches of production, low unionisation, absence from working class politics – all these are familiar and characteristic features of female labour under capitalism. And the labour performed at home is trivialised by its absence from commodity exchange which alone under capitalism allows human labour to become social labour, assigns it a value and therefore allows it to appear as real.

This contradiction of the female's position becomes particularly acute with the development and maturation of capitalism. The number of women in production increases and female wage labour becomes a permanent feature of the system. This brings possibilities for organisation and challenge within production and across the society as a whole. And this challenge combines with other factors – the need for female labour and for a more rational socialisation of labour – to force the advanced capitalist countries to begin socialising domestic labour. Through the development of the welfare state the bourgeoisie provides services which supplement but do not replace domestic labour. The extension of the commodity market into packaged meals, household machinery, etc. reduces the effort involved in domestic work, but leaves it as privatised as before. Thus the disorderly, partial, uneven and unplanned manner in which this takes place aggravates the situation further because (among other things) it raises expectations, fed by real needs, which it cannot properly satisfy. The present crisis of the capitalist system brings all these things to the fore.

However, the articulation of the theory and practice of women's liberation by no means flows mechanically from the oppression and needs of female labour. Various factors, that relate ultimately to the balance of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, retard or assist the birth of a revolutionary alternative to the status quo. And this balance of forces must be grasped internationally as well as nationally – who can deny the effect of the courageous resistance of the Vietnamese people to American imperialism on female radicalisation in the West? – and historically as well as actually – for example, the effect of the Stalinisation of the Soviet Union on the political consciousness of the international working class.

While it would be true to say that all women, regardless of their class, are oppressed by the bourgeois order, it is nevertheless the case that only the proletariat as a class can open the way to a solution of the historic problem of women's oppression. This is because this problem is intimately related to the property relations of capitalism and therefore appears most acutely for the working class. For this class the need to do away with the specific oppression of women is a question not of choice but of necessity if the historic potential of socialist revolution is to be realised. By abolishing wage labour by nationalising and socialising the means of production, by creating a properly planned economy – and therefore socialising domestic labour – the proletariat poses the relation between production and human reproduction in a completely new way, in a way which no longer depends upon, but is fundamentally opposed to, the privatisation of human labour and its results.

One of the first acts of the Bolshevik revolution was to abolish the institution of the bourgeois family. This was done first of all – as indeed it had to be – at the level of legislation. The Bolshevik legislation however, by no means expressed the reality of women's situation after the revolution – it was more a programme of the actions that would be required in the future to bring about the liberation of women. Domestic labour, like other aspects of the economy inherited from capitalism (survival of the market, money, material incentives etc.) could be abolished only through the development of an alternative socialist economy, based not only on advanced production but also on new socialist relations. Unlike the capitalist mode of production, which begins to develop and even mature before the bourgeois conquest of power, the socialist world order can be established only in the aftermath of the proletariat's becoming the ruling class. This is why clarity of political purpose is of crucial importance for its success.

Conscious direction of the economy in the interests of the proletariat as a whole is the essence of a society on the road to socialism. But when the direction of the economy when state power passes away from the hands of the working class into the hands of its own bureaucracy, and when the interests of this bureaucracy come to dominate over the interests of the working class, the transition from capitalism to socialism becomes distorted and deformed. The degree of socialisation of domestic life is a sensitive and accurate measure of this deformation.

This pamphlet, then, is important both because its examination of the position of women in the Soviet Union today tells us something about the reality of Soviet society and about the degree of its deformation, and also because it raises questions that are of crucial importance for the socialist revolution in capitalist countries. As the author writes in her introduction: "An analysis of the position of women in the Soviet Union today thus touches on the fundamental theoretical and practical problems related to the position of women in society; similarly any discussions of these fundamental problems will involve interpretation of the Soviet experience." The continuous existence and entrenchment of bourgeois family forms, the sexual division of labour at home and in production, the conditions of existence of female labour, the woman's absence from political life, the crude ideology that feeds and encourages this inequality, the distortion of sexuality in general and the oppression of lesbians and homosexuals in particular – these are phenomena that are well known under capitalism. Their manifestation in the Soviet Union springs from the very nature of the contemporary Soviet regime.

The pattern of the sexual division of labour in Soviet production follows closely that found in advanced capitalist countries: women are concentrated in non-productive, low-skilled, and low-paid branches of the economy. As in the West, their wage is on average only a little over half the average male wage: about 69%. The apologists of the Soviet regime try to argue that it is the low technological level of Soviet industry which precludes a more equal position for women in production. But as the author points out this does not explain why, even in sectors where women constitute the overwhelming majority of the workforce, they are rarely found in positions of responsibility. To those who try to put the blame on the backwardness of the Soviet masses, she replies by pointing to the Soviet regime's ideology and propaganda which feed and maintain this backwardness; and she documents this point by a careful and comprehensive presentation of the nature of Soviet education, press and scientific research. She argues that the roots of women's inequality are to be found in their domestic responsibilities, which continue to burden Soviet women (particularly those of the less well-paid sections of the working class) and which the official line endorses and encourages. Domestic labour in the Soviet Union today represents the equivalent of the annual labour time of 60 million workers engaged in production: and this labour comes almost exclusively from Soviet women, in their post-work hours.

Soviet ideologues and their colleagues abroad often argue that it is only a matter of time before women are completely liberated in the Soviet Union. Where is the plan that justifies this optimism? Where is the evidence of a progressive trend of development in opportunities and achievements of women? The relative economic progress of the Soviet Union since the war has only exacerbated the importance of sex for jobs and wages. And the development of industries for consumer products is such as to reinforce the privatised and unequal pattern of responsibilities and consumption rather than to widen and make more efficient the provision of collective services. The history of the country itself, let alone events in other East European countries, shows the precariousness of the basic rights (for example, the right to abortion) won by women in the course of the revolution. The government's disregard for effective contraception, for instance, and the stereotyped trend of much current Soviet research on the related questions of sexuality and reproduction - these things spring directly from the backwardness of the official Soviet line. Contrary to the unfounded optimism of the apologists, the author concludes that it is not the economic instance but the very nature of the Soviet regime that is holding back progress. The solution to the problem of women in the Soviet Union cannot be discussed or envisaged outside a revolutionary transformation of Soviet political institutions.

The official Soviet line is that the contemporary family is a socialist institution which plays, and will continue to play, a major role in the education and socialisation of Soviet citizens. This thoroughly counter-revolutionary and un-Marxist position also appears to be supported by the British Communist Party. In the women's liberation movement and on the revolutionary left in general the analysis of the role of the bourgeois family in the perpetuation of female inequality, the relation between sexuality and reproduction, the role of spontaneous and organised revolt by women, and the importance of theoretical and political clarity - all these questions are being hammered out. Thus the questions and conclusions contained in this pamphlet bear a direct relation to British revolutionary politics as well. The rise of the women's liberation movement and the relatively high theoretical debate which goes on within it, together with the upsurge in women's struggles in the present period of generalised capitalist crisis, should make us even more aware of the continuing backwardness of the working class and its vanguard on the question of sexism, and how vital it is to develop an understanding of the strategic relation between women's liberation and socialism.

# A WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE U.S.S.R.

## 1.-INTRODUCTION

"A woman's greatest embellishment is her femininity. There is nothing surprising in the fact that woman's weakness is man's inspiration: her weakness complements man's strength. Women are often timid and shy, coquettish and frivolous. Such are the typical and therefore 'endearing' qualities of the female character and they can be considered positive or negative according to taste."

"What do men value in women and in wives?"

1. A wife must be a wife and only second a doctor, an engineer or professor; not the other way around. 2. She must be faithful. 3. She must put love for her family before love for her career."

"Why do girls try to be like men? The words of Rousseau still ring true today: when a woman is truly the woman she is worth more than when she tries to play the man. Can there be anything attractive about girls who smoke cigarettes? They radiate cold and not warmth."

"The qualities I value most in women are her frailty and weakness of will. Or put another way - her gentle and pliable nature, readiness to oblige, patience, sense of humour and tact. It is very unpleasant when a woman flaunts her education."

"My advice to all young men is: find a representative of the 'weaker sex' who is feminine, cultivated and an excellent housekeeper."

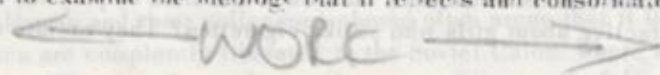
These quotations, which seem at first to be taken from a sixteenth-century tract or, given Rousseau and the cigarettes, from an early twentieth century newspaper with rabidly patriarchal beliefs, are in fact readers' comments which were published in a Soviet magazine, *The Week* No. 6, 1974.

Yet the Soviet Union has achieved many of the reforms that are often thought to open the way to the genuine emancipation of women and the equality of the sexes. The original four-point programme put forward by the women's movement in Britain, for example, has to a large extent already been carried out in the U.S.S.R. Education is co-educational and equal; there is equal pay for equal work. Abortion is free on demand and the state provides a network of creches and kindergarten facilities, both on an all-day and an all-week basis, that is unparalleled in the world.

Soviet or Soviet-oriented propaganda maintains that all is as it should be; that women in the U.S.S.R. have won complete legal, political and social equality; that the woman question is no more, and that the example of the Soviet Union acts as an inspiration and a guiding light to women everywhere. But the reality of Soviet women's emancipation, not least illustrated by this gap between the position women apparently hold in society and the position granted to them by public opinion, cannot but give rise to doubts. Doubts as to the

genuine nature of Soviet achievements — Hungary, after all, has just re-introduced the ban on abortion — or as to the truth of the Marxist assumption that women's objective position in the productive process determines the role she plays in society and the ideas that society has on the role of women. The theories put forward to explain the Soviet experience usually assume either that the revolution was unable, for various reasons, to achieve those material preconditions necessary for true emancipation and this is the reason for present inadequacies, or alternatively, that the Bolsheviks failed to liberate women because their understanding of the problem, provided by historical materialism, was inadequate.

An analysis of the position of women in Soviet society thus touches on the fundamental theoretical and practical problems related to the position of women in society; similarly any discussion of these fundamental problems will involve an interpretation of Soviet experience. However, a detailed and comprehensive picture of Soviet women is hard to come by and such conclusions as mentioned above are often based on the haziest knowledge, either of their actual situation or of the historical evolution of the Soviet revolution. The purpose of this essay is to describe, on the basis of the Soviet sociological, statistical and other material, the contemporary division of labour between the two sexes, both in the home and in production, and to examine the ideology that it reflects and consolidates.



## II — SOVIET WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PRODUCTION

The Soviet Union is perhaps unique in that it shows almost universal female employment. The entrance of women into production has been quite spectacular since the revolution. The following table indicates the growth of female employment:—

TABLE 1

The Employment of Women Outside Agriculture 1928-1970

Date	1928	1940	1945	1950	1960	1965	1970
in millions	7.8	13.2	15.0	19.2	29.3	37.7	45.8
% labour force	24	39	56	47	57	49	51

Soviet propaganda often points to the fact that half of the work force, or even more is composed of women. This high figure, however, reflects also the fact that there are 19 million (8.1%) more women than men in the country, the disproportion being the result of losing 20 million citizens — mostly men — in the Second World War. The predominance of women among persons of working age is even higher, probably ten women for every nine men. But the real situation of female employment is grasped only if we look at persons outside the labour force: 94% of those eligible but now working are of the female sex; this accounts for 13 million women or 13-15% of women of employable age. Surveys carried out to establish the reasons why women stay at home have revealed that most of these women would be willing to work but the burden of domestic duties prevents them. In Leningrad 50% of those questioned replied that they would work if there was somewhere to put their children, 19% if they could find employment near home, and 14% if they could find part-time work. <sup>2</sup>These figures show that while there are more women at work in the Soviet Union than in any single capitalist country, the contradiction between social and domestic labour still exists and is shown by the continuing existence of 13 million exclusively domestic workers.

Similarly, the sexual division of labour in production – the pattern of distribution of male and female labour among various sectors of the economy – although perhaps less pronounced than in the highly industrialised capitalist countries, still operates to the detriment of women. While it would be true to say that there is no area of production from which women are excluded, the mass of them tend to be concentrated in particular (and low paid) branches of the economy. The following table illustrates sexual asymmetry in some sectors:—

TABLE II

Percentage of Women in Workforce in Sectors

trade and catering	77	teaching (of which	3	food processing (of	
medical staff	85	primary & secondary	80	which: sweets	84
telephonists	97	level		tobacco)	87
communications	68	pre-school)	100	sewing	90
credit and social		textiles (of which:	85	transport	24
insurance	78	knitwear	97	construction	29
		underwear	95		

The rule that women tend to be concentrated in the non-productive sectors of the economy, common to advanced capitalist countries, applies also in the Soviet Union, and, though the proportion of women employed in industry is higher there than in the West, the distribution of female labour between different branches of industry follows an essentially similar pattern. An example of this is the textile industry which was run on largely female labour before the revolution and today as well. In 1963, 35% of all textile workers were women and among those producing knitwear and underwear the proportion was even higher: 97% and 95% respectively. This branch of industry accounted in fact for a quarter of all female workers. (While the official statistics claim that 30% of women are engaged in material production, it should be realized that of this 43.6% are employed in agriculture and 6.7% in trade). Occupation is therefore still determined by sex and the sex factor seems to have become even more important in recent years.

TABLE III

Distribution of Female Labour Force among Branches of Industry and Average Wage 1950 – 1970 (%)

Sector/Branch	1950	1960	1970
Whole economy: % of women in labour force	47	47	51
average wage in roubles	64.2	80.6	122.0
education and culture	69	70	72
	66.8	69.9	108.5
credit and insurance	58	68	78
	66.8	70.7	111.4
health and social security	84	85	85
	48.6	58.9	92.0
industry*	46	44	46
	68.7	89.8	104.4
Including:			
textiles	73	72	73
	57.1	71.2	84.3
garments	86	85	84
	43.3	57.3	76.1

\* The most recent figures for industry are from 1966.



In education the tendency for girls to choose arts continues; the percentage of girl medical students had dropped. The number entering the technical college remain low: in 1969 for every 1120 boys there were only 362 girls.

It has been argued that these trends result from a still low economic and hence technological level of development so that physical strength still plays a role in job selection in the Soviet economy. There is undoubtedly some truth in this and it is certainly a progressive step that physical strength is in certain cases taken into account, for example, women no longer work down the mines. But this argument is refuted by the fact that women **are** employed in heavy duty work, in agriculture and forestry for example, and by the fact that they are **not** employed in a host of jobs: in transport (why should they not drive buses and airplanes?); in construction (why should they not be plumbers and electricians?); in engineering (machine or lathe operators) – where physical capacity beyond that of the average woman is not required. The absence of women from these jobs cannot be explained by their weaker physique.

It should also be noted in this context that while women and men receive equal wages for the same work, where women work wages tend to be lower (see Table III). For example, the medical profession, which demands a seven year training course and which employs predominantly women, is relatively badly paid contrary to what was the case in Tsarist Russia or still is in the West. In other words, although women are guaranteed equal pay with men they still earn less than men and the situation is getting worse. A survey in 1966 concluded that in the Union as a whole the average of women's wage was 69.3% of the men's – in 1924 it was 64.4%! Although certain increases (particularly in the course of the 1972 reform) have been granted since then, the discrepancy is still quite considerable.

Statistics also show that women's place in production is determined not by their physical strength but by their low level of education and qualification – indeed, it is this lack of qualification that often forces women to take up unsuitably hard work.

At the time of the revolution the majority of women could not read and few possessed technical qualifications. The success of the Soviet State in the sphere of education is considerable but although they have narrowed the gap between men and women, this gap has by no means disappeared. Women, particularly the middle-aged, are in particular less adequately educated than men: for every 1000 adult citizens 53 men and 41 women have higher education while for every 1000 men to finish secondary education there are 78 women. A survey of the Volshki motor works in the early 1960's found that the number of women doing any kind of study after their marriage was half of that of men. Consequently jobs in the trade and servicing sector, for example, attract female labour because they do not require any particular skill. And often, as we have said earlier, this lack of skill implies the necessity of undertaking physically strenuous work. Some statistics from the Latvian Republic illustrate this point: of the total female workforce 84.9% work in trade and servicing. In forestry they form 70% of unskilled labour, in production of building materials 30.6% and in agriculture 80–95% of manual labour. In the case of production of building materials, their number has gone up by 220% between 1959 and 1969. This situation is not peculiar to Latvia: a survey in Leningrad and the surrounding region produced a similar picture. The Dagestan *Pravda* in May 1966 admitted that 90% of unqualified workers in the region were women.

For the same reasons that women have to accept unskilled work they also have to take jobs where conditions are far from desirable. In Latvia, despite health protection legislation, 49% of the total women employed work in, for them, harmful conditions. 47% of those engaged in nightwork are women. In Leningrad and its surroundings, there are twice as many women as men engaged in low qualified work and twice as few women as men in professions requiring high qualifications. In the artistic and academic world, which has always been the province of men, women have made some headway but their contribution is still quite small: 27% of scientific workers, 35% of writers and 18% of composers and conductors are women. The more 'rare' the atmosphere the thinner is the presence of women: they contribute 27% of the total number of candidates of science but only 13% of doctors of science and out of 204 members of the Academy of Science only two are female.

The same goes for positions of responsibility. Even in those areas of the economy which are traditionally dominated by women the highest posts are held by men. One survey reported that there are nine light industry factories in the Dagestan Republic where, though the overwhelming majority of workers are women, eight of the directors are men. In Latvia - out of 230 sovkhos only 3 are directed by women and for 643 collective farms the number is 24.

TABLE IV

Women in Positions of Responsibility 1957-1968/9 (%)

Industry	1957	1963	1968-9
foremen	21	20	**
shop stewards and deputies	14	12	**
chief engineers	10	16	**
directors	10	6	**
<b>Medicine</b>			
doctors	82	**	75
head doctors	57	**	52
<b>Education</b>			
teachers in classes 1-4	87	87	87
teachers in classes 5-7	75	76	75
teachers in classes 8-11	68	68	75
heads of primary schools	69	71	78
heads of incomplete second schools	22	24	26
heads of full second schools	20	20	23

Statistics for 1970 put the number of women heading industrial enterprises at 6.6%.

As in employment so in political life, women's status is considerably lower although things have improved somewhat in recent years. The proportion of women to hold public offices has increased - today women contribute 48.3% of people's judges (31.7% in 1969) and at the last elections 31% of those elected to the Supreme Soviet were women (28% in 1966) while 43% were elected to district and town soviets (46% in 1966). But in the Communist Party, women's share of membership has stayed for some time around 20%; no effort has been made to recruit them into the party in numbers more representative of their position in the economy.

TABLE V

## Female Party Membership 1929 - 1970 (%)

Year	1929	1941	1945	1950	1959	1965	1970
% female party members	13.7	14.9	17.0	20.7	19.5	20.2	21

The absence of women from general political and trade union activities is clearly not just a result of formal education. Although in the highest reaches of the educational system women are still very much under-represented, the educational opportunities appear in general to be genuinely equal to that of men and at some educational levels they appear even to favour women. Why don't girls take up opportunities offered to them in political and trade-union fields? And in education, why do they not go as far as their male colleagues? Indeed, women play a far more subordinate role in production and public life than the inequalities in education would warrant.

Two Leningrad sociologists have made a detailed survey based on a study of women in Leningrad and Kostroma (a near-by provincial town) of women's attitudes to their role in production. The overwhelming majority of women, 81%, put financial remuneration as their chief reason for working. A higher percentage than men were satisfied with their jobs and as their main reason they quoted convenient shifts and location. It was the absence of these factors that was quoted more frequently than insufficient pay as the negative factor in their particular occupation: work far from home (29%), inconvenient shifts (25%), and insufficient wages (15%). The sociologists concluded: "Basically everything that the married woman does not like about her job is not connected directly with the process and nature of the job but is something that is refracted through the prism of the family." Many women confessed that their home and children did not leave their thoughts all day and for this reason they preferred simple, mechanical tasks which gave them the opportunity to indulge in their cares and worries. A woman's domestic burden has a very direct effect not only on choice of occupation but also on effectiveness at work. The survey at Volshki motor works mentioned above showed that women whose domestic duties were great, and who were therefore tired and less able to concentrate at work, had a productivity rate as much as 10% lower than the others. Soviet women have so much to do at home that they have little time to think, study or engage in political and social activities.

"A woman," say the sociologists, "especially if she is a mother, tries to spend as much of her non-working time as she can in the family with the children and carrying out countless household duties." The pull of these domestic responsibilities affects her position not only in the economy but also in social and political life in general. All sociological surveys agree that women take a less active part in the life of the working collectives: activities which demand extra time attract very few women.

To understand the impact that the role in the home has on the woman's life outside we need to analyse more fully what the domestic economy entails for her in the Soviet Union today.

### III - DOMESTIC ECONOMY IN THE SOVIET UNION

Housework has been woman's lot since time immemorial. Lenin had spoken of it in sharp and unflattering terms and its elimination did not seem too wild a dream: it was a major task of the revolution. Today in the Soviet Union sociologists have calculated that housework takes up 150 billion hours every year: its abolition would be equivalent to the freeing of another 60 million persons for production.

A recent survey of 8468 women in a large enterprise in the city of Gorky, the results of which are presented in the table below, illustrates the use to which these women devoted their time during an average week. The survey divides the women up according to the number of children they have. We can see that there is a sharp drop in the time available for relaxation and study after the birth of the first child and again after the third, including the time available for sleeping. The survey also shows a relationship between family income and housework time: the less well-off the family, the longer the wife is likely to spend on housework for she has fewer gadgets to help her. Unskilled workers spend 3½-5 hours a day while specialists spend 2½-3½ hours a day.

Husbands are unwilling to see the housework suffer and are even less willing to help their wives in its execution. According to one survey only 27% of husbands approve of their wives working; the other 73% just live with it - although the percentage of approving husbands increases as the woman's wage rises! But surveys differ: another gives 98% of men approving of unmarried girls working; 97% of men approving of married women without children working, but only 40% approving of women with children continuing at their jobs. Husbands on the whole participate only minimally in the work at home.

TABLE VI

Use of Working Women's week, by Number of Children \*

Time used (hours)	Women with					
	no child	1 child	2 child	3 child	4 child	5 child
Total Time of which	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0	168.0
work and work related	49.1	49.0	48.9	49.5	50.2	47.5
psychological needs	62.8	60.2	59.1	58.1	58.0	59.1
including						
sleeping	50.0	47.0	45.0	44.3	44.5	45.4
eating etc	12.8	13.2	14.1	13.8	13.5	13.7
housework and personal care	28.1	43.8	46.7	48.5	51.9	52.0
relaxation	11.4	5.6	5.0	3.9	3.5	4.3
study and cultural pursuits	16.6	9.4	8.4	8.0	4.6	4.7

\* Survey of 8468 women in a large enterprise in the city of Gorky

TABLE VII

Carrying out of Domestic Tasks, by Performer (%) \*

Task	wife alone	husband alone	Performed by husband and wife	other family members
<b>Housework</b>				
food-buying	64.2	2.7	18.1	16.0
making breakfast	61.0	9.8	20.0	10.1
getting lunch	69.0	1.5	14.3	15.2
cleaning and dishwashing	19.3	12.2	32.4	36.1
general tidying	44.6	9.2	31.8	14.3
small repairs	24.3	68.1	1.8	6.0
paying bills	49.2	29.9	14.8	6.1
washing and ironing	67.1	1.6	19.3	12.0
<b>Childcare</b>				
washing dressing and feeding	81.2	1.2	12.1	5.5
taking to nursery/kindergarten and back	78.2	6.0	11.8	4.0
visiting school	75.1	12.1	11.8	1.0
help with homework	73.3	14.2	8.8	3.7

\* Results of survey of 280 women in two Vilnius plants.

The above survey is by no means exceptional in its results: all surveys show that it is invariably the woman who carries by far the heaviest part of the load.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most time-consuming of household tasks is the preparation of food. The procedure takes a long time partly because shopping for meat and vegetables is apt to involve standing in queues and visiting several shops, and partly because modern kitchen equipment hardly exists. Most shops use a system whereby the customer first has to ask for the goods required, then has to go and pay elsewhere, and finally has to return with a receipt to claim the goods. Supermarkets are a relatively new phenomenon although they save a lot of shopping time - it has been estimated up to 10 hours a week.

Convenience foods are in their infancy. Eating out is rarely practised. In 1962 only about 4% of all meals consumed were eaten out. The main reason given for not eating out was that the cost was 30-40% higher than eating at home and that the food was of inferior quality. In the Leningrad survey done by Kharchev and Golod, 256 of the 1230 women questioned considered the expense of canteen food the main drawback, while 211 complained that meals were poorly cooked. But only 6 answered that they liked cooking and only 12 thought that communal cooking was unnecessary. The number of eating places has been increasing, especially in the urban areas: from 95,400 in 1950 to 237,300 in 1970. And in the last year the number of dishes served annually outside the home has risen from 15,285,000 to 24,372,000. However, shortcomings both in quality and quantity, let alone in cost, are still quite considerable.<sup>4</sup>

Laundry is another main item of housework and is dealt with in much the same way as cooking, i.e. at home. A mere 2% of Soviet washing goes through the public laundries. In Leningrad as many as 29% of working women used dry-cleaning facilities but generally this is the kind of service used only infrequently if at all. Only 10% used laundries and many complained about the poor quality of the service and of the long wait: 10-12 days. Again, it is quantity as well as quality that needs improving: the queues particularly in laundrettes, suggest that the demand is high but that the services available at the moment could not cope with more than 2%.

TABLE VIII

Commercial and Public Service Establishments (In thousands) 1960-70.

Type of Establishment	1960	1965	1970
hairdressers and barbers	28.8	35.3	42.3
dressers and menders	27.6	33.1	40.1
shoemakers and repairers	30.0	30.4	33.5
laundries	0.9	2.2	3.6
dry-cleaners and dyers	0.9	0.8	1.1
repair shop (incl. garages)	15.8	20.9	27.0
retail trade outlets	567.3	643.3	682.0
public catering establishments	147.2	192.7	237.3

The following comparison will make the picture clearer: in 1960, while in the UK 89 people were served by one shop or stall, in the Soviet Union there were 381 people for each outlet. For public eating places the comparative numbers were 411 and 1469. In 1971 there were 195,000 people for each dry-cleaner in the Soviet Union. All in all, only about 5% of housework time is covered by public service establishments.

The other side of woman's domestic role is the bearing and rearing of her children. Soviet law grants a woman four months leave at childbirth and her job is kept open for her for one year after the baby is born. In Leningrad, where the level of facilities is higher than the national average, only 13% of children of appropriate age were covered by creche facilities: where relatives do not step in, the mother has to stay at home. In the same city at least 10% of working women do not resume their jobs immediately because of individual nursery facilities. When the Leningrad survey sought to establish motives behind mothers placing their children in the creche and the reasons for others staying at home, the results suggested that availability of facilities was the main factor. In the majority of cases women replied that they sent their children to a creche or kindergarten because there was no one to look after them at home, and others said they stayed at home because there was nowhere to place their children. Kindergartens were more widely available than creches in the same year in Leningrad (1960) 66.7% of children of the appropriate age-group were in kindergartens. Mothers were less satisfied with creche organisation than with kindergartens: one in four was dissatisfied with the former and one in seven with the latter. The contradiction between work and motherhood is thus far from being solved.

The usual inverse relationship, found in advanced capitalist countries, between women's employment and fertility holds in the Soviet Union as well. But despite the high level of female employment, the Soviet birthrate remained comparatively high until 1960, after which

it fell sharply. It is still high by comparison. (The sharp drop after 1960 was due to the small number of women born in war-time and immediately after coming to childbearing age, and also to the fact that abortion was legalised in 1955).

In conclusion, while there have been significant improvements over the last few years, there has not been a concerted effort to socialise household tasks or to complete the social upbringing of children. The domestic economy is still shouldered by women with very little help from their husbands.

The age of the husband, his education and his attitude to his wife's working – these factors are intimately related to the amount, if any, of the help he gives at home. The younger, better educated man who approves of his wife's professional activity is more likely to do something; but even so, as statistics reveal, that something does not amount to very much. It is a depressing fact that the husbands help most during the early years of marriage: familiarity certainly does not bring understanding.

Women are by no means still attached to their domestic round, nor do they prevent their husbands from giving a hand. Only 15% of the Leningrad women were of the opinion that men should play no part in performing domestic tasks; the other 85% were obviously just unsuccessful in persuading their menfolk to fulfil their duties. The husband plays the leading role in the family (one fifth still refer to themselves as 'the head of the family' and they still think it right to leave 'women's work' to women).

The upbringing of children is also almost exclusively the task of the women. Although over fifty percent of husbands play some role in this process, their total contribution is rather small. One survey discovered that only 30% of the children interviewed recognised their fathers as having participated in their upbringing. In Krasnoyarsk, one sociologist noted, women did not benefit from the working day's being shorter because they simply spent longer with their children. The process of rearing children has, over the last 50 years, become an increasingly complex process and the new parental duties have been added to the existing household ones.

Given that women have to shoulder the domestic burden themselves, receiving little help from the state in the form of communal facilities or co-operation from their husbands, there is nothing surprising about their secondary and unequal position. But while the different aspects of women's position in society make sense when viewed together, how this situation comes about remains to be explained. The questions as to why the process of socialisation of the domestic economy has been so slow, and why the distribution of this work-load between men and women in the meantime has not altered remains to be answered. Soviet writers, tackling the question of women's inequality 'under socialism' readily admit that the problem is two-fold; that it is on the one hand the result of objective factors – the insufficient level of communal facilities and inequality in education and job qualifications – and on the other hand of a subjective nature – the backwardness in ideology and social attitudes. What they generally fail to point out is that, in a society where production, administration and propaganda are in the hands of the government, indeed under its sole control, the responsibility for the continuing problem of women's oppression remains with that government.

At this point all the arguments about the isolation of the Soviet Union and its poverty, calling for the direction of all efforts towards 'priority tasks', are offered. But one cannot hide forever behind these facts: although they have been of great importance in the Soviet Union's historical development, the speed and manner with which the Soviet Union overcomes her problems depends also upon the policies of the Party and state. And given these policies, the campaign to socialise housework — given that in 1964 public services accounted for only 5% and given the absence of any plan to speed up this rate — will take another thousand years to complete at the present rate of 0.2% a year. And even this estimate disregards the possibility of reverses in this field: such reverses are by no means foreign to the Soviet past.

Towards the end of the Khrushchev era there was much propaganda about plans for the second half of the 1970's. These plans envisaged free meals in factories and collective farms and the rapid elimination of housework: the communal services were to represent half of a citizen's income. Such notions have now been forgotten. What progress there has been has been made on account of the upward movement of the economy rather than by means of any planned effort. Quite clearly, the emancipation of women is an issue of low priority in the Soviet Union today and is hardly, if at all, integrated into the economic plan.

This is where the lack of women's organisations is particularly significant: there are no institutions through which women can channel their grievances, discuss collectively their specific problems and through which they can bring pressure to bear on the government. Although during the early years of the Khrushchev regime the women's soviets (which were apparently established by the government in 1940 to help the war effort) began to be more active, today they have ceased to exist except on paper. In Moscow there is a Committee of Soviet Women that does little but send representatives to international women's conferences and official local meetings. Some sociologists have commented on this: A.K. Yurtsinya complained that the party and other public organisations were often unwilling to co-operate with the women's soviets and give them the necessary support and she emphasised the need for active organisations. But it would be unrealistic to imagine that any genuine and effective organisation of women could develop outside a far-reaching process of transformation of government and of social and political life in general. One of the tasks of this future revolution is the creation of genuine organisations of women necessary to ensure that the new society is built in a way that contributes to the fastest liberation of women.

The question as to why women receive so little help from men in performing their domestic tasks is often misleadingly represented by Soviet writers as a matter of 'relics from the past'. It is true that most Soviet citizens have their roots in the countryside: although 60% of the population now live in the cities, the majority of them are only one-generation city-dwellers and in the rural areas old customs, old prejudices, including views on women's place in the world, die hard. But these ideas could not continue if things were changing and clearing the ground from under their feet. The Soviet man's frequently aggressive male-chauvinism may have its roots in the centuries of women's slavery but it is bolstered daily by the reality of women's secondary position in contemporary Soviet society.



#### IV.— THE SEXISM OF SOVIET EDUCATION AND IDEOLOGY

In fact, an analysis of the contemporary education system, the press and modern fiction and non-fiction, films, advertisements, etc. show that the education and media are not only holding consciousness at the level of economic development but that it is keeping it behind the level of possibilities that the productive forces now offer. Since there is an omnipotent government censorship and all the writers, teachers, journalists, and film-makers reflect more or less the party and state's point of view, it is hard to see this situation as anything less than deliberate.

After the revolution, the school was considered to be one of the main instruments with which to destroy the conservative atmosphere at home. In the Soviet Union today the school not only does nothing to counter reactionary views on women but in many cases reinforces them. Although all education is co-educational the child's world inside the classroom still continues to be divided sharply into boys and girls. The school uniform accentuates the two groups: while grey shorts and sweater give the little boy little trouble, the girl is inhibited by her brown dress and black apron (white for best). Far more important is the practice of syphoning the girls off for cookery and needlework and the boys for metalwork and carpentry. Since the school makes no attempt to dispel ideas already instilled about hobbies suitable for girls and those suitable for boys, and itself perpetuates them, it is not surprising that when the children have a choice in after-hour recreation, in the Pioneer Palace, etc. they do not as a whole diverge from the norms that the society has already set. School thus prepares girls and boys for their future roles: with girls the stress is on modesty while boys are forgiven more highly spirited behaviour.

This situation is not just the result of the conservatism of the women teachers or the sluggishness of teaching methods: these attitudes and practices have the official support and encouragement of accepted educational theory.

Take for example the late Sukhomlinsky, one of the modern and officially well-received educators. A propos boys and girls, Sukhomlinsky considered it very important to teach girls to be mothers and to possess the 'feminine virtues' and boys the corresponding male ones. He encouraged the fathers of his pupils to visit him and to discuss the problems of being 'head of the family' and he emphasized also that the whims of women should be obeyed since it is desirable that the cult of the mothers and the hearth be recognized.

Parents have been awarded a large and positive role in educating their children: magazines, books and brochures are there to help them. These give hardly any mention of 'sex-role' training, and leave the parents to give rein to any prejudices they might have over this matter. It is this silence that strikes one on leafing through the publications, both of the popular and 'scientific' type that one would have expected to broach these problems. The February number of the monthly journal *Family and School* printed the letter of one mother expressing her approval of the way the little boys at the kindergarten asked the girls to dance and of another woman who was glad that boys were taught gallantry. The editors say nothing in reply; they do not take this opportunity to discuss gallantry in particular or the way little boys should treat little girls in general. A 191-page booklet entitled *You, Your Child and the World Around* by the Lavrovs, printed in an edition of 100,000 copies, manages to avoid these subjects altogether. In discussing the kind of relationship desirable between a couple about

to have a baby, how should they treat the new arrival, etc., the authors have only this to say about the position of the wife: "The reader knows well enough without us that in a government building socialism the fair half of mankind becomes free, equal and is liberated from oppression and inferiority". With this flippant sentence they dismiss the fact that the wives and mothers in their readers' families will fulfill nearly three-quarters of the domestic burden. A word of encouragement to young husbands thinking of helping in the home might, one would have thought, not have come amiss and might have contributed to the equality and liberation of which they speak. The child is treated throughout as a sexless being – a seeming sign of equality, but in a situation where public opinion sees boys and girls as very different, this is only ignoring the problem. Girls, they go on to say, are easier to deal with, easier to discipline, more critical of themselves than boys, more inclined to hide their inadequacies and seek approval of those around them. Parents are to be excused if they take these different characteristics that their sons and daughters display to be inherent and not as a result of their unconscious socialization. The Lavrovs beg parents not to force girls to do "women's work" – another seemingly progressive comment until they add: "this work must now go by the name of 'family chores'". Mothers are warned not to complain about 'woman's lot' on pain of losing respect and confidence of their daughters and driving them to develop a negative approach to life. This seems a decidedly hypocritical approach since nothing is to be done to ensure that the girl escapes her fate later on. The mother after all is not encouraged to instill in her daughter a positive attitude towards equal distribution of the domestic load between the sexes but just to grin and bear her fate.

The media not only tacitly assumes that women will be washing the dishes and the nappies, but actively promotes the separate world where women engage in their own interests. This is particularly true of the women's magazines. Women's press can be used either in the service of liberation or subordination, to break down the stereotype of women's role or to enforce it. Comparison of some early and recent numbers of magazines will illustrate the difference of direction in which they have evolved since the early days of the revolution.

*Kommunistka*, December 1920, No. 7

Economic revival: On the Forthcoming 8th Congress of Soviets. Results of the 3rd all-Russian Meeting of Heads of Women's Departments; Our Production Tasks (from Trotsky's speech); Vocational Training for Women.

Problems of the Communist Women's Movement in Russia: The Family and Communism (Kollontai); The Way to Emancipate Women (Preobrazhensky); On Religious Belief (Stepanov); The Last Slaves (about a congress of women in the East, Kollontai).

International Working Women's Movement: German Communist Women (L.); About Soviet Russia (Zetkin); Women's Pages in the German Press (left-wing press, Didrikil);

Women's Conference in Germany (Didrikil).

Questions of organisation: Work among Peasant Women (Samoilova); Questions of Agitation and Propaganda (Pitlovsky); Work of the CC of the Bolshevik Party among Women (A.I.); Suggestions on Organisational Questions (Eporov).

Other work: Week of the Child; Red Army; Compulsory Military Training; Work among Housewives.

Five years of the Communist International; on England (describing the ILP, the British Socialist Party and their work among women); struggle against unemployment in Russia; Memories of a maid who had worked in Lenin parents' home; story about a couple who moved in from countryside to work in a factory: he hits her in front working women, they get him sacked until he apologises to his wife in front of all; on women who act as newspaper correspondents - inviting anyone to write in and not to worry about their grammar as that can be corrected; description of how the newspaper is printed; women at work; pioneer exhibitions; communal eating; descriptive scientific experiments to transplant sex organs; to bring back youth; illustrated description of the female sex organs; blouse pattern; poem about Ivan who was always worrying about the women, he frightened one of the young girls and even tore her dress, but Lena writes to the papers so he gets his just reward.

Working Woman, January 1974

Article on Lenin; Brezhnev in India; textile workers; a woman who fought in the Second World War; story about a man who resues a drunkard from a pond - this episode gives him the strength to leave for the army, because he realises that society will look after his wife; working conditions and control of - admitting little has been done suggesting measures to be taken; careers for girls leaving school; dress and hat patterns; information about the kidnapping - one of the horrors of capitalism; articles for children; the bread you eat; how to make tasty sandwiches; fashion.

Working Woman, February 1974

Article on the five-year plan; a sewing factory; 250 years of the Academy of Sciences; short story of how a girl spent her first day working in a canteen; girls who went to East Germany for two months; sewing pattern; Princess Dashkova, an educated lady of Catherine the Great's time; skin care; recipe for pancakes.

It is difficult to give the flavour of the magazines through the headings alone, but they are sufficiently clear, and while the 1974 numbers are frankly boring, those from the 20s, even if the language is simpler and the present far from professional, breathe a pioneer spirit. Women are being shown around the world they live in, introduced to the wonders of science and to political events around the globe. They are exhorted to stand up for themselves and to try new ideas, to be active in the community. The contemporary issues contain no articles on political events abroad. Those that do touch on political and economic themes are written in the usual superficial style. The magazine caters for the woman as she is now and makes no pretensions to anything else; it talks to women about women like themselves, giving a little bit of general culture, cooking and fashion.

In fact, the stress on fashion has become pronounced of late, particularly in the magazines from other socialist countries, which are widely read in the Soviet Union. Of course, after going without clothes of decent quality for so long, there is nothing strange about wishing to take advantage of the new successes of economy and technology. But fashion is spreading with all the negative aspects of its Western counterpart. Recently there was a series of articles in the *Literary Gazette* discussing the function of fashion in Soviet society. Several readers wrote querying the need for fashion as it is at present practised and complaining about the hold over people that fashion has established. "And then there are those awful conversations

in the corridors at work!" wrote one woman, "They are saying that platforms aren't in fashion anymore". "Do you think it is still worth sewing a pair of trousers or not?", wrote another, "If only I could find out what a spring everyday suit should look like. Otherwise I'll just be wasting money and time".

One of the chiefs from the House of Fashion, who answers these questions, not always very much to the point, is obviously in defence of fashion. He stresses the difference between socialist and capitalist fashions – in the West fashions change to make money for clothes firms; while in the socialist countries – this he does not make clear unless it is to help a man express the uniqueness of himself (the expression of which has always to be within the limits of the fashion decreed). One cannot, he remarks with glee, be outside fashion: one is either wearing the clothes of today or of yesterday or tomorrow. The comment about the awful conversations is answered not by the assurance that women should no longer be slaves of fashion designers, and should dress to suit themselves, but by agreeing that fashion information is lamentably badly organised, and suggesting that it would be a good idea to have a fashion page in, say, the Soviet equivalent of the *Radio Times* and to organise shop clubs for young people. Life, he ends up, would be dull without fashion.

The language of fashion journals is always one of fashion being created from above and perpetuates the idea that clothes make the person. "All things point to the fact," reads another blurb, "that fashion has chosen for itself a new ideal – the soft, feminine, lyrical new woman. Fashion's ideal no longer reminds us in its clothes and style of the tomboy."

Her new-found glamour is not in conflict with her role as home-maker. The assumption that whatever else a woman is, she will always be a housewife, is so deep-rooted that it does not have to be given special emphasis – it is implicit everywhere. A Novosti Publishing House propaganda booklet on the famous Soviet heart surgeon Meshkalin describes the change in the man's life after the appearance of his second wife. The new order that reigned in his flat immediately showed that the hands of a loving woman had been at work. Women figure as mothers, wives and secondary figures. For example:

"Natalya Dirovaya has several professions. The first, with which she began her life, is certainly not a woman's profession: she is a member of a famous circus family and she trained horses.

Another of her occupations is the main profession of every woman – she is the splendid mother to seven year old Mishenka..." (*Soviet Culture*, March 1974).

"And here one has to say Galina Michailovna is her husband's equal. The head of the family has been for many years receiving top marks for military and political training, and his wife too... It is true that the head of the family has the advantage..." (*Soviet Patriot*, March 1974).

The ten readers' letters from *The Week*, some of which were quoted at the beginning of this article, are the measure of the media's success. The paper printed the contributions – without editorial comment, a sure sign of approval – under the heading "Femininity and more femininity – such is the opinion of the majority of our readers. Next come the

faithfulness and the capacity to be a good housewife. All the letters except one confined themselves to stressing woman's role as wife, mother, grandmother etc. and to lauding the traditional positive qualities that are attributed to women: goodness, sensitivity, beauty and the ambiguous weakness. Even the one letter that spoke of women's emancipation and of common human qualities went on to say: "The cultured man may not be gallant, but he knows he has to give up his seat to a woman. He may not know how to cook a tasty meal, but he does know he ought to help his wife around the house. The cultured woman knows how to smooth down the sharp corners of life and not spark off conflict situations at home or at work". Men and women are here granted far greater equality, but they are not allowed to move out of the orbit of dream-world into the reality of the human world. Men, according to this public opinion, have the monopoly of the human qualities of thought and responsibility: their column, headed "Brain", say our readers, "is a man's greatest merit", attributes to the male character honesty, psychological maturity, love of work and a feeling of responsibility.

The image of women that comes across has little to do with the part that the 'weaker sex' plays in society. This lopsided stress on the soft and feminine is not in accord with the role women play in production. They illustrate the increasing polarisation of the male and female stereotypes in the Soviet Union today. The readers of *The Week* chose as the second and third most essential qualities for men (after the brain) -- 'masculinity' and 'gallantry' to complement the feminine woman.

There is something cult-like in this pursuit of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. These qualities are certainly being given much prominence in popular brochures on behaviour and etiquette. Take, for example, the chapter "Relations between Men and Women" in the book entitled *Soviet Etiquette*. The chapter begins by remarking that since the biological differences between men and women will never disappear, one would suppose that such specifically female and such specifically male qualities, as strength and decisiveness, which represent 'genuine masculinity', are eternal and will eternally distinguish the sexes from one another. The example of one young man, whose letter to *Komsomolskaya Pravda* was published on March 1st 1968, is quoted with distaste. "Why does the paper", the letter had complained, "write about some long-gone age of gallantry? We have equality. My girl-friend does the same job as I do. And works no worse than us lads. Why should I humiliate her by bowing and fawning?" The young man is advised to remember that, according to Karl Marx, a society can be measured by its attitude to women. And those who "mask their disrespectful attitude to women with phrases about equality" are told to listen to General Ignatiev who said that one should never forget for a moment that women are the weaker sex and that one's behaviour towards women should be determined by the realisation that every woman is the mother, wife or beloved of some man. Unlike General Ignatiev, however, Marx always rejected the idea that putting women on a pedestal rather than treating them as comrades denoted a higher level of society. The young letter writer showed a better understanding of Marx than the editors of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* or the author of *Soviet Etiquette*. The latter's interpretation of Marxism is certainly very significant.

The male code of conduct, as propagated by the etiquette book, includes the following points: a man should always be the first to say hello, stand up when a woman enters the room, offer his girl-friend or woman companion his right arm (except when he is a soldier, in which case he should keep his right arm for saluting officers), order in restaurants, etc. It is men who invite and are not invited to dance even in the informal gatherings in friends' flats, unless by suitable announcement the next dance is the ladies' choice. One warning is never to make a lady a present of a bottle of wine -- jewelry, sweets or pictures are more suitable. The woman's part in all this is to be passive: to smile graciously as they are helped onto the tram or into their coat. And all this time women must look beautiful even at home.

The way the press celebrated March 8th, International Women's Day, perhaps sums up best of all attitudes to the emancipation of women by the media. This festival was devised at the beginning of the century to highlight the plight of women and to centralize their struggle for a better life. In the past, the parades and meetings had a political content and the day was a truly proletarian holiday. Today March 8th is little more than a glorified Mothers' Day in which wives, sisters and daughters are allowed to join. This is the time of 'gifts for women'. Girls at school and women at work receive presents from the authorities and at home from boy-friends, neighbours and husbands. The menfolk may even prepare the party food. But apart from giving these polite bows in their direction, no-one thinks further of the idea behind the celebration. The press refrains from touching on any awkward questions and although there are plenty of issues around which demonstrations could be organised and meetings held, official statements confine themselves to congratulating women on the part they play in society and encouraging them in a vague way onto greater things.

*Pravda* on March 8th, 1974, carried the heading, "Wishing you, Fine Daughter of the Motherland, a Happy Holiday". The address from the Central Committee congratulated the "fine women workers and fiery patriots" and noted that women are enthusiastic about the way the five-year plan is being implemented. A paragraph was devoted to women's maternal success: "Soviet woman always was and is the main educator of the younger generation". The gains women have achieved under socialism were mentioned and finally the support women are giving to the CPSU peace programme. The paper also included a report of a meeting the day before in the Bolshoi which had been attended by Brezhnev, Kosygin and many other CC men. Most of the speeches had thanked the CP for the way it valued women. There had been talk of the International Federation of Women and the UN decision that 1975 was to be Women's Year. Then after more discussion of the plan, and of vegetables and grain in the Moscow region, the affair had ended with the usual applause. The photos on *Pravda's* back page were all of women: mother and baby, teacher and pupils, a gymnast doing floor exercises, and Vietnamese girls by the sea with baskets!

The other big dailies printed the CC message and the TASS report - and very little more. Journalists have to mention that today is Women's Day, but further than that they are not obliged to interest themselves. You can look in vain for any discussion or analysis of women's struggles abroad or her position at home.

The inequalities of Soviet women were celebrated in enraptured tones on that day. They were complimented for battling so heroically against all odds. Praise which they undoubtedly deserve, but which is no substitute for criticism of their unenviable position and action to eliminate it.

"Women are absolutely equal with men and not only carry a high weight in production, but are the educators of our wonderful children, who represent our future; they are amazing housewives: they create comfort and a good atmosphere in the family. Their smiles force us men to forget about any misfortune or unpleasantness. They infect us with optimism and gaiety."

So much for the 'ordinary' press, but how about the more 'elevated' journals? On that day the *Literary Gazette* had a front-page contribution by the poet Mikhail Dudin. On that day he thought of his mother and of a brave girl Zoya who fought at the front during the Second World War, but did not live to see peace:

"Zoya did not have the opportunity of becoming a mother  
But she was the mother of Victory ...."

And addressing women in general, he concluded: "The world is alarming and unstable, but your bravery which remains hidden in the shade, keeps life in this alarming world on an even keel."

In other words, the 8th of March is drained of any political content. The press by-pass real issues and confine themselves to flag-waving and vague generalities. On this day, as on the other 364 days, they project the image of a woman who works, washes, cleans, cooks, looks after her husband and children, and yet manages to look feminine, soft and yielding at the same time. The theory that lies behind this is rather woolly and vague: equality has been achieved, but women's domestic and maternal roles remain her primary concern -- and the contradiction between the two is not even seen.

## V- WHAT LIBERATION AND WHEN?

Soviet academics have taken up these questions at a more serious level : they have been prepared to admit the complexity of the issues involved and to state categorically that under socialism women cannot yet be absolutely equal, that the process of liberation is still in progress.

The dialectics of sex has for some time now been a popular topic for study, but for several decades it has remained at the level of triumphant hyperbole or flattering photographs, and it is only recently that anything serious has been written on the subject. Over the past few years a number of publications have appeared dealing with not only female participation in production but also with the family, childbirth, divorce etc. A number of dissertations have also been written discussing the problems of women's inequality and how it can best be overcome.

Much of this new research represents a genuine effort to establish the reality of the present and to approach the findings in a critical way. The Latvian sociologist, Yurtinskaya, for example, has taken to task those who give the impression that the women's question is finally solved, and she does not flinch from naming those who present misleading facts and twist statistics in order to support this view. Thus she quotes an author who announced that because over 50% of the personnel in administrative departments were women, the problems of which Lenin spoke, of bringing women into government, have been settled, and she points out that to be a secretary or a caretaker is not the same thing as being in an administrative position.

Here and elsewhere there are frank criticisms of the past -- for example it is admitted that during the thirties the patriarchal family and its values held sway -- and of the present : some writers stress that not enough is being done. And while back in the fifties the organisers of the first All-Russian Congress of Working Women were labelled petty-bourgeois for their insistence that the abolition of housework was an urgent task, today it is possible to state firmly that domestic chores have not only to be mechanised but also industrialised, that it is not enough to bring technology into the home, but that household tasks must be dealt with communally and as a part of the national economy. Many of the suggestions put forward : strengthening women's organisations, allocating finances for communal services, campaigning for men to take part in domestic work, ending sexual differences in school education, etc. are very much to the point. But it should be emphasized that these books and dissertations are for students of sociology, philosophy and other specialities, and are not available to the public : more detailed studies with bolder conclusions are found in dissertations which usually remain unpublished and inaccessible -- to read them a special permit is required. While the authorities may use the compiled statistics in order to decide where to build a sewing factory or a creche, the specialists have very little influence on government policies, particularly if they theorize in a direction which is disapproved of.

However, even the best of these studies deal with only one or two sides of the problem while ignoring many vital aspects or failing to take their conclusions through to the end. Although it is generally agreed that housework is largely to disappear, the socialisation of child-rearing is expected to stay in the mothers' hands, within the family even under communism. The Leningrad sociologists, Karchev and Golod, for example, believe that women will always play the main role in bringing up the children. On the basis of statistics, they argue that a woman's role in the upbringing of children is less in conflict with her participation in production than is her housework. This, they somewhat illogically conclude, flows from their evidence that a greater percentage of men take some part in the looking after of children and that the amount of help given in this area is generally greater than in domestic tasks. Another survey, however, suggests that the percentage-wise proportions are in fact the other way round, so its authors envisage an end to the tyranny of washing and cooking but do not see communism doing away with women's present involvement with young children. Both trends, in other words, go for a superficial 'solution' of the problem of the conflicting relation of motherhood and women's role in production.

In the Soviet Union today, sex, maternity and motherhood are joined together into an indivisible and mystic trinity. It is true, of course, that the material conditions of Soviet society today preclude any financial solutions to the problems of sexual relations and motherhood and fatherhood, but this should not result in women's inequality being eulogised at a time when a very precise and honest attitude to the inadequacies is required. The motherhood cult that was fostered by Stalin, an example of how deformed the revolution had become, survives in the Soviet Union today in the continued existence of 'mother-heroines'. *Family and School* carried in January 1974 an interview with one such heroine -- a mother of seventeen children! The table below shows that this cult is by no means diminishing:

Table IX

*Mothers of many children decorated (thousand/year)*

Indicator	Children born and raised to qualify	1944-9 (average)	1950-9 (average)	1960-9 (average)	1970	1944-70 (average)
All women decorated	5+	536	360	491	543	471
<i>of whom, with</i>						
Title of Honour:						
Mother-Heroine	10	6	3	6	13	5
Order of Motherhood Glory, <i>of whom</i>	7-9	132	77	131	183	117
1st Class	9	12	8	16	29	13
2nd Class	8	35	21	38	56	33
3rd Class	7	85	48	77	98	71
Motherhood Medal	5-6	398	280	354	347	348
<i>of whom</i>						
1st Class	6	137	97	136	147	127
2nd Class	5	261	183	218	200	222

Soviet theorists have not tackled the problem of controlling reproduction in the cause of either rational or planned growth of the labour force or of the maximum liberation of women. Scientists have not devoted themselves to explaining to women either the nature or the functioning of their bodies or their passions. The quality of sanitary towels, for example, is very inadequate and they are so uncomfortable that most women just use cotton wool -- internal tampons are unheard of. Women are inhibited sexually by their ignorance or by the possibility that every sexual encounter may lead to pregnancy -- effective and widespread contraception is



unavailable. Abortion is free on demand today but many unwilling mothers choose to have the child rather than go through the long and laborious bureaucratic procedures. Soviet doctors always put pressure on the woman to have the child if it is her first pregnancy, on the grounds that the number of women dying due to a first abortion, or subsequently unable to give birth, is higher in this case. This seems a rather hypocritical attitude given that no care has been taken to see that she does not become pregnant to start with.

In Soviet society, as we have already said, government, economic management, education and research are all based on the same principles and have the same orientation. The government clearly wants to hold women back. One of the sociologists, Yur tsinya, has advanced a tentative suggestion as to why this should be the case. Arguing from the developments in Latvia, she maintains that as society reaches a higher level of development and as the human personality develops, women will give birth to fewer children and so children will cease to be a crucial factor in keeping men and women together. The liberation of women from their family role, therefore, is an important prerequisite for social development towards freedom. So in order to keep men and women in their place, the present system of government favours traditional family relations based on the subordination of women.

The material and social conditions required for the liberation of women are nevertheless evolving, at a very slow pace, but still more rapidly and surely than in any capitalist country. The decision-makers have to do what they can in order to stem the tide; their ideologues have to pretend that the existing partial emancipation of women is the sum total of possible liberation.

As regards women, while motherhood is no longer seen as the sole reason for their existence, the fact that it still occupies a large part of their lives and emotions is taken as proof that their role in production, however great it may become, will always be hindered by it, and the differences in the psychic make-up of men and women will never completely disappear. The arguments used for the first part of this thesis are rather lame: we do not know as yet which areas of production will remain less accessible to women, but we can be sure that such areas will exist. As for the second, the arguments are a rather more sophisticated version of the masculinity-femininity fixation generally found in the media. These writers reject the biological interpretation of human nature only to ally the fight for female equality with the fight for the maintenance of 'specifically human values' that distinguish women from men. There are those like Yurtsinya, who have tried to explore the possible roles of men and women in the future. In her case, while she gives the most lucid account of women's present inferior status and puts forward bold remedies, she ends up all the same with a panging to masculinity and femininity. Pomarenko, another research worker, claims that it would be a distortion of materialism to deny the specificities of sex (in the same way as age) in the development and formation of people, and that these are reflected in those little-studies qualities of masculinity and femininity. Any attempt to extinguish these qualities would lead to a violation of nature and of human culture as well. His arguments at this point become rather incoherent, but it appears that whatever the left hand may do, the right always acknowledges the biological as the determining factor of contemporary sexual differences.

An article by A.I. Zakarov, in *The Social Psychology of the Personality*, published in 1974, is a further example of the strange reasoning used by Soviet theorists: "In our striving towards equality we must not forget that certain biological functions cannot be changed and result in social and psychological differences." A fairly harmless statement when taken out of context, but then the author goes on to say that changing nappies is a biological function with social and psychological consequences. Many women, he begins, now work in male professions and many men carry out women's functions: feed children and change nappies. The roles of men and women are clearly drawing together. "Although many men welcome this, there is on the whole a danger that the child may have two mothers and not a mother and a father. In the eyes of his playmates, a feminine boy will be seen as 'girly' and this will harm him. Thus the desire to bring up sons and daughters as people must not blind us to the importance of bringing up boys who are boys and girls who are girls."

Why should a boy whose father takes a prominent role in his upbringing necessarily grow up feminine? This we are not told. The only reason would seem to be that it is impossible to carry out traditional women's tasks without assuming a traditional women's personality. If a boy brought up in an atmosphere of respect, understanding and equality between his parents is made fun of at school because of his different values, then this reflects the shortcomings of the upbringing of the other pupils and is a reason for changing their education, not his. The author, however, is not interested in changing things but rather is anxious that children should fit comfortably into the present. So he warns the parents that if they divert from 'normal' behaviour patterns, this will have a serious effect on their child's character.

Zakarov's approach is typical of the Soviet social sciences : instead of making a serious study of the complex interrelation of the biological and social and of attempting to document the effect of changing circumstances on the personalities of men and women, they describe what *is*, without any suggestion of the dialectical development. Women are *this*-- but *why* they are what they are or *what* they are becoming and might become is never seriously investigated.

## VI. Conclusion

Soviet women's legal position and their role in production is in almost all respects ahead of capitalist countries. They are now better educated, live better and have a higher social status than before the revolution. Many of the negative aspects of Stalin's era which made their lives particularly hard in the thirties and forties have disappeared. Co-education has been re-introduced, abortion is now allowed and although divorce has still to be paid for, it is not expensive -- approximately one week's salary for each of the persons concerned. Over recent years the greater availability of consumer goods, their better distribution and the increase in communal facilities have lightened women's work. Improvements are, of course, relative : the disorganisation of Soviet public services would shock any capitalist, and the queues, lack of vital necessities and archaic domestic appliances would shock any Western housewife. These improvements have been spread very unevenly through the country as a whole. But over the next few decades, the women who warm their irons on the stove, wash clothes in the tub or scrub the floor with a piece of rag, will probably vanish forever. However, the slow tempo of progress, and the extent to which these improvements lag behind the real possibilities of the economic advances made, is what is particularly striking about the situation today. While the contradiction between their roles in the national and domestic economies has become and might become less pronounced, there are no signs in the Soviet Union today that this contradiction is on the way to becoming qualitatively transformed.

The very real success of the Soviet Union in changing so many aspects of women's life shows that the social ownership of the means of production does afford the base for the liberation of women. Bolshevik theory and practice contained many inadequacies, but the programme they put forward for the resolution of this contradiction was, and still is, basically correct. The new course of political evolution of the Soviet Union that was set by Stalin's victory changed the course of women's liberation as well. While in the twenties the objective situation prevented the Bolsheviks from carrying out their emancipation programme quickly and in the manner desired, today it is the bureaucratic nature of the regime which is preventing any advantage that could be taken based on the Soviet Union's economic progress.

We need to return to those early years of the revolution and study the methods of organisation and the ideas and aims discovered then by Soviet women and men. Lunacharsky once said that putting family life on a social basis was the aim of the revolution. This is still the aim of the revolution whether it takes place in advanced capitalist countries or in the Soviet Union. Through Lunacharsky speaks the very best of the revolutionary working class tradition : it also pronounces historic judgement on the Soviet regime of today.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1) Rather than burden the text with references to the books from which statistics have been taken, I have provided a bibliography at the end. All figures, except where expressly stated, refer to the year 1969 or to even more recent years.
- 2) The Soviet state positively discourages part-time work although in recent years this has been somewhat relaxed. The results of the survey show that mothers of very young children would welcome the possibility of part-time work. This is particularly the case amongst the relatively better educated and better off women and is probably due to their greater concern with their children's education, better acquaintance with theories of infant psychology and consequently more critical attitude to state-run provisions.
- 3) Reactionary views on sex-roles are not confined to the division of labour at home but often extend to wife-beating as well. In rural surveys conducted near Moscow, for example, in the years 1964-7, up to 25% of those questioned (including the young and the rural intelligentsia) believed that it was "permissible to punish one's wife".
- 4) One sociologist, Labzin, has calculated that in 1962 communal kitchens prepared sufficient dishes to feed annually the total population of the Soviet Union for only 11-12 days. Marriage has still to be separated from the kitchen.
- 5) This habit of skipping over the very real inequality of women vis-a-vis their role in domestic life by pretending that this is not a very important aspect of liberation seems to be fairly common practice in the Soviet Union. The introduction to the translation of Evelyn Sullerot's book *Histoire et Sociologie du Travail Feminin* begins with this comment: "Besides a great number of frivolous publications that try to assure the reader that a heavenly life awaits her as soon as she has persuaded her husband to wash the dishes and nappies and as soon as she has got the latest gadgets which mechanize housework, there are serious pieces of research ..."

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