

Connections

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Women in Eastern Europe



Connexions is the collective product of feminists of diverse nationalities and political perspectives. After one year of publication we reevaluated our original goals.

We are committed to serve as a communication channel for feminist ideas worldwide. We want to go beyond merely providing facts and information, and hope that by passing on women's writings generally unavailable in the U.S., we will be helping women here to understand and connect with the experiences and

viewpoints of women in other parts of the world. In order to maintain the perspectives and attitudes of women from other countries we limit ourselves to direct translations and interviews as much as possible. We give priority to reports on events outside the U.S., but we provide resources and contacts dealing with related issues in this country.

We want to participate in the growth of a worldwide network connecting women working on similar projects by researching,

communicating and exchanging information with other women's organizations.

Women do not live in a vacuum. To a large extent the economic and political conditions under which we live determine the issues to which we give priority. We believe that by acting as an international forum we contribute to the understanding necessary to the development of an international feminist movement.

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Connexions

Until the end of World War II the term Eastern Europe had been only a geographic description which included Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the European part of the Soviet Union. It has since become a political concept—dating from the signing of the Warsaw Pact in 1955—and has been extended to include East Germany, and the two Balkan countries, Rumania and Bulgaria.

In this issue of *Connexions* we use the term Eastern Europe in the political sense and have chosen material about the countries in the Warsaw Pact. We are not trying to define the politics of those in power in the Soviet Union or in any of the other countries. By putting together this issue we want to document the daily lives of Eastern European women, their work, their worries, their achievements and their visions. We see that they are faced with the same problems as working women all over the world: the double responsibility of holding down a full-time job while taking care of the house and the children. Eastern European governments grant equal rights to women and provide a large variety of social benefits—nevertheless none of these rights has meant liberation for women.

1905 First major uprisings in St. Petersburg. Workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets (councils) are organized.

1914 August 1. Beginning of World War I. Rank-and-file resistance within all major European socialist parties.

1917 February Revolution triggered by mass demonstrations for "bread and freedom" in Petrograd. Czar ousted, provisional government under Kerensky.

November 6. October Revolution. The Bolsheviks take power. Negotiate and settle peace with other European countries.

1918 November 11. End of World War I. Revolutionary uprisings in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy.

1919 Peace negotiations in Versailles change Europe's borders. The Austro-Hungarian Empire is broken up, creating several independent states: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary. (Rumania and Bulgaria had received their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and 1908 respectively.)

1924 January 21. Lenin dies.

1928 Leon Trotsky expelled from the Soviet Union. Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country" becomes the official line.

1939 Hitler-Stalin pact

September 1. Germany invades Poland, beginning World War II.

1945 May 8. End of World War II in Europe. The meetings between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt lead to a division of Europe, the two Balkan countries, Rumania and Bulgaria, as well as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia are controlled by the Soviet Union. Germany and Austria are occupied by all four allies (France, Britain, U.S. and U.S.S.R.); Austria remains occupied until 1955. Truce declared with Germany, but a peace treaty is never signed, therefore West Germany has been occupied by French, British and U.S. troops, while East Germany remains under Soviet control.

1946-1948 All the countries under Soviet control are constituted as People's Republics. Some countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia) have their own strong socialist movements, in other countries (Poland, Hungary, East Germany) the establishment of Peoples' Republics is met with strong opposition from the national bourgeoisie.

1953 March 5. Stalin dies.

June 17. Uprising of workers in East Berlin, crushed by Soviet tanks.

1955 Signing of Warsaw Pact Treaty, as a reaction to NATO and modelled after it.

1956 February. 20th Party Congress of the Soviet Union's Communist Party (CPSU). N. S. Khrushchev publicly criticizes Stalin's policies.

October. Uprising in Hungary. Soviet invasion; Moscow puts Janos Kadar into power. This uprising also has impact on other Warsaw Pact countries, especially Poland.

1964 Khrushchev is ousted. Leonid Brezhnev comes to power as General Secretary of CPSU.

1968 Prague Spring. Alexander Dubcek tries to open up Czechoslovakia to the West. After several months of liberal reforms, coinciding with students' and workers' revolts in western countries, Czechoslovakia is occupied by Warsaw Pact Armies on August 22.

1970 December. Polish government tries to raise the price of food. Uprisings in Gdansk spread throughout the country.

1980 August. The Polish government tries again to raise food prices. Workers resist and go on strike. Solidarnosc is founded. Organizes 10 million workers within several months.

1981 December 13. The Polish military takes over, ending 16 months of trade union activities.

A Week Like Any Other

Olga, the leading character of this story is a chemist. She has an interesting time-consuming job, a husband she loves, and two small children who need to be taken care of. Trying to balance her job with her daily responsibilities is an endless, never successful race against the clock.

(Excerpted from *Spare Rib*, British feminist monthly, December 1976 to June 1977.)

In late 1969 the Russian magazine *Novy Mir* published a story which portrayed in diary form the problems of a woman trying to hold a demanding job and keep her marriage together. The story touched a sore spot for many Russian women and men, and newspapers were flooded with letters about the status of women.

Vera, a journalist on a Moscow newspaper, recalled (in an article by Susan Jacoby in the *Sunday Times*, August 20, 1972) the arguments which broke out over aspects of the heroine's life. "I walked in the office the day after that issue of *Novy Mir* came out, and I hadn't even read it yet. The first thing I heard

was a lot of shouting. The men were saying Olga had brought all her troubles on herself—no one forced her to have the second baby. The women argued, 'No one but her conscience. I suppose a woman gets pregnant all by herself. I thought we stopped believing in virgin births after the revolution.' It went on like that all day. My editor said it was hopeless to think of getting anything done."

For many Russians the story raised pressing questions about a society where 80% of women work outside the home; the way women were expected to do all the housework; the primitive methods of contraception they had to rely on (at the time abortion was the main option for birth control); and the shortcomings of State nursery care. The following are excerpts from the story *A Week Like Any Other*.

TUESDAY

I always systematically look through American and English publications on building materials. I do it regularly in our own library and—whenever I can spare the time to get there—at the Lenin Library in the scientific and technical and patent departments. I'm very glad that ever since school I've stuck at my study of English. Leafing through magazines for 20 minutes or so after two or three hours of work is real relaxation and pleasure. I show everything that bears on our work to Lucy Markoryan and Jacob Petrovich. He's another "Englishman," but he's not as good as I am.

Today in the library I manage to scan through *Building Materials '68*, study the new numbers of the *Abstracts*, and leaf through the catalogue of one American firm.



Fay MacTavish/Spare Rib

I look at my watch—five to two. I forgot to give my shopping order! I run to our room, remembering on the way that I never finished combing my hair, and suddenly I'm convulsed with giggles. Breathless and disheveled I burst into our room, and find myself in the middle of a crowd—the room is full of people. A meeting? Could I have forgotten?

"There, very appropriate, ask Olga Voronkova what considerations she was influenced by," says Alla Sergeevna, addressing Zinaida Gustavovna. I can see by their faces there's a heated argument going on. About me? Have I done something wrong?

"A discussion about that questionnaire has developed," explains Marya Matveevna. "Zinaida Gustavovna raised an interesting question: will a woman—a Soviet woman, of course—be influenced by public interests when it comes to something like child bearing?"

"And you want to consult me, and decide that way?" I answer, reassured. I'd thought it was something about my work.

Of course, I'm taken as the chief authority on childbirth, but I'm sick of it. Besides, Zinaida's "interesting question" is simply a stupid question, even if you believe that it was put as a serious inquiry. But knowing Zinaida, with her constant teasing and maliciousness, it's much more likely that her question was a spiteful one, and that she wants to have a dig at somebody. Zinaida herself is at that happy age when you don't have children any more.

Shura explains to me in an undertone that the argument was about the fifth question on the form: "If you have no children, state the reason: medical grounds; material domestic conditions; family circumstances; personal considerations; etc. (underline as applicable)." I don't understand why we're arguing when each of us can evade the question by underlining "personal considerations." I'd even underline "etc." But they are all interested in the fifth question, and the childless ones among us are even hurt by it.

Alla Sergeevna defines it as "monstrous tactlessness." Shura objects, "No more than the whole questionnaire." Luska, who's absorbed the most alarmist point from our talk yesterday—"who will populate our land"—rushes to the defense of the form.

"But it's necessary to find a way out of a serious and even dangerous situation—a demographic crisis."

Lydia, my rival in the competition for the junior scientist job, and who has two admirers, says, "Let the ones who're married deal with the crisis."

Barbara Petrovna, kindhearted and calm, corrects Lydia: "If the problem is of general public importance then it concerns us all...up to a certain age."

Lucy shrugs her shoulders. "Is it really worthwhile arguing about something as hopeless as this questionnaire?" Several voices ask at once: "Why hopeless?" Lucy

argues that the compilers suggest basically personal motives as reasons for not having any children. This means that each family is ruled by personal considerations when they have a child; therefore "no demographic investigations will succeed in influencing this process."

"Look, you're forgetting the 'material domestic conditions,'" I object. Marya Matveevna doesn't like Lucy's skeptical remark. "A great deal is being done in our country to free woman from her slavery, and there's no reason to mistrust the desire to do even more."

"Maybe a strictly practical approach to the problem would give the best results," says Lucy. "Now, in France, the state pays the mother for each child. This is probably more effective than any forms."

"Pays? Like on a pig farm?" Alla Sergeevna screws up her mouth in disgust. "Watch your words!" M-M's manly voice rings out at exactly the same time as Luska squeaks "Are people the same as pigs to you, then?"

"But that's France, where they have capitalism," Lydia shrugs her shoulders. All this fuss bores me. It's late. I'm starving. One of us moms has to go shopping. And I still have to do my hair. And I really have had enough of that form. I hold up my hand—attention—and strike a pose.

"Comrades! Please give a mother the floor, a mother of a large family! I assure you I had my two children out of exclusively national considerations. I challenge you all to a contest, and hope that you'll beat me on quantity as well as on quality of production!...But now—please, please—somebody just give me something to eat..."

I thought I could make them laugh, and finish off the argument. But some of them take offense, and an open squabble starts. Venomous retorts fly from all sides, voices are raised, drowning each other. Only snatches of phrases can be heard: "...turn an important thing into a circus;" "...if the animal instinct prevails over reason...;" "all childless people are selfish;" "...they themselves spoil their lives;" "the question is whose life is spoiled?;" "...they undertook voluntarily to increase the population...;" "...and who'll pay you your pensions, if there aren't enough of the young generation to be workers;" "...the only true woman is one who can have children...;" and even "...he who puts his head into a noose had better keep his mouth shut..."

And in all this chaos two voices of reason. Marya Matveevna's angry one: "This isn't a discussion; it's some kind of bear garden." And Barbara Petrovna's calm one: "Comrades, what on earth are you getting so heated about? After all, we've all had the freedom to choose our parts." Things quiet down a little, and then Zinaida, petty creature, shrieks shrilly: "It's all right for them, but when we have to be on duty for them, or drag ourselves around the factories when we're sent on an assignment, or spend the whole evening at a meeting, then it affects us as well."

This ends our women's discussion about the questionnaire and childbearing. And now I am suddenly sorry. We could have talked seriously; it would even have been interesting to talk seriously about it.



FRIDAY

In the shops—noisier today and more crowded than usual—we load four shopping baskets to the brim and at three o'clock we start back. I handle my share quite capably, but Lucy nearly collapses under her burden. Suddenly, there's Shura, coming towards us: "I've come to give you a hand."

I ask her to take one bag off Lucy; Lucy asks her to take one of mine. In the end we put Shura in the middle, and the three of us carry four bags between us. We have to get down off the pavement, every minute or so we stop to let a car go past.

"Hello, girls, take us into partnership!," two guys walking towards us exclaim gaily. "We've got enough men of our own, thanks," I answer. I feel good, because it's a sunny day, because we're blocking everybody's way, because there are three of us...Because I'm not alone.

When we get back, Luska appears with the sick leave figures. Of course, I'm at the top of the list. I knew I would be. According to the sick lists and certificates, I was absent for 78 days, nearly a third of the working time. All because of the children. We each write down our own figures, which means we can all see how many everybody else has. I don't know why this embarrasses me so much. I even feel ashamed. I shrink internally, avoid looking at anybody. Why? After all, it isn't my fault. "Have you filled in the form?" asks Luska, "let's have a look."

But there's also the difficulty of knowing how to work out how much time is spent on what. The "moms" confer about it. We decide that we definitely must indicate the time spent on travelling—we all live in new housing estates, and we spend approximately three hours a day on these journeys. "Occupation with children"—that's something none of us can separate out—we "occupy" ourselves with them in between our jobs. As Shura says: "Seryozha spends the whole evening with me in the kitchen. During the day he misses me very much, so he doesn't leave my side."

"So what do we write down about the children?" Luska is still puzzled.

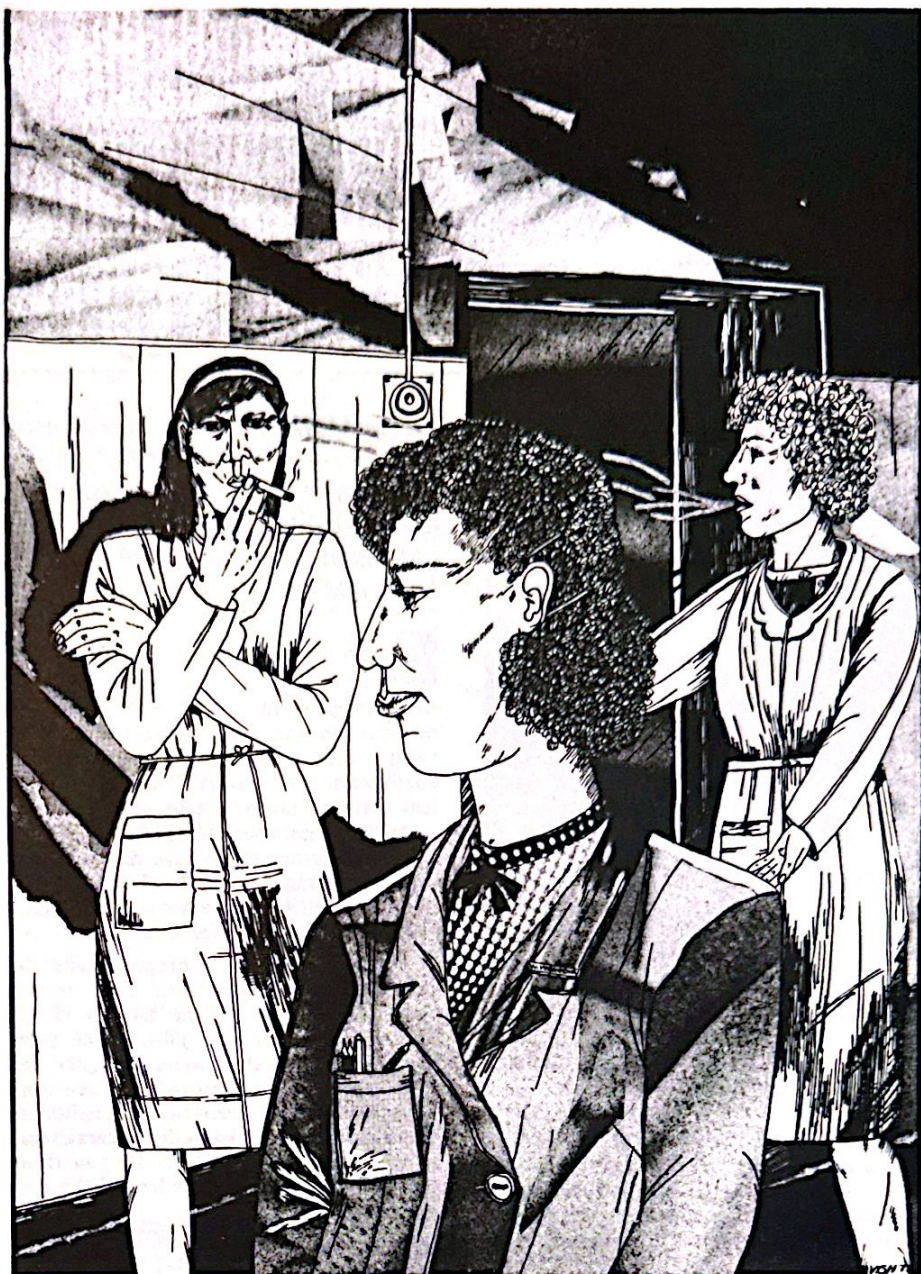
"Which week do we give an account of—a general one, or specifically this one?" asks Shura.

"Any," Lucy answers. "Aren't they all the same?" "Well, I don't go to the cinema every week." Luska has found a new difficulty. "Why rack our brains," I say, "I'm taking this week. A week like any other."

We decide it's a stupid question. How can you give an account of the time used on domestic jobs, even if you walked about the whole week with a stop watch in your hand? Lucy suggests indicating the average time left after the working day and travelling, and then working out which jobs are done in that time. We are amazed—it turns out that we have got 48 to 53 hours a week at home. Why isn't it enough? Why do so many unfinished jobs drag on week after week? Who knows? Who really does know how much time is needed for what is called "family life?" And what is it, anyway? I take my questionnaire home with me. So does Lucy. Various things have to be worked out before the day's over.

Travelling home isn't easy today. Two heavy shopping bags in my hands—I've bought everything for the weekend except vegetables. In the subway I have to stand, one bag in my hands, the other one by my feet. There's a crush. Reading is impossible. I stand and work out how much money I've spent. It always seems to me that I have lost some money. I had two ten ruble notes, and now I've got only silver left. One three ruble note is missing. I count again, try to remember all the shopping in the baskets. The second time it appears that I have lost four rubles. I give up, and begin to look around at all the people who are sitting. A lot of them are reading. The young women are holding books and magazines in their hands; the sedate looking men hold newspapers. And over there sits a fat guy in a porkpie hat, leafing gloomily through *Crocodile* [a popular humor magazine]. The young men turn their eyes aside, or sleepily half close them so that they won't have to give up their seats.

At last we make it to the terminal. Everyone jumps up and rushes to the narrow stairs. But I can't. I'm carrying parcels of eggs and milk. I trail along at the back. When I get to the bus stop there are lines for six buses. Shall I try to get into one that is filling up? But the bags! All the same I try to climb into the third bus. But because of the bags in both hands I can't get a grip on the handrail. My foot slips off the high step, I hit my knee very painfully, and at this moment the bus starts moving. Everyone's yelling, and I scream. The bus stops, some guy by the door grabs me and pulls me in, I fall onto my shopping bags. My knee hurts, and there's probably scrambled egg in my bag. But I'm offered a seat. Now I can have a look at my knee, at the hole in my stocking covered in blood and mud, and I can open my bag and satisfy myself that only a few eggs are broken, and one cardboard container with milk is



squashed. I'm terribly upset about the stocking—four rubles a pair!

As soon as I open the door, the family comes racing into the entrance hall—they have been waiting for me! Dima takes the bags out of my hands, and says: "You're mad." I ask: "How is Gulka's tummy?" "It's all right, everything in order."

Kotka keeps jumping up at me, and very nearly knocks me over. Gulka immediately demands sweets, which she's already spotted. I show them my knee, and limp into the bathroom. Dima brings iodine and cotton wool, they all pity me. I feel wonderful!

I love Friday evenings: you can sit a little longer at the table, romp around with the children, and put them to bed half an hour later. I don't have to do any washing. I can sit in the bath...

But after yesterday's sleepless night I'm terribly tired, and, once the children

have been put to bed, we leave everything in the kitchen as it is.

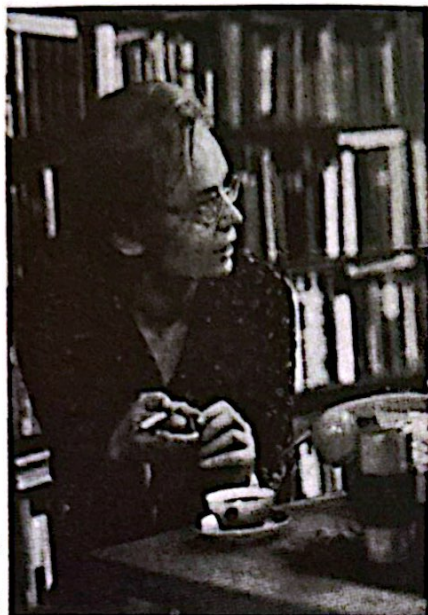
I am already in bed. Dima's still in the bathroom. Although I'm getting heavy with sleep, suddenly I imagine that Dima will wind the alarm clock out of habit. I shove it under the divan with the words, "Stay there and belt up." But its ticking comes through the thickness of the divan. So I carry it to the kitchen, and lock it in the cupboard with the crockery. □



Further reading:

• "Working Mothers in the Recent Soviet Fiction," by X. Gasirowska, "Slavic and Eastern European Journal," no. 25, Summer 1981.

"No Women's Movement in Sight"



Spare Rib

(Excerpted from *Spare Rib*, British feminist monthly, March 1979.)

Q: East European governments claim to be liberating women by bringing them into paid work on equal terms with men, and by socializing housework through nurseries, public laundries and so on. Does the position of women in Hungary bear this out?

A: When a Communist government was established in Hungary after World War II, it was thought that the new society would provide services to take over household duties and that a fairer distribution of the remaining housework among all the members of the family would allow women to play their part in the world of production as equals. These hopes have not materialized. Working women still spend more than four hours a day on housework; men spend a little more than an hour. Services are not well developed; shops and busses are overcrowded, restaurants and convenience foods are expensive, and there are few mechanical aids such as washing machines. This means that housework is not only time consuming but energy and nerve consuming too. Nearly all women go out to work, but in the less qualified and lower paid jobs, and women's earnings are 30% lower than men's. Only 15% of skilled workers are women. Though 85% of teachers are women, only 17% are principals.

Maria Markus worked in the Institute of Sociology in Budapest, Hungary—until she lost her job for being too critical of the government. In 1977 she left her country and now lives in Australia. In the following interview, conducted in England, she reflects on the situation of women in Hungary and discusses questions such as wages for housework.

Q: So would you say that nothing has really changed?

A: Hungary can show quite impressive statistics on the size of the female work force, the number of women with qualifications, etc. But at the same time we feel that nothing has really changed. Well, something has changed, but not enough. For most women there have not been fundamental changes in the conditions of their lives. Such a situation is not acceptable. It is not equality. It is not liberation.

Q: In some Eastern European countries there've been suggestions that women have time off to do the housework, be employed in part-time jobs, or be given work they can take home. Hungary and Czechoslovakia have introduced an extensive network of maternity benefits so women can stay at home for several years to look after their children. Do you think this a solution to the problem of the double shift?

Q: Certain feminists, sociologists and government representatives in Hungary have proposed that women be paid for doing housework. Though I agree that housework is a very important part of the reproduction of the labor force, and looking after children is an important part of human life, I do not think that paying people to do it is the solution. Housewives are cut off from contact with others.

Hungary introduced the maternity benefits you mentioned in 1967. A woman can now stay at home until her child is three years old without losing her job or pension rights; during this period she receives a monthly payment from the state of 800 forints. (The monthly wage of over 80% of the women, who claim this allowance, is less than 2,000 forints). The difficulties working women have in arranging their family lives have led to a very sharp drop in the birth rate and this is one reason for the new social policy. I think maternity benefits can be very helpful for certain women when there is no possibility of solving their problems any other way. But in Hungary the government has not

tried to look for other ways. Only 10% of children under three go to nurseries. They have not built more creches and nurseries and legally men are not allowed to receive the child allowances. Some teachers have demanded that fathers be allowed to share in the upbringing of the children; but usually it is taken for granted that it is the woman's job—since women usually get less pay it is more "sensible" that they stay at home. If the family has a number of children in succession, it can mean that the woman stays at home for several years.

Q: So these benefits reinforce traditional sex roles?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. I can see that the payments might be all right as one alternative, but I could never accept them as a solution. This is not a solution for women, but a solution at their expense, providing among other things an "objective" justification for the existing anti-female bias of employers and also making it more difficult to improve the way work is divided up inside the family. The maternity benefits have changed people's attitudes toward women working outside the home. It used to be accepted that women worked. It was thought of as a material necessity although not a dire one. But now if a woman has a young child and wants to continue working, people will say that she ought to leave work because she will be paid for staying at home. My objection to this is not that women will lose their qualifications by staying at home, because most women, as I said, do unskilled work. But work is the only place where the woman is involved in problems that are outside her family circle.

Q: Have Hungarian women complained about the lack of nursery facilities or expressed any dissatisfaction with the way the government tries to solve the problem of the "double shift"? Is there any women's movement in Hungary?

A: The government does not tolerate any form of spontaneous activity organized from below, nor any form of real control by people over the bureaucratic apparatus. Hungary is the most liberal of the East

European countries, but nevertheless, it is absolutely impossible for any spontaneous organizations to form. I remember when Angela Davis was in prison and the government was officially protesting about her detention. Some students organized a demonstration and went to the American embassy to demand her release. They were beaten up by the Hungarian police because they were not organized by the official youth movement.

So you see, there can be no women's movement. Things are always done by the government *for* women, it's very paternalistic. "We give women this, we do that for women"—that's their attitude. There is no possibility for women to express their needs as a group and work out some kind of solution. Hungary doesn't even have the formal kind of women's organization that exists in Poland and Czechoslovakia. There are a few women's committees in local government and the unions, but they are not elected and have no real power.

I think a real, grassroots women's movement would be very important, not just because it would represent women's interests but because it would change the traditional attitude women have of accepting "whatever fate brings." They would learn to express their own needs and would become actively involved in shaping the framework of their own lives. In doing this they would see the broader context of these problems. I believe it is not a matter of "raising" women to a level defined by the existing status of men, but rather the creation of human conditions of life for both sexes. This means that women and men must be involved in making political and economic decisions and must feel free to shape their own lives without having to conform.

Q: That seems to leave out the question of ideology. In the West we have been very concerned with the way women's oppression is perpetuated by fixed ideas about sex-roles, for example, that the ideal woman should be self-sacrificing, passive and heterosexual. Do you think issues such as challenging stereotypes and sexuality are important areas of struggle?

A: I absolutely agree that emancipation is about changes at the level of personality; we need social conditions that will ensure the free development and free self-realization of each personality. This must include changes in ideology too. I think the western feminist movement has done something very positive in drawing attention to this aspect of women's oppression, although in some cases I think it is overemphasized as compared to some of the more direct forms of oppression, which can be very much felt, especially by less privileged women.

I am concerned about changing the whole set of values that shape relations between the sexes—but I hardly would define sexuality as an area of struggle. The existing stereotype of "femininity" contains some characteristics which I see as values—tenderness, helpfulness, openness to personal human contacts. These should become values for everybody, even though,

at present they are often used against women.

Officially, views on women are very enlightened—though sexuality is an exception, and homosexuality is not tolerated. There are proclamations about equality, and laws to enforce it, but in practice women are not considered important. Conservative and patriarchal attitudes are not challenged, and so, as everywhere, to a certain degree, women accept these views. I think it would be impossible to change them without changing the actual conditions of people's lives.

Q: Are there many women among the oppositionists? Did being a woman make any difference to your intellectual and oppositional activities?

A: There are really not many oppositionists, but I think women were as much involved as men. In our group, I did not feel that being a woman was an obstacle in intellectual work, but maybe we were an exception. You see we all worked in research institutes where relations are not very hierarchical and where, especially in the humanities, women researchers are common and accepted. I do know that even in the universities, and especially in the technical sciences, the system is much more male-oriented. Women working there are usually directed into some kind of secondary work, servicing laboratories or projects. The few who are really determined to compete are faced with two choices: either to become completely masculine in their behavior and forget about any family life; or just the opposite, to throw all their femininity and charm on the line, use it as a weapon, and instead of arguing, shed a few tears. Needless to say, it is humiliating, but it works.

Of course women intellectuals have their "second shift" at home too. Husbands may help, but it still doesn't solve the problem because it is the woman who must

organize the family and the woman who is most psychologically involved. But for women intellectuals the problems are easier to cope with. In the families of workers it is more difficult. The level of education is lower, the ideas about women more traditional. I am more anxious about working women as they have less free time, less money, more time consuming housework. I would like to distinguish between these two different groups of women, though I see, of course, that in general the problems are the same.

Q: Do you think a women's movement will develop in Hungary in the near future?

A: No, not in the near future. Women are unlikely to organize themselves as a social force because they are so overburdened and isolated from one another. People try to deal with their problems as private troubles, each individually. It is only a few intellectuals who are interested in feminism, and with them it is at the level of discussion, not action. There has been only one more or less spontaneous action in recent years. This was in 1973 when the government decided to change the abortion law. Abortion had been easily available since 1956 and the type of contraception available had improved in the '60s; the Pill becoming widely used. But in 1973 it became known that the government was considering restricting women's rights to abortion. A petition was organized against these changes. Several hundred women and men signed. But a directive was passed all the same and now abortions can be refused to married women with fewer than three children.

I don't see much immediate possibility of a women's movement emerging. I may be wrong and I shall be glad if I am. If a movement does begin I will very much try to help and involve myself in it because it would be very important. □

Feminist Review

Feminist Review aims to develop the theory of Women's Liberation and debate the political perspectives and strategy of the movement, and to be a forum for work in progress and current research and debates in Women's Studies.

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The Official Women's Press

Women's publications in the Soviet Union picture the "ideal woman" — a worker, a wife, a mother. But in many ways these magazines differ from the ones available in the West.



(Based on *Women in Eastern Europe*, published in Britain by the Women in Eastern Europe Group, No. 4, March 1981.)

In western capitalist nations, a "woman's magazine" is readily identifiable as such because its articles and pictures present women engaged in their traditional domestic and nurturing roles. Although there are sport, hobby, and "skin" publications which assume a male readership, male equivalents of *Woman's Day* or *Family Circle* do not exist. Men are expected to have a broad range of interests beyond the confines of the domestic sphere.

Similarly in the Soviet Union we find no male versions of such magazines as *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker), *Krestyanka* (The Peasant Woman), *Femeya Moldavia* (The Moldavian Woman), and *Sovietskaya Zhenshchina* (Soviet Woman). In terms of magazines, there is the world, defined in non sex-specific terms, and the woman's world. But what is it in Soviet society that women need to know that men don't? Why, of the 5,967 journals published regularly in the Soviet Union, are 39 for women?

In the early post-revolutionary period, *Rabotnitsa* (established in 1914) and *Krestyanka* (established in 1922) were instrumental in the campaign of the Communist Party and its women's department (*zhenotdel*) for the emancipation of women. The magazines mounted literacy, hygiene and modernization campaigns, as the Soviet state endeavored to draw women into the labor force and involve them in the construction of the new society. Now, however, when equality of the sexes is proclaimed in the USSR, a separate sphere of journalistic production for women is suspect.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) has long recognized the ideological importance of controlling the media. The daily and periodical press aim to mold a certain type of citizen, the "New Soviet Individual," who is the "chief hero of the press." Presentation of role models is one aspect of the educative nature of the Soviet press, and one which is particularly apparent in the case of the women's press. The Soviet journalists' handbook states the aim of *Rabotnitsa* as "the cultural and political education of working women and housewives, mobilizing them to fulfill tasks established by the CPSU." *Rabotnitsa* and

Krestyanka are both published by *Pravda*, the CPSU's publishing house, presumably under the auspices of the journals section of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

WHAT WOMEN READ

Rabotnitsa and *Krestyanka* have the largest print-runs of all Soviet periodicals. In 1980 *Rabotnitsa* printed almost 14 million copies, and *Krestyanka*, aimed at the smaller rural female population, six and a half million. An increasing print-run, plus difficulty in locating either of the magazines at Moscow newspaper kiosks, would imply that the female population of 141.6 million is willing to absorb more.

Like all Soviet publications, both are replete with references to the state and party organizations, their decrees, meetings, history and their leading and guiding role in Soviet development. These are supplemented by photographs and drawings of Lenin, references to his life and writings, and a preoccupation with the Great Patriotic War (World War II).

Much of the content of *Krestyanka* shows the concern of the Soviet government with agricultural problems: low levels of productivity; under-mechanization; rural migration; and an unskilled work force. Most of the articles on rural life center on the work histories of individuals and collectives, many of whom are champion producers or Heroes of Socialist Labor, and are presented as role models for the readership.

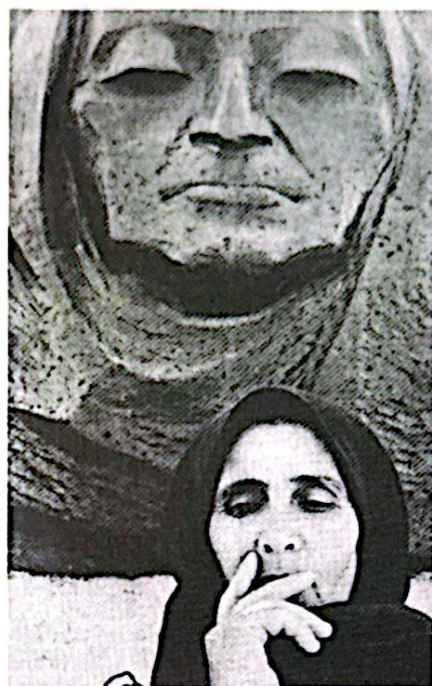
The content of *Rabotnitsa* is quite similar. Since it is designed to appeal to a different audience, the urban working woman rather than the agricultural worker, its articles feature different occupations—welders (No.1, 1979), locomotive workers (No.12, 1978) and chemists (No.3, 1979).

Both publications frequently feature biographical articles on women who were involved in the Revolution or who were activists in the Great Patriotic War. These present an historical perspective of Soviet life, serve to legitimize the government, and build a sense of shared history and political culture. This function is also served in articles such as "I am a citizen of the USSR," in which an electricity worker elected to the Supreme Soviet writes about her pride in her country and her citizenship.

Women's magazines also encourage improvement in the economy with articles like one in *Rabotnitsa*, (No.1, 1980), that discusses the work of two women "leaders of socialist emulation" and state prize winners. One, a worker in a china factory, was instrumental in increasing the output of her work collective by 120-130%. The other, "short, feminine, with a lacy collar on her overalls," was a power station worker. Her workshop motto was "efficient rhythm and highest quality for minimum labor and material expenditure."

For its part, *Krestyanka* directs clear messages to its readership about increased productivity, improved qualifications for agricultural workers, and the importance of new methods. The women workers appearing in its pages are usually specialists—

АЛІМАНАХ



ЖЕНЩИНА И РОССИЯ

Besides the official press, occasional underground publications emerge. In December 1979, *Women in Russia*, a feminist almanac, was illegally published by a group of women in *samizdat* form. *Samizdat* means self-publishing and involves typing the originals in multiple carbon copies that circulate through underground networks to people who retype them—creating more copies for further circulation.

Collaborators risk extended sentences in jail or forced exile. Within a broad commitment to feminist solidarity, the articles, short stories and poetry expose various aspects of the situation of women in the USSR. Essays in the *Almanac* range from expressed theoretical items to graphic descriptions of actual work-day and prison conditions. Mysticism and an emphasis on women's sorrow are also prevalent in the *Almanac*. In spite of the fact that *Women in Russia* has ideologically little in common with the women's movement in the West, it has received enormous publicity.

skilled workers—although agriculture has the lowest number of female specialists of any of the major branches of the economy. Thus, the female agricultural worker in *Krestyanka* is not typical of the female work force to whom the magazine is directed, but represents a model for the readers to emulate. Rarely discussed are the problems faced by rural women as they combine paid employment with work in their private market gardens and domestic tasks usually without the aid of services and domestic appliances, available to their urban counterparts.

Soviet women's magazines do not discuss sexuality. There are no "problems" pages, no "advice" columns, not even serious educational articles. A typical coy piece in *Rabotnitsa* (No.2, 1978) discusses the work of a "sexologist" who provides "consultations on problems of family life" almost solely in terms of improving husband-wife relations and strengthening the family. In recent years Soviet sociologists and psychologists have been critical of the inadequacy of provisions for sex education, suggesting that ignorance in sexual matters is one reason for the increasing divorce rate.

In the USSR, much of women's paid work is an extension of mothering, nurturing, and domestic servicing activities—women are 89% of public health employees, 72% of school teachers and 99.5% of child care workers. Women in political office are similarly clustered in "housekeeping" activities—the ideological, cultural and educational posts which are not normally congruent with higher office.

Soviet women's magazines assist the maintenance of women's two roles as they are presently constituted by publicizing the Soviet concept of femininity—the successful and harmonious combination of domestic and professional activities. The reality of the "New Soviet Woman" lies in the grafting of full-time paid work onto the traditional wife/mother and housewife activities. Women are, by Soviet definition, workers, wives, mothers and housewives, hence the magazines "The Woman Worker" and "The Peasant Woman" are implicitly and simultaneously entitled "The Working Mother/Housewife" and "The Peasant Mother/Housewife."

The Soviet press is not sex-exclusive unless it is for women, and only those publications directed at women include advice on buying children's clothes, preserving vegetables and removing stains from furniture. Soviet women's magazines condone and confirm the sexual divisions in Soviet society. □

Further reading:

- "Russian Feminists Challenge Phallocracy," interview with Tatyana Mamonova, "off our backs," December 1980.
- "Women in Russia," excerpts from a book concerning women in Soviet prisons, "Newsfront International," No. 236, May 1980.
- "Women and Russia: First Feminist Samizdat," review by Nora Neumark, "Scarlet Woman," an Australian socialist feminist magazine, Spring 1981.

Shortcut to Equality

Reading Eastern Europe's official press conveys the image that women have achieved equality. Ignoring the reality of women's everyday lives, emphasis is placed on laws and statistics related to women's position in society.

The following is excerpted from an article by Elena Lagadiova, President of the Committee of the Movement of Bulgarian Women, to "inform readers of *Women of the Whole World* of the present situation of Bulgarian women...on occasion of the 1,300th anniversary of the establishment of the Bulgarian State."

Somewhat more than three decades ago, the majority of Bulgarian women did not have any political or civic rights. About 85% of them were peasant women living on a scanty plot of land which hardly enabled them to make a living. Very often, they had to bring up the children without any help. Women experts with high school or college training made up no more than one per cent of the active population of our country. However, this fact did not prevent the Bulgarian women from finding the right way to break out of conservatism and mental blindness and from joining the revolutionary struggle of the people for social justice and equality in all spheres of life. And they have struggled with revolutionary enthusiasm and devotion on the side of their brothers, husbands and sons.

In seeking to characterize the social portrait of the Bulgarian woman today, one becomes aware of the fact that, within one generation, a wonder occurred: in the first days of the Bulgarian revolution—in September 1944—we, the Bulgarian women, started on our way towards that wonder with a sheet of paper in our hands, namely the "decree on the Mutual Adaptation of The Rights of Persons of Both Sexes," which contained the following laconic paragraph: "...persons of both sexes to enjoy equal rights in all fields of economic, political, cultural and social life." The decree was a permit for our way into life, enabling us to overcome our social inferiority complexes, to break with the traditions of centuries, to rely on our own strength and to gain self-confidence.

While in 1946 the number of women workers and employees amounted to 162,538, today there are two million women—that is 50% of all working people—participating in social production.

The latest Bulgarian census, carried out in 1975, showed that 37% of all active Bulgarian women have graduated from high schools or universities—the percentage regarding women aged under 40 years even being 48%. Women's share in industry is 48.5%, in agriculture 48.9%, in science and scientific supervising 51.3%, in education and culture 71.3%, and in the health care system 75.2%. The cooperation of Bulgarian women in the management of state and society, in top positions of science and culture and in leading bodies in all spheres and on all levels, is a general fact and no mere accident. It is the rule and not the exception. Almost 25% of all leading cadres in factories, institutions and organizations are women.

The progressive nature of this process is not only manifested by facts and figures concerning the employment rate. The equality of Bulgarian women is a matter of course—both for the women themselves and the people as a whole—it is part and parcel of the way of life and of the whole social process, the basic idea being that women have to be saved—once and for all—from doing only domestic work. The majority of women would never renounce going to work. It is quite obvious that the Bulgarian woman—having experienced the advantages of social work—considers it to be a necessity of life. It is by going out to work that she realizes that she is an equal partner of full social value. Her mental horizon is widened, her experience extended, and she gets accustomed to thinking and acting in the interest of society. She learns to understand that freedom also entails great responsibility.

Motherhood was already recognized by the constitution as a social function a few years after the revolution. And despite the difficulties of the first post war years, the government in those days started to pursue a consequent social policy enabling women to successfully reconcile motherhood and increasing professional activity. In 1973, the Politbureau of the central committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the State Council of the People's Republic of Bulgaria worked out and adopted a document entitled "Basic Rules

for Promoting the Role of Women with regard to the Construction of the Developed Socialist Society." Its consequent implementation created even more favorable conditions for the Bulgarian woman, so that she can reconcile her role as mother with her professional work and can mentally and professionally develop. In addition to maternity leave lasting 120 days for the first child, 150 days for the second, 180 days for the third and 120 days for every further child, every mother, since 1973, has enjoyed additional paid time off to look after the children, the length being dependent on the number of children.

Mother and father have the right to a 60 days paid leave per year to look after a sick child up to its 16th birthday. If the sick child is not yet seven, the mother or father receives full pay for that leave. The greater part of the costs for child care facilities, which are of great help for the family, is born by the government. Seventy-five per cent of all infants between three and seven years attend a kindergarten, 19% of the under three years are accommodated in creches.

The Bulgarian woman of today is well aware of her role and contribution, she is well aware of her responsibility—not only with regard to her own life and the life of her family. Living in troubled times she knows quite well that she has to bear a great responsibility. That's why the vital questions of mankind—above all the most important—the safeguarding of peace—are reflected in her thoughts and activities. There are no national or international actions carried out in connection with the defense of peace, the struggle for the easing of tension, for the cessation of the arms race, for detente and for understanding and cooperation among the peoples, that are not supported by the Bulgarian women—a fact that fully corresponds to the active peace policy of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. □

Further reading:

• "Women of the Whole World," journal of the Women's International Democratic Federation, Unter den Linden 13, 108 East Berlin, GDR.

For the Sake of Re-Production

Abortion as the last means of birth control is common to women all over the world. Women's rights to control their bodies is determined by a country's need to manipulate its population. But no matter whether legal or illegal, women have always managed to find a way.

Letter from a Hungarian to a friend in France

From *Women in Eastern Europe Newsletter*, English-language feminist publication on Eastern Europe, no.3, 1980.)

I want to tell you about the abortion petition campaign in which I was involved

in the summer of 1973. It all began one day in mid July when Katie and I were walking near the faculty. We bumped into Istvan who, as usual, was running off somewhere. He had enough time to tell us that at the last party assembly the question of the Hungarian birth rate had come up. The

adopted liberal abortion laws. A result was a dramatic increase in the number of legal abortions and a drop in the birthrate. In Hilda Scott's book, *Does Socialism Liberate Women*, an examination of government policy and the lives of Eastern European women, she describes this situation: "The states that had believed they were making motherhood a blessing that could be combined with self-fulfillment in other spheres of life, found themselves at the beginning of the 1960s with staggering abortion rates and some of the lowest birthrates in the world. The result has been a prolonged tug-of-war, in which women's rights are emphasized on the one side and population requirements on the other."

Women's rights lost out. The pendulum swung back again and abortion regulations were tightened in Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. In East Germany an immigrant labor force was used to compensate for declining population rates. □

branch secretary had announced that as far back as February the central committee had adopted a resolution which would lead to a change in the abortion law. The branch had to give its approval and make proposals as to the implementation of the changes to come. According to Istvan this announcement had elicited an icy response.

To understand this response you have to know something about the history of the abortion law. Between 1951 and 1956, in conjunction with plans for industrialization the government decided to make abortion illegal, in the same way it had been between the wars and is today, for example, in Rumania. The pill did not exist then and condoms were withdrawn from sale. You can imagine how pressure to bring children into the world became a new source of family dramas.

In June 1956—in the midst of political crisis—the government abolished those practices and passed a law allowing abortion on demand to be put into effect.

You can probably understand better now how the central committee had touched a sore spot. No one, not even those most disappointed by the deficiencies of "liberalism" since '56, could imagine that the right to abortion could be done away with.

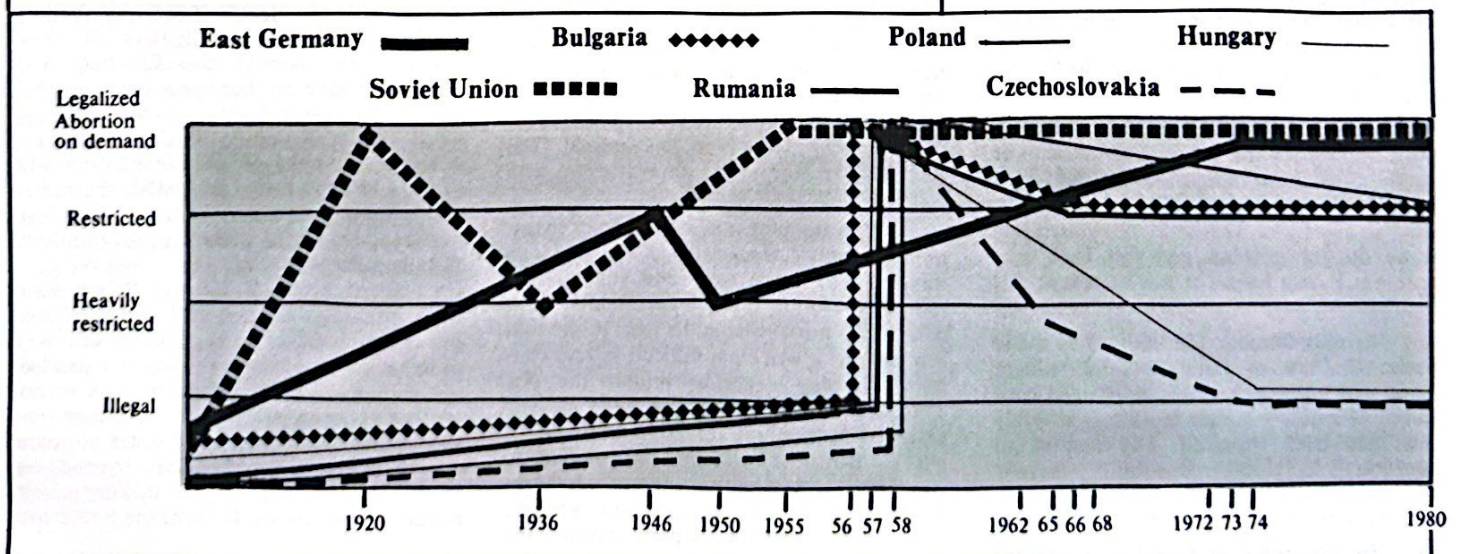
After a few days all our close friends knew that we had to do something. We wanted to initiate some action which would be able to go beyond the circle of intellectuals where the idea for such action had originated. It was not the intellectuals who would be the first to be affected by abortion being made illegal, for us there is always

(Compiled from *Does Socialism Liberate Women?*, Hilda Scott, Beacon Press, 1978; *Family Planning and Abortion in the Socialist Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, Henry David, The Population Council, NY, 1970; *Induced Abortion: 1979*, Christopher Tietze, The Population Council, NY.)

ABORTION RIGHTS

The Soviet Union was the first country to legalize abortion on demand in 1920. Sixteen years later this progressive legislation was reversed. Abortion was made a criminal offense except for compelling medical and eugenic reasons. Included in the law restricting abortion was a provision to increase aid to mothers. This legislation was one part of a move backwards toward a strict moral code that glorified motherhood and "healthy family relationships."

In 1955 the law restricting abortion was repealed. Most of Eastern Europe, with the exception of East Germany, also



some loop-hole. Abortion being made illegal would most harshly effect women from the lower classes who, surprised by the new law (discussions of the proposals remained secret), would be obliged either to bring unwanted children into the world, or to resort to illegal methods. We wanted some action that could inform people and provoke a mass reaction which would put some pressure on the people drawing up the law.

We drew up a letter to our representatives in which we affirmed our support for the present law on abortion and presented arguments to refute the rationale for limitation of abortion on demand. The line pursued in our petition was the following: if the government estimates that Hungary must increase its population, the solution lies not in withdrawing the right to abortion for women, but in creating economic and social conditions which will make people want to raise several children.

At the same time the spirit of the petition implicitly recognized that women must have equality within the family itself, for most of us in fact wished for an end to the traditional family.

I had one of the most interesting and richly instructive experiences of this campaign with journalists from *Nok Lapja* (The Women's Magazine). I made an appointment with one of their editorial staff in order to show her the petition. She read it through and was almost in tears giving her refusal, explaining that she would be fired at once if she signed. She told me that over the last 15 days since the magazine had been informed of the central committee decision, the editorial staff had gone totally to pieces. She said that up until then the magazine had had to fight for women's rights, for women to be assured of economic independence, for hospitals to do abortions properly, etc., but overnight "they" wanted the absolute opposite to be written by the very same journalists. "You need to have a very strong stomach," she muttered more to herself than to me.

By August 25 we had collected 1553 signatures and set up meetings to present the petition to the local representatives. We got the text of the petition and the pages of signatures to the President of the Parliament and thus the whole affair, as far as it concerned us, was over. One of the most exciting periods of my life had come to an end.

From September 10 onwards we were waiting for the police, in one form or another, to show themselves. Nothing happened. No one spoke of continuing our work in any form. This little movement had come out of nothing and fell back into nothing. It was hard for me to accept this indifference.

In mid October the authorities made public the law of family politics, which, along with other measures, reinforced control of abortion—though much less severely than had been expected. The cost of an abortion increased five-fold, thereby becoming half the monthly salary of an average worker.

In November at a central committee

meeting the petition campaign was accused of being part of a counter-revolutionary plot, singling out my husband as a leader. He lost his job as a result. We were not greatly surprised that the first secretary of the party imagined that a man had been behind a feminist action.

Abortion: A Privilege?

(Translated from *Sozialistisches Osteuropakomitee*, West German quarterly, August 1979.)

My abortion experiences in Rumania are not totally normal, but they are typical of the experiences every woman in my country goes through. My difficulty in finding a doctor, getting together enough money, overcoming fear, and having five abortions between the ages of 18 and 23—all that is normal for Rumanian women. Although my experiences are typical, I must add that if I remain healthy and alive after all my experimental abortions, it is because I have a somewhat privileged position.

My parents were Communist Party members before 1939 and fought with the Underground during World War II. After 1945 they were rewarded with good jobs which gave them privileges, such as special health care. These privileges extended to their children even after my parents lost their high posts in the "housecleaning" of 1952.

MY FIRST ABORTION

I got pregnant for the first time during the summer of 1966. I hadn't been careful. At the time, as now, we only had the most simple forms of birth control: condoms, rhythm method, taking one's temperature, douching with lemon juice or vinegar, or simply coitus interruptus. I had "sinned" on a "forbidden" day and ended up pregnant.

My first abortion took place in the period before it became illegal. All I had to do was to go to the hospital—my mother had spoken earlier with the doctor—and pay 30 lei; at the time, the average monthly income was 1,500 lei. I was put to sleep, and when I awoke the world was again in order. That same year, in the fall of 1966, the right to abortion was repealed. Abortions were only permitted in the case of rape. In 1968 the law was modified to include women who already had four children or who were over 45-years-old. The final decision, however, always rested with a special pregnancy committee.

With the new law came stricter measures of control, especially in the first few months. The worst was—and still is—that the pill and other modern methods of birth control are not available. In fact, in the first few months it was even difficult to find condoms. It was illegal to import the pill. Travelers entering Rumania were heavily searched by customs for contraceptives. It got so bad that women who wanted to travel abroad first had to undergo a gynecological examination to ascertain whether they were pregnant. Upon return, the

At the end of May disciplinary procedures took place in the faculty over my activities which were said to be "contrary to the demographic politics of the People's Republic of Hungary". As a result I was expelled forever from all the universities in the country.

women were again examined to check if they had broken the law and had an abortion outside the country. This was the beginning of an intimidation campaign.

MY SECOND ABORTION

I got pregnant again in the spring of 1969. I began to discover the different ways one could get rid of this "thing" without having an abortion. I learned about lifting heavy objects and taking hot baths, in fact, so hot that one must get drunk before hand. There are also horrible attempts that sometimes end tragically. One young woman near Bucharest tried to perform a primitive suction method with a vacuum cleaner. She died of internal bleeding.

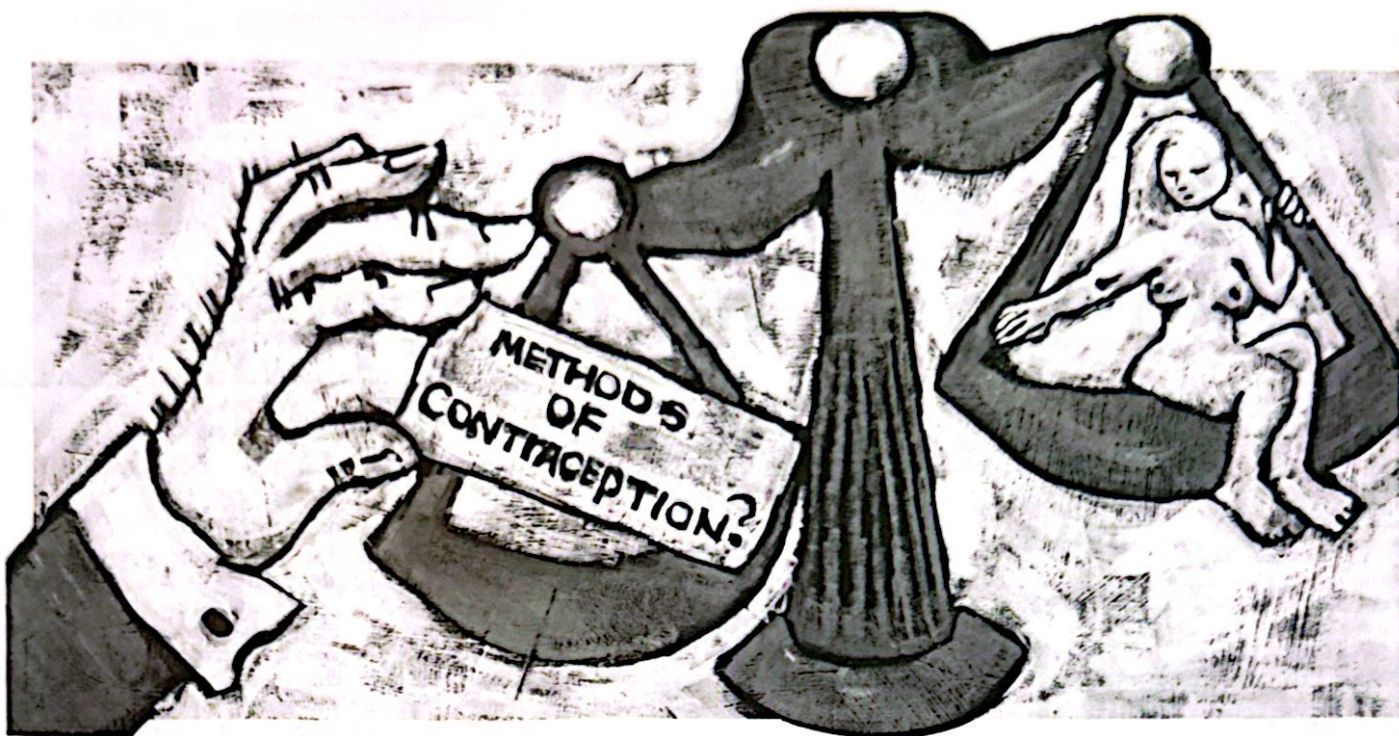
The hot baths, the large quantities of vodka, the heavy lifting and the overdose of quinine did not help. Since neither my friend nor I had the money to pay for an expensive illegal abortion (between 3-5,000 lei) I was forced to tell my parents. Fortunately, my mother was friends with a gynecologist who performed the abortion for free after hours in his office. The fear that I was going to be caught was felt by everyone involved. In case something unforeseen might happen, I only received a local anesthetic. The operation hurt a lot but only lasted five minutes and went well. After it was over, I promised myself, and my mother, that the next time I would really be careful, since I now knew how bad it could be.

MY THIRD AND FOURTH ABORTIONS

I kept the promise for a whole year. I got pregnant again in the spring of 1970. My mother was no longer around to help me—she had left the country. Things looked bad.

I went to a doctor at the special clinic for former Underground fighters and their families, and begged him for help and advice. He gave me hormone shots which I had already used during my second pregnancy and irradiation in the abdominal area. After three weeks of daily irradiation and shots, I lost the baby. As feared, the radiation caused a severe inflammation in my ovaries. Up until today I suffer from chronic inflammations.

I got pregnant for the fourth time only three months later, in July 1970. I was too embarrassed to go back to my doctor. I didn't want to tell my aunt whom I was living with then. I decided to go back to my mother's friend who had performed the second abortion. This time he did not dare do the operation in his office. Instead, he tried to provoke bleeding by sticking a long needle up my uterus. He sent me home and



said I should wait two to three days. If I started to bleed or get feverish, I should immediately go to the clinic since I was then eligible for a legal abortion for health reasons.

The fever came. I checked in to clinic with a temperature of 38°C [100.4°F]. My doctor advised me not to try to bring the fever down and sent me to the hospital with the diagnosis "endangered pregnancy." He also told me to try to see Dr. X, who was supposed to be very nice and understood what was happening. That went smoothly, but the doctor could not recommend an abortion since he was obligated to try to save the baby. That night my temperature climbed to 41°C [105.8°F] and I started to hemorrhage severely. The next morning I received a "legal" abortion.

MY FIFTH ABORTION

Today I look back and it seems impossible that I got pregnant a third time in 1970. By then, I was too tired to search for a free abortion and too embarrassed to go back to any of the doctors who had helped me in the past. I did not want to hear, "Can't you be careful?!"

Four years had passed since the anti-abortion law was put into effect. Doctors and patients had adjusted to the new situation. It was now easier to get an illegal abortion. Everyone knew "somebody"—a doctor, a midwife, a medical student—for a price. I knew of a doctor who some of my friends had gone to. I told my aunt that I was pregnant and needed 4,000 lei. She immediately gave me the money. Twice the doctor postponed the operation. Finally, the day came and I learned what had become "usual" in the last four years for so many women in Rumania. I had to go alone; I was not allowed to know the doctor's name and the abortion was to be performed in someone's apartment. And at the door I had to use a special signal.

Upon arrival I received a sedative and a local anesthetic. A long low coffee table, with books placed under two of its legs to create a tilt, served as an operating table. Two stools held my legs. A bucket was at the lower end of the table. A tape recorder was turned up loud. Two unknown men, only one of whom was a doctor, performed the operation. From the previous abortions I had learned how much it could hurt and that it would all be over in five or ten minutes. This time it hurt more and seemed like it would never end. The doctor was swearing, the assistant held my hand attempting to calm me, but the tape recorder could not drown my moans. After a half hour, which seemed like eternity, it was over. Before being sent home, I was allowed to rest awhile on the couch. Compared to the other abortions, the pains continued and I felt terrible. I was extremely pale, and I had a fever the next morning. When my temperature did not go down the next day, I became concerned and went to my doctor at the clinic. He examined me and found that half the fetus was still in me. He immediately sent me to the hospital and I was lucky to get Dr. X again.

After I told him the story, he said to me: "Hopefully, your uterus is not punctured. From the color of your face I'm afraid it might be."

On the next day I received my second curettage during which the doctor discovered that my uterus had been punctured and I was bleeding internally. I was operated on within a half hour.

Everything went so quickly that there was no time to conceal the matter. The doctor was forced to inform the police of the operation. An official representative of the police was present during the operation and when I woke up he was at my bedside. The first interrogation began. I told him I did not know what had happened. He said that the "case" was so clear that there was

no need for an interrogation or confession. I only needed to say who had performed the abortion.

After ten days I was released from the hospital. At home I found a summons. I went to the police and maintained my story that I had not done anything and did not know how the puncture had occurred. About every three days I had to report to the police always with the same tiresome questions. One time I was taken to the Institute for Legal Medicine where I met with the doctor who was at the operation as the official representative of the police. He told me I did not have a chance.

In the meantime, my whole family and all my friends had been informed about the incident. I was threatened with a three-year prison sentence. With the help of Dr. X, I tried to find a solution. Finally help came from my parents' friends who were friends with one of the highest judges in the country. They called him and explained the situation: "The daughter of R., you remember him. We fought together in the Underground, etc., etc. Well, anyway, the daughter is in trouble..." He promised to take care of everything.

At the next interrogation, there was a new official. He said that he had the task of resolving the case fairly. "We must find a way to bring this to a good ending." I went with him again to the Institute for Legal Medicine and to Dr. X. A medical explanation of the perforation was patched together. On December 12, 18 days before the 23rd anniversary of the founding of the Republic, the case was dropped due to insufficient evidence. My new investigator whispered to me that I would not have gone to jail anyway, since there was an amnesty in honor of the 23rd anniversary. He still wanted to know whether I was really innocent. I reassured him that I was. □

The Incongruous Shadow

Rumanian poet Nina Cassian has written over 50 books of poetry and prose. Her poems are marked by boldness and a bitter irony. Rumanian critics say that "she tries to deny her feminine universe."

Besides being a writer, Nina Cassian is also a composer of symphonic and chamber music, an art and film critic, and a translator. She has received two awards for her children's literature: the 1950 State Prize and the 1969 Writer's Union award. Although she has been translated into several European languages, her poetry has only recently been made available in English. In Spring 1982, at the invitation of her English translator Laura Schiff, Nina Cassian came to the United States for the first time. The following is excerpted from an interview conducted by Clare Wellnitz and Shana Ritter for *Connections*.

My first book was published in 1947. The bourgeois capitalist publishers were still there, but they had begun to flirt with the communists. I have been a communist since I was 15—before the system was established and while it was still a great risk. Many of my friends were arrested, although I was not. The publisher who took my book told my husband that he was going to publish it, not because I was a communist, but because he liked my poetry, well, I don't know what the real reason was...But, communism was an ideal for me. I was not a big fanatic, but I was a small one. The party was always right. So, I was very confused when I immediately ran into problems.

My first book was...I can't quite describe it. It was a fantasy book, very colorful, with humor, and so on. And this was just the moment when the party or perhaps history, I can't say which, decided that we had to write in a way that could be understood by everybody. It was the Stalinist time. Of course, this was absurd; my vocabulary could not be understood by everybody—by the masses. So, I was punished for my first book. They wrote articles in the newspapers, they called me names: "an enemy of the people." It was 1948, I was 21 years old and as a beginning it was not very enjoyable. It was the first shock.

Then something happened. I wrote four or five books, very bad ones. I did not write them out of fear, or because they told me I had to. I persuaded myself that, "ah yes, now I must write for the people." And I wrote with conviction. I applied restraint to my vocabulary: not precisely "84 words,"

but not many more—only words that everyone could understand, and no metaphors. Still they were always angry with me. In a poem about Lenin, I wrote simply that he sat writing at his desk, and some sunshine filtered through the window and made his inkwell appear like a blue light bulb...This caused a scandal: "Lenin was a pretext for you! You wanted to write about the ink and the light bulb!" It was really a crazy time. But everything I tried, I tried sincerely, and that was the worst of it. I could have simply played the game and lined my drawers with poems, but no, I was there. So honest, so convinced...My conscience was clean, only my talent was gone. All my poems from this time were bad, and I threw them away. This took a long time, maybe eight years. Then, I couldn't write at all, any more. It was over with poetry for three years. I did only music, because notes cannot be found in the dictionary. They can't ask me, what do you mean, do you make allusions...So, with music I could survive. I mean inside.

I WRITE WHAT I WANT

At the end of three years, the hard winter was over and there was a melting. Stalin had died, and there was an opening, words I had banished and despised came back to me, little by little. Then it was like an avalanche—books, books, books, one after another. And again, poetry. We had five wonderful years from 1965 to 1970. We enjoyed an amazing freedom, and we all used this freedom to write as we wished.

In 1970 and '71, however, things changed. I can't say it is exactly censorship...Certain types of literature are flourishing: Aesopian literature, fables with allusions—a kind of literary hypocrisy, but not in the bad meaning of the word. I have to enjoy the chaos that exists now, because it is this chaos which makes it possible for good literature to be produced. During Stalin, everything was very clear—black or white. Now, it's such a mess, that in that mess we can survive! Personally, I write what I want to write. I don't publish all I write. But what I publish, is what I wanted to write, and it is there.

I have been a free-lancer since I was 22 years old. In the socialist countries it's not we who pay for being published. We are paid. The attitude of the government

towards artists, and poets and so on, is a very healthy and noble one. We have a social status, we are not pariahs, and we are not just playing for others' entertainment. We are considered professionals who must be paid. Once, we were very well paid. But not any more in Rumania, although they continue to be in other socialist countries. I never compare myself with Switzerland or the United States, I compare myself with my neighbors and with the socialist countries. In Hungary, for instance, it's fantastic! I envy Hungary, it's a paradise. In Rumania, we take all of the worst things from the capitalist countries including the practice of not paying writers a subsidy. It started in 1970 and 1971 and it is becoming worse. "Why royalties, for what? For writing poetry? Anybody can write a poem. We don't need it. You can't feed people with a poem"...So, now we are only paid for what we publish, but I have never had to wash dishes to support myself.

There are an increasing number of women writers, especially poets, but also prose writers. Some are very interesting, and should be known. But there is an historical problem. We have not had access to this creativity. We have always been creative, but we have not always been allowed, due to social pressures and prejudices to express it. So, now we are really newcomers with such an appetite, and probably more energy than the men. The energy we haven't been allowed to spend for centuries is now exploding.

I BEGIN TO SEE SOME CHANGE

And there is a problem with discrimination. Critics treat us differently than men, and the majority of critics are men. It is a matter of vocabulary. For instance, if a poet is a good one and a man, they write: "He is so strong, he has such a vision, he is deep, penetrating, in the essence of things," and so on. If a woman writes a good book of poems they say: "She is pretty sensitive and writes so delicately about her feminine universe." Everything is linked to this word, "feminine." When they say of me, "She proves herself to have such a feminine attitude"...I say, "Thank you for your adjective. That will help me get married. But what has that to do with objective value, with the aesthetic value of what I am writ-

SELF-PORTRAIT

I was given this strange triangle face,
this icicle head, this face
for the prow of a pirate's ship
with long moon-like hair on the skull.

I was given to walk this violent shape
wandering from night to day,
wounding the retinas of any who see
the incongruous shadow I make on walls.

What am I? Ancestors, kin reject me.
Briefly they join with races
black, white, yellow, red to reject me.
Even the species won't have me.

And only when I'm hurt and scream
and only when I freeze
and only when time fills me with sin
—they call me beautiful. They call me human



ing?" It is a stamp! We are not just there with the others—men and women—we need a special chapter in the history of literature. They are still surprised we are there—the men—and a little uncomfortable.

My colleagues, women writers and poets, are preoccupied with this problem, and really, we must have solidarity. In the beginning I did not feel this way. I was with everybody. What difference did it make if I was a woman? Moreover, it was easier to find somebody valuable among men than among women. Little by little, however, I became aware that I had to assume my role as a woman and be with my sisters. I said, "How can I be on the side of the executioner? I am on the side of the victim, of course!" And we are still victims. As long as we are victims, I have to be on the side of the victim.

The government says: "We are doing everything that is necessary for women, so how, why a feminist movement, to fight against whom?...We agree with the development of women in all of the professions...We are supporting them..." and so on. And they are right. The laws are there, only it doesn't really happen. The most wonderful law in the world can't change a mentality automatically, and habit and tradition. With the liberation of women, I sometimes wonder how they manage, because really, she has much more trouble than ever. She works sometimes 18 hours a day at her job, and then the burden of the house, of course, it's hers. And this

is really a problem, because she must stand in lines for hours and hours to buy food, and we do not have washing machines as good as yours, and she has to take care of her family, the children, and so on. I begin to see some change. The man begins little by little, to help, but only because he can't avoid it. He wants to eat so...for purely selfish reasons. And women, they do not enjoy this change either. Marx said about women that in history they had two positions: they were either beasts of burden, or luxury dolls. Well, no one wants to be a beast of burden, but a luxury doll...?

I was recently appointed president of a "Feminine Club." These are women's clubs, which were established about ten years ago in factories and work places. The women are mostly very young and they want to learn how to cook, how to apply make-up, and so on. I ask them, "Why are you doing this? To prove that you are really just feminine in the ancient way? Why?" I try to talk to them, and tell them to be aware of their situation and to have aspirations for something better. Probably, because of my communist background, I am interested in educating people, to make them see more clearly and be more conscious. I say these same things on the radio when I have interviews. We do not have a feminist movement in my country, but we are not forbidden from saying such things. It's a mentality and an attitude and we speak openly. We don't talk about abortion, for instance, and sometimes we put a veil on what we say, but we are still saying it.

Several years ago, it was a problem to get any kind of birth control. It was decided that our population should be larger, and a woman was expected to produce four children. This expectation is still in effect, but it is no longer so scrupulously enforced. Abortion is, of course, illegal, and it is now more difficult to get one. In the past, an illegal abortion might be performed by a midwife in a village, and it was a good source of income for doctors in the cities. I was shocked to find out that abortions had been illegal in the United States. I said, "How come? No, I can't believe it! Here in the United States of America? Which of your presidents had this big idea? You want to be more and more, why? The world is crowded enough!"

Now I tell you my science fiction theory. Women can't be equal to men until we take from us what is needed, and from our lover what is needed and put it in the incubator, and then we have to spend the same time to have a child as the men. And not he, ten or five minutes, and we, nine months. Until then, real equality is impossible. □

Further reading:

- "Blue Apple," poems by Nina Cassian, Cross-Cultural Communications, N.Y., 1981.
- "Lady of Miracles," poems by Nina Cassian, Cloud Marauder Press, Berkeley, soon to be published.
- "The Penguin Book of Women Poets," edited by Cosman, Keefe and Weaver, Penguin Books, 1978.

Good Morning, My Lovely

Good Morning, My Lovely, a book composed of interviews with East German women, reveals their experiences and their dreams. The stories caused a stir on both sides of the border, but because of their authenticity, they could not easily be dismissed.

Ruth B., 22, waitress, single, one child:
What I really can't stand is this American way of talking about everything—that's perverse. I once was involved with an American, and after only three days he wanted to crawl into the most secluded corners of my soul. Everything in a person has to be beautiful, has to have style somehow. What do you think of when you hear "beautiful"? Well, Stalin, for example—he was a beautiful man. My mother really liked that man. His picture was in her bedroom—in a golden frame. Well, when that was no longer acceptable, she hid him in her linen closet. And how I used to sit by the open door of the closet, and how gloomily Papa Stalin looked down on me! I never had to be afraid of my father, he never even knew what I did. But I often had a bad conscience around Stalin.

"You do this wrong, and that you do wrong, too, and look at X." In school it was that way. What was inside of me, they never saw. But I am not really difficult, I just don't swallow what they offer me. I want to find myself, and not somebody else—such as my little philistine of a step-brother. He was often pointed out to me as an example—to be somebody, to have security. Such types are not at all different from my grandmother in West Germany. But he has a leading position. Sometimes I ask myself: What kind of a society are we building? Everybody has a dream. People are born, and they have dreams. My dream is that people treat each other like human beings; then there will be no egoism, no envy, no distrust. We will be a community of friends. Well, then there would have to be somebody who will accept me.

Berta H., 74, married, one son:
Oh, I got to know Karl and Rosa; I saw them speaking in person. It was really interesting with those two. This Rosa Luxemburg—she really impressed me. I spent so much time by myself, and there were no better educated people around me. I thought a lot about everything. I said so my sister, "Someone like this Rosa who I thought a lot about everything." When I encountered only once in your life! When ever she spoke, I was always there. I still can see her standing there: dark hair pulled back, a pink blouse, and a blue pleated skirt. She always looked stooped over to me. But what a big mouth she had! That was really amazing. I always thought about whether it could happen, you know, the things she was talking about—she really had quite good ideas, this Rosa—I never would have dreamed that I would actually see it happen. I only thought: things look really bad for us. And then, when they drowned her, in the canal, oh my god!

Guidrun R., 18, highschool student:

"You are the future cadres"—that's what we hear in school every day. We get so dizzy with all that praise. But when a teacher says, "Are there any questions?" there are, of course, none. In political education, I once signed up to give a report on order to attack this damned indifference around here. I really worked hard and I brought in a lot of my own thoughts. The teacher was thrilled. The students were well-behaved and listened. But I had the feeling I had not accomplished anything, and I was deeply disappointed. How is that possible? I think, it is partly the teacher's fault. In political education, I sometimes have the feeling that the teacher herself does not really understand. When we want to discuss truth, we are told, "That is not necessary for the final exam: you don't have to bother." But I am interested in such things. It is our first contact with philosophy, and some start thinking immediately that this is something abstract and dry, and we will never in our lives need it. I feel stupid when I ask questions. And then the questions are answered in such a way that you lose all desire to ask another question. People just accept the stuff they are taught; nobody expects anything special from the teacher. What you don't understand, you'll look over again at home. Before, there used to be open criticism of the teachers, too.

Our clergyman has the kind of personal contact with people which the teachers don't have. One guy in my class wanted to study theology because the clergyman is so great and does not argue against Marxism in such a primitive way. He doesn't say, "There is no question; it is of no use." If the teachers were able to make Marxism as interesting as this clergyman does religion, then the clergyman would be out of work. Young people like to argue; that's nothing unusual. They don't want ready-made truths which they just have to swallow.

"I was interested in finding out how women see their personal history, how they imagine their lives. [By doing such interviews] one learns to respect the uniqueness of each human life. One will then listen more closely, and have fewer prejudices and use fewer clichés. Maybe this book would have never happened if I had not been a good listener," writes Maxie Wander, the journalist who conducted the following interviews. Maxie Wander was born in Vienna, Austria in 1933 and moved to East Germany in 1958, where she lived until she died of cancer in 1977.

"If the depressing side seems prevalent in the accounts, it might be due to the fact that few people have the need to talk about the happy events in their lives. We live our happiness, but we have to talk about our worries—to understand them better, to free ourselves from them."

Doris L., 30, elementary school teacher, one child:

Werner, my husband, is a tool-mechanic. He started university, but he stopped because of me, because I wanted to continue. But it was also an excuse. He did not really want to be a student. He likes his profession and he also makes quite a bit of money, so everything is okay.

But of course it also causes problems. When I started university, I was young and didn't know much. I really grew through my studies, and Werner could see that. When he lived by himself, he sent me money, but very little. I accepted that. I mean, at home we could not afford a lot, and when you're a student, you have to be careful with your money. You have to save money for furniture for your future apartment, and you have to pay for room and board. But after three years, I did not accept any more interference. I did not accept the idea of dividing money; I wanted to get out of this restriction, no matter what. I am not a spoiled brat, but there are moments of consumer ecstasy when I go spend 200 marks on books and records to prove to him that I am somebody!

Often, we would not talk for a whole week. Then I try again, very eloquently, to get equal rights. If you earn a lot of money, you don't have to sit on it. You don't necessarily have to save all of it to buy a car; you can also get food for thought. And I really needed to catch up with some chic clothing. We always argued about money. That problem has been solved, but now we are facing other problems, like the bad character traits that are surfacing. I mean, at school you are somebody, and every now and then you have to boss people around. And I often can't stop doing that at home. Stefan, my son, knows that and he can deal with it. But in Werner's case, he wants to be the man somehow. He is a calm partner, but it is often too much for him. Normally, it is I who talks most of the time, and he says, "Yes," or "Oh, cut it out; you always want to be right." And that's the end of that discussion. Sometimes I feel like a worker who has all these suggestions for improvement, but the boss never has time. And then I think, "You can kiss my..." That's the way it is with us. We are fond of each other; neither one has any intention of getting a divorce. But: "Just let her talk, let everything continue the way it is."

Erika D., 41, theater producer, divorced, two children:

But I don't know what this is—a liberated woman. We looked at Goethe's *Faust* the other day and we discovered that the Gretchen story does not move us anymore. Maybe that's what liberation means: that things which used to lead into a catastrophe no longer are a problem; that a woman can say, "If you don't cooperate, I'll do it myself." But that is not easy. My son is too much for me, and sometimes I could knock him down, that's how helpless I feel.

It all sounds so simple, but first the big storm that comes over you when you find yourself all of a sudden alone has to calm down. Twenty-two years never alone. I thought, I'm going crazy! I have to have a man. As if I were out of sheets and I had to get new ones because one has to have sheets, right? My husband used to predict: "You'll never be able to live even three months without a man." And I thought, if he says so, it's probably true. And now I've lived for nearly three years without a man, and I don't have that need anymore, not at all.

But one thing worries me. A dangerous apathy can develop, if you think nothing can happen to you anymore. You just continue to function. If there are no ties, then you lose fear, but there are no highs, and that is terrifying.

Susanne T., 16, highschool student:

The way my father behaves is really bad for me. I always have to listen while he complains about work. I try to understand, but it depresses me when he has annoying problems with the party. In school, they talk about it quite differently. So what's the truth? Sometimes I'm really scared because I cannot believe everything a hundred percent any more, the way I did when I was a child. The other night I had this stupid dream about our headmaster, who always preaches to us about how we are supposed to be. All of a sudden, he wanted to shoot us. There is such enormous pressure in school, you cannot sleep in peace anymore. In the dream, I explained everything to the director. I negotiated with him, as I always do, and then he let us live. In our class, everybody is for socialism. Everybody tries to convince the others of how convinced he or she is. Our state makes mistakes alright, but the principal is flawless. We are sometimes really fanatical.

An important example for us is our history teacher. Even her appearance shows this. She is always dressed in fashion, not at all like a teacher, and she always looks fresh and rested, as if she had no problems with us at all. She does not just work toward a goal, and she does not impose her opinion on us. With her we talk about everything, even about West German television. She does not say, "That's wrong." She says, "It's good that you're so honest. One can only get an opinion of one's own if one can be open and make mistakes."

Further reading:

- "Women in the GDR," in "New German Critique," no. 13, winter 1978.
- "The Quest for Christa T.," English translation of a novel by East German author Christa Wolf, 1971.
- "The Seventh Cross," "Transit," "Revolt of the Fishermen," and "The Dead Stay Young," English translations of novels by Anna Seghers.

Ute G., 24, skilled worker, one child:

We here in the plant send people away to study, and we know they don't really do socially important work—they are just good in their field, and at most, they will later become official leaders. We are actually hurting ourselves. What can we expect from such people? They don't inspire and activate anybody else. And that's like going in cycles. My goal is to educate the people in the collective to a degree that they themselves know really well everything. If you are interested enough in your work so that you want to change something, then you are not there just to wait for the breaks. It really upsets me when I see how people just sleep at work and only wake up during the breaks. Sometimes you are powerless—you can't make people responsible for the fact that there is no material left and that the production is stopped—and that is the saddest thing of all. Sometimes I have the feeling I am lecturing at windmills. We have really difficult people in our class. "Socialism, hurrah!" they do everything as they are told, and now look, how good we are." But basically they are completely reactionary. You have to argue with them scientifically, also a few with whom you can talk in a sensible way—that just makes longer. But I am not in favor of compromises, not at work. With Ralph, my boyfriend, that's something else.



*Nina Hagen,
the queen of German
punk, the self-proclaimed
reincarnation of Edith Piaf, is now
experimenting with a blend of religion and rock.*

"Indescribably Female"

(Translated from *amazonas*, Spanish feminist publication, October 1981.)

1955. Berlin is in ruins. The East Germans begin to construct socialism. Rock begins to call itself rock. And in this year, the year of the goat in the Chinese horoscope, Katarina Hagen is born.

Nina Hagen's childhood is exciting

thanks to her mother, a young successful actress named Eva Maria. She is married to a mediocre novelist who does not support her extravagances. Unable to bear the marriage, she gets divorced when Nina Hagen is two years old. After the divorce, mother and daughter continue to live together.

Little by little, Nina Hagen becomes

an exemplary East German socialist. She enters the Thaelmann pioneers (a communist youth movement). Her mother, an official musical performer, is well liked by the party until she decides to live with Wolf Biermann, a poet and singer whose songs criticize daily life in West Germany. (He has been forbidden to perform in public since 1963.)

It is 1966. Nina Hagen lives in a non-conformist family and has difficulties with how she is treated. She suffers the most from the reactionary attitude she meets in school, where the rest of the students are prohibited from sitting next to her, becoming acquainted with her, and including her in their talks. "Things went fine up until the start of school; the world was still okay." Left on her own, she learns to play the guitar, and timidly writes romantic songs: "When you are very alone and all the sadness of the world falls around, you will understand how much you need love."

When she is 13, the Soviet troops enter Prague; she participates in a demonstration against the invasion and is expelled from the communist youth group.

Some years later, she enters the School of Dramatic Art and begins to give small recitals. She discovers rock by listening to Janis Joplin and Tina Turner from whose repertoires she takes songs, and by whom she is then greatly influenced. In 1972, she takes a trip to Poland, where she smokes her first marijuana cigarette. She joins the Comic Opera in order to obtain a work permit and the status of musical professional, both of which are indispensable for starting a rock group in East Germany. Once she obtains the work permit, however, the Cultural Commission tells her that she is not yet mature enough to form her own group. She will have to work for one year with some musicians that they have found for her to demonstrate that she can adapt herself to a collective.

Nina Hagen's attitude begins to bother the government censor, which judges her lyrics to be too good and too dangerous to have been written by her. They believe that behind all this is Biermann. "We think, Miss Hagen, that these lyrics are too nihilistic. They do not fit with the goals of our young people."

Still she continues to be enthusiastic and ardently desires to form a rock group. On television she discovers Beat Club, a West German pop music program. After this, she departs for Switzerland where a rock festival is taking place. Within three months, she attains complete success, rising rapidly above the East German hits.

In the fall of 1976, Biermann, while giving a concert in West Germany, receives a notice from East Germany that he should not return and that he has been stripped of his citizenship. Nina Hagen and her mother

receive authorization to leave the country—a country which does not allow her to sing what she wants.

Living in West Germany, in Cologne, Nina Hagen spends her days alone, trying to adapt herself to her new situation. She takes a series of trips to London where she is dazzled by the punk scene, in its most provocative phase at the time. She makes friends with the *Slits*, a popular all women's band.

Upon returning to West Berlin, she decides to start a group with ex-members of the *Lokomotive Kreuzberg*. In the fall of 1978 her first album, *Nina Hagen Band* appears. The music is rock, with lyrics written by herself, which are provocative, bitter and defiant.

She dyes her hair orange and begins to frequent the Berlin hang-outs for gays and transvestites. She gets married in the summer of 1979 to Hermann Brod, a junkie and delinquent, from whom she divorces in six months.

In 1980 Nina publishes her second album, *Unbehagen* [Discomfort], and she thinks that "it is garbage, the same garbage that was in the first, just a little better done. Who I am now will be demonstrated in the next record."

Nina Hagen's voice is a dynamic voice that comes from within, from the guts, from the womb, that bursts out into delicious, delirious vocals. It is aggressive, anguished, tortured and unbearable, like a fiery dove, charged with an exotic force and wandering madness.

In 1980 she said her musical inspira-

tion was reggae and all day long she only listened to reggae. Reggae "is where I recognize myself the best...reggae is to learn not to run, to ignore time." At the same time Nina Hagen asserts that she is the reincarnation of Edith Piaf. The queen of German punk labels herself extravagant and scandalous. "I pervert the rules, I make them abnormal, and furthermore, I play with them, exercising my immediate desire." In this way, Nina Hagen demands, for example, that in the magazine *Stern* she appear photographed on the cover with three forks stuck in her head; she demonstrates how to masturbate before the cameras of a talk show on Austrian television.

Her punk ways, her leather stockings, her chastity belt, which she sometimes wears, all indicate a special manner of seeing, living and understanding the world.

Since this article was written, Nina Hagen moved to the United States, had a daughter named Cosma, and discovered god on a trip. Her latest album, released in 1982, is called *nunsexmonkrock*. □



G.H. Reicher

AT THE ZOO TRAIN STATION text by Nina Hagen

In the ladies room at the station!

(I must be hungry)

(sweet child)

Your brown hair is marvelous!

Your gartered stockings maddening!

OH!

Sweet child, tell me quickly, who are you???

Your pointy leather shoes!

Your ragged rubber stockings!

Your mini from a shopping bag!

Your sweater with the Queen of London on it!

Silver-Jubilee! Hee, Hee!?

In the ladies room at the station!

(I must be hungry)

(sweet child)

Your resistance has foot and hand!

Your high heels are as sharp as you!

Sweet child, tell me quickly, who are you??

Your neon pink nail polish sticks in my head like a hornet!

Your matted hair was greased with RICE KRISPIES

Your song!

Your words!

WAU!!!

Rock&Roll-Operette.

Rock&Roll-Operette!

Rock&Roll-Operette!!!

It happened in the ladies room at the station.

It was soo nice!

Your garters tore.

I pulled them off.

I kissed you/you kissed me.

We kissed each other!!!

P.S. If blond, if black, if brown?!

I love all women.

INDESCRIBABLY FEMALE by Nina Hagen

I was pregnant, I started to vomit,
I didn't want it, I didn't even ask for it!
I devour pills, and definitely!
I'm not having any tiny children.

REFRAIN

Why should I as a woman fulfill my duty?
For who? For them? For you? For me?
I have no desire to fulfill my duty!
Not for you, not for me, I have no duty!

When it was over, I started to vomit.
Now it is finally time to grumble.
I devour pills and definitely.
I'm not having any tiny children!

REFRAIN

MARLENE HAD OTHER PLANS
SIMONE BEAUVOIR SAID GOD! FORBID!
AND BEFORE THE FIRST BABY'S YELPS,
I HAVE TO FIRST FREE MYSELF
AND AT THE MOMENT I'M FEELING
INDESCRIBABLY

FEMALE
FEMALE.

Further reading:
• "2nd Wave Feminist Meets New Wave Music,"
feminists and punk/new wave music, "Big Mama
-Rag," August 1981.

From Fields to Factories

1956, 1970, 1980—each time the Polish government tried to raise the food prices, the Polish working class was quick to respond. And women workers were always visible—as leaders and as organizers. But where did they go after the strikes?

(Based on *die Tageszeitung*, West German daily, September 8, 1981; *Libération*, French daily, September 10, 1980 and June 3, 1981; *L'Alternative*, French-language quarterly on Eastern Europe, No. 10-11, May-August 1981; *die internationale*, West Germany quarterly, September 1978; *Women in Eastern Europe*, English-language feminist publication on Eastern Europe, No. 4, March 1981; *cahiers du féminisme*, French feminist bi-monthly, October 1981-April 1982; and *Courage*, West German feminist publication, October 1980.)

Since August 1980, the Western press has been reporting on Poland's economic crisis giving extensive coverage to the strikes, the new-born union, *Solidarność*, and the international implications of the situation. The military coup on December 13, 1981, led by General Jaruzelski, was viewed as an attempt to crush the successful union, and to ensure Poland's continuing role in the Warsaw Pact. One can look back at these 16 months of revolutionary process, learn from the achievements and the mistakes made by the union and its leaders, and try to understand the problems of a mass movement in Eastern Europe. One of the most intriguing aspects is to analyze women's role and participation in this movement.

Polish women workers organized unions and participated in the strikes, but there is hardly a word about them in the press. There are pictures of Anna Walentynowicz, but she always seems to appear in the shadow of Lech Walesa, the hero of the Poles. Anna Walentynowicz was one of the leaders of the 1970 strikes triggered by increasing food prices. In December 1970, strikes and riots broke out in the Gdansk shipyards which then spread throughout the country. According to official records, 54

people were killed.) Her lay-off in early August 1980 was one of the main reasons, besides increased food prices, which caused the strike, eventually leading to the founding of *Solidarność*. It was she, together with Lech Walesa, who organized the workers in the Lenin shipyard.

Today over five million Polish women are employed making up 42% of the active work force. They are mostly hired as textile workers, food processors, teachers and health service employees. Since the founding of Poland's present republic on July 22, 1944, women's lives have changed drastically. In 1939 Poland counted 34 million inhabitants, but by the end of World War II, only 23 million were left of which approximately 13 million were women. More than half of the women over the age of 25 could not read or write, having grown up on farms where there was little time or opportunity to attend school. The new Polish government, desiring to switch from agriculture to industry, badly needed skilled workers. Mostly rural women and men were recruited, given promises of a brighter future in the cities and factories.

WANDERING AROUND POLAND

In an interview first published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Weekly for All) on January 11, 1981, Anna Walentynowicz describes her situation at that time. "I never went to school, just for a while before the war. I got as far as the fourth grade, but in my papers I put down the seventh. When I filled out the application to be a welder, I wrote down fourth. But one of my fellow workers said, 'What's the matter with you, Anna, make that a seven.' It's easy to change a four to a seven, so that's what I did. To be honest, though, I never had any more schooling, except a course at the shipyard for those who can't read or write and

some welding courses...Before applying at the shipyards, I wandered around Poland from village to village hiring myself out. In the summer I helped with the harvest. In the autumn I sold kitchen knives fashioned out of old scythes by the farmers I used to work for. During the winter my bosses made and sold vodka. My job was tending the still at night, so it wouldn't blow up. During the day, I toted bottles in my knapsack to sell. I'd be paid for the vodka and knives with flour, potatoes or kerosene, which I then lugged back to my bosses' farm.

"I have met many good people in my life. But the most important of all these people was the man who told me, 'Don't sit around here like this. Go to the shipyards; you will have the chance to learn and become a man.' I couldn't sleep a wink that night. I prayed to Our Lady of Ostra Brama while my heart raced all night: I hope they take me at the shipyard, I hope they take me. Our Lady heard my prayers because in November 1950 I was admitted to the training course for welders. November 8, to be exact—here is the stamp. And here is another right next to it, August 8, 1980—the date I was fired. Thirty years—quite a coincidence, don't you think? In 1951 my picture appeared in the newspaper for the first time. It was an article entitled, 'Our Super-Quota Workers'."

During the last 35 years, the enormous emphasis placed on education has almost eliminated illiteracy among women. Today more than half of all Polish women have high school diplomas. But women still predominantly work in fields that have traditionally been considered "female jobs." If they work in other areas, they usually hold lower paying, less prestigious positions. Identically educated men and women end



up at different levels in their work place. Men become the factory managers and government representatives; women serve as the workers. Women are expected to seek social gratification outside the work place, the family being the ideal place for women's self-realization.

According to *die internationale*, between 1945 and 1955, the government questioned the family structure. The family was seen as the backbone of political conservatism, and attempts were made to split it. Soup kitchens were opened; collective activities, such as trips, sports and cultural entertainment, were organized. Psychological and moral problems, once considered private matters, were openly dealt with. This educational campaign was carried out without a clear purpose in mind, and was designed by bureaucrats who did not consult the rank-and-file. The opposite goal was achieved. Instead of splitting the family, families became tighter.

The events of October 1956 put an end to this period of publicly criticizing and attacking the family. [In June 1956, several workers were killed while striking for "bread and liberty." The process of agricultural collectivization was reversed, and Wladyslaw Gomulka was put back into power. In October 1956, Poland was almost invaded by the USSR, which tried to reinstate the former regime. Gomulka managed to stay in power, gaining support from the church.] In the years since, the family has been considered an important unit in building the modern Polish state.

The "Women in Eastern Europe" collective takes this argument further stating that it is the Roman Catholic Church which has had considerable influence on people's daily lives and their attitudes toward the family. Two out of three party members are said to be churchgoers, and most workers appear to be practicing Catholics. Since 1980 the church has been given more access to the media; its views are solicited and often heeded. Its primary concern has been to emphasize the sanctity of family life. The regime has been accused of neglecting the family, of fostering values

which undermine family life and degrade women. The church deplores the fact that women have to go to work rather than stay at home and look after their children and is, of course, hostile to abortion. By appointing practicing Catholics to the government, the party indicated that it was prepared to let the church have more influence on family laws. One of the most discussed options was the possibility for women to choose to stay at home and care for their children.

OVERWORKED

Anna Walentynowicz voiced her own views on these matters. "We think that a woman, who has small children, should stay at home for their benefit. Once the children are old enough, or before they arrive, then by all means she should be able to work... Women in Poland are immensely overworked and it would be good if there was a period when they could be at home, because then they could devote some time to work for the community. There is work on the housing estates, there is work for sick people and this can be done by women, women who have more energy because they are not overburdened with so many duties. And women would not be cut off then, would not be locked up in their homes, but would also not have to race to get to work on time, would not be enslaved..."

The famous 21 demands drawn up in August 1981 by the strike committee in Gdansk originally consisted of only 16 points. It was due to the pressure of the women workers that demands were added, asking for better child care facilities and for three years paid maternity leave. In early 1981 women in *Solidarność* decided to form their own women's commission. One representative, Yawdiga Doliniak, who works in Poland's largest automobile plant, explained in an interview with the French daily *Libération*, the need for such a commission. "Until now women workers were reluctant to discuss their personal problems with the all-male union delegation. Here in Poland, alcoholism is a social plague. Women workers with alcoholic husbands

who beat them wouldn't confide in a man. Now they come to see me individually with their problems. In meetings I can then request alternative housing arrangements for these women without divulging their personal histories... We have the same rights as men and are considered equal before the law. However, there still exists a different mentality between the sexes. Traditionally, women take care of the family and the men, who have a bit more time, get involved in politics."

In late spring 1981, the differences between the male union leadership and some prominent women became irreconcilable. Anna Walentynowicz complained of the lack of internal democracy and resigned from the steering committee. Alina Pienkowska and Joana Duda-Gwiazdas, who were also among the leading organizers in Gdansk, shared Walentynowicz's complaints, saying that things had not changed considerably since August 1980. "The flow of information is irregular," stated Alina Pienkowska in *die Tageszeitung*, "and the rank-and-file is not involved in the decision making process. Women have been very active during the strikes. They did not participate just to change women's lives, but everybody's. But women have too little time to be politically active—they have to work, take care of the house and the children, and then they have to stand in lines for hours to buy food. We don't think that this will change." □

Further reading:

- "The Polish August: Documents from the Beginning of the Polish Workers' Rebellion," Ziangi Press, San Francisco, 1981.
- "The Strike in Gdansk," ed. Andrzej Tymowski, 1981; "Don't Hold Back", P.O. Box 714, New Haven, CT 06510; \$2.75 per copy
- "The Road to Gdansk," by Daniel Singer, Monthly Review Press, 1982.
- "The Polish Confrontation," by Tamara Deutscher, "New Left Review," #125.
- "Only for U.S. dollars: Prostitution in Poland," from "Second Class, Working Class," an international women's reader, Peoples Translation Service, 1979.



Christina Yoder

Waiting for Another Spring

In 1968, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia brought an end to the "Prague Spring." Since then, the government has tightened its reins, punishing outspoken dissenters by jailing them or taking away their jobs. But organized opposition still exists. Over the last five years, the Charter 77 movement has criticized government policies on human rights and civil liberties.

(Based on *Courage*, West German feminist monthly, December 1981, March and May 1982.)

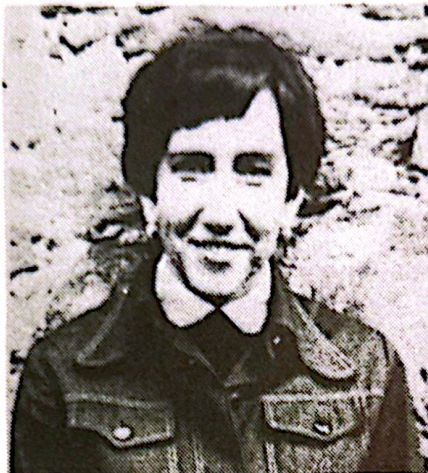
The "Charter 77 Civil Initiative" was founded in January 1977. The 242 signatories called for a dialogue with the government over human rights and urged the authorities to abide the laws.

The government's reaction was swift. Signatories were denounced as "political shipwrecks," many were subjected to police interrogation and some were arrested. Despite the government's strong-arm tactics—which have stemmed the flow of documents, statements and appeals issued by the Charter through a variety of underground channels—the Charter, nonetheless, has established itself as a factor in Czech society.

Charter 77 activists do not consider themselves dissidents but rather regard themselves as acting under rights granted by the Czech constitution. That Charter 77 has attracted a broad spectrum of interests has been both its weakness—making consensus on Charter documents difficult—and its strength, since it can hardly be accused of being an organized political opposition. During the past year, a debate has been going on in the movement between those prepared to sacrifice their livelihoods, and those arguing for a lower profile and broader base. Nevertheless, well over a thousand people have added their names to the original 242 signatories.

A Charter offshoot, the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS), was formed in 1978 and publicizes examples of alleged government abuse of power and violations of civil rights. Several of VONS' leading members are either in prison or subject to criminal proceedings, and eight others have been forced to emigrate. In October 1979, the government took action against Charter 77 and VONS, putting six activists on trial and sentencing them to long prison terms. The crackdown followed the detention and expulsion of two French citizens accused of smuggling in emigré literature and money for dissidents.

But while Charter 77 may have been



tamed, it has not been silenced. Its fifth anniversary was celebrated with the announcement of the latest list of spokespeople, some of whom were politically and culturally prominent figures—among them, former Foreign Minister Jiri Hajek.

TRIAL IN PRAGUE

After a year of investigations, imprisonments and government harassment, the 14 defendants of *Case Siklova et al.* still await the beginning of their trial in Prague. All signers or open supporters of Charta 77, the defendants have been accused of "hostile actions against the republic" for allegedly circulating anti-government documents within Czechoslovakia and in the West, and for receiving information and literature from western sources.

The case takes its name from Jirina Siklova, one of the defendants who did not sign Charter 77. The government's choice of Siklova as lead defendant in the case, singling her out for her moral and practical support of the Charter signers, is viewed ominously—as an example and a threat.

Siklova's history of opposition to the government goes back to the "Prague Spring" of 1968. At that time she was a member of the Communist Party and a professor of sociology at the University of Prague. Siding with radical students at the university, Siklova spoke out and wrote articles supporting the reforms of 1968 and the ideas of the new left in Western

Europe. As a result, she was fired from her job and in 1969 was kicked out of the party.

After her expulsion from the party, Siklova had to start her life and her work all over again. She took jobs, first as a cleaning woman at the university library, then as a librarian in a hospital. Using her maiden name, she was able to continue writing and speaking—in magazines, at public forums and on television—and has published books on the role of women in the family and the problems of young people.

Since 1977 Siklova has used all her contacts and her reputation to help those who signed the Charter. She became one of the few links between the signers and the outside world, her apartment a regular meeting place for dissidents.

Again, the price for speaking out, and attracting the government's attention a second time, has been heavy. In 1978 Siklova's phone was disconnected, and she received several warnings that her support of the Charter signers could jeopardize her personal safety. Siklova's children may also become targets of government harassment. Her daughter, recently admitted to medical school, is expected to lose that place, and her high school-aged son has little chance of being accepted at a university.

In May 1981 Siklova was arrested in one of the government's big raids aimed at breaking up the civil rights movement. She was imprisoned, initially without formal charges, and held for 10 months. A government statement explaining her release on March 22, 1982 said only that "reason for arrest does not exist any more."

Eva Kanturkova, a dissident writer, was also released with Siklova. Banned from publication in Czechoslovakia since 1968, Kanturkova signed Charter 77 and was arrested at the same time as Siklova. Her most recent book, *Twelve Women in Prague*, talks with 12 women in dissident circles, has been published by Czech emigrés in Paris. Despite their release, Siklova and Kanturkova may still stand trial and face up to 10 years in prison—or more likely, forced immigration. □

An international defense group is collecting signatures and money in their support. For more information, write:

Jirina Siklova Defense Group
Box 11, 190 Upvoer Street
London N1, England

Further reading:

• "Women in Czech Social Democracy," from "Women in Eastern Europe Newsletter," London, No. 3.



Nine Months

(Based on New Yorker Films, 16 W. 61st St., New York, NY 10023 and *Liberation*, French daily, March 22, 1982.)

Márta Mészáros is the first woman to write and direct feature films in Hungary. She was born in Budapest in 1931, the daughter of the sculptor Laszlos Mészáros. In 1936 the family emigrated to the Soviet Union where Márta attended public school and the Moscow Academy of Cinematographic Art.

After graduating from the academy, Mészáros returned to Hungary, working first at the Budapest Newsreel Studio. Then she moved to Rumania for a job at the Bucharest Documentary Studio. In 1958, she came back to Budapest, and over the next ten years made about two dozen short documentaries, mostly on subjects of art and popular science.

In 1968 she began writing and directing her own features. Her work displays a strong feminist sensibility, making clear statements without being didactic.

Mészáros is presently working on a film about a little girl whose parents died under Stalin's purges. This girl moves in with a woman who works as a prison warden and who has a friend who looks quite like the girl's father. Mészáros' upcoming projects include films based on Gogol's *Revizor* and on George Sand's *Consuelo* and a film about Rosa Luxemburg.

In the following interview Márta Mészáros discusses her film *Nine Months* (1977) the story of a love affair between a strong-willed young woman and an impulsive, often arbitrary fellow worker in a chilly industrial city.

Q: How would you describe the story of *Nine Months*?

A: It is the story of an affair—or rather that of a determined modern young woman who braves all odds to go her own way. A pretty young woman, she works for an industrial firm in the country where she has a well-paying, if physically tough, unskilled job. She attracts the attention of the engineer in charge of the workshop; he falls in love with her and wants her to marry him. It comes to him as a shock, therefore, when he finds out that she is the mother of a six-year-old child who is being reared by her parents on a lonely farmstead. Years ago, as a university student, she fell in love with one of her lecturers. He fathered her child and she willingly assumed the status of unmarried mother. The engineer soon

recovers from his disappointment, since he is devoted to her. But she refuses to marry him, although she is quite willing to have a second child that will be born out of this affair. In the meantime, she completes her university correspondence course and gets her degree. Upon graduation, she quits her job and leaves town for another job somewhere else. The story remains open-ended. By the end of the film, the engineer seems to have gained a better understanding of the woman and now appreciates her fortitude and independence.

The closing sequence of the picture is devoted to the birth of the woman's second child. Coincidentally, the female lead, Lili Monori, was pregnant when we were about to start shooting the picture. She consented to the birth of her child being filmed. Thus, the shooting started with what became the closing sequence.

Q: It would appear, that *Nine Months* is another one of your feminist films, similar in its theme to your earlier pictures.

A: Ever since my first film, *The Girl*, I have with the stubbornness of a mule pursued my attempt to study women with strong personalities and the ability to make decisions for themselves. Yet in those early years, *Women's Lib*, which is so fashionable today, was at that time far from being a widespread movement. In this country—and as a matter of fact throughout Europe—the ideal type of woman has been for centuries that of the soft-spoken, passive, obedient sort. The family, as the basic unit of society, is the dominant way of life. Netting a husband becomes life's chief purpose for

every woman between 20 and 30 years of age. Still today, any woman of 30, who cannot introduce herself as Mrs. So-and-so, is virtually suspect. And yet, women, like men, should have the right to form their own opinions and make their own decisions on such important matters as having a child or adopting a world outlook. An independent-minded woman—one who finds herself in a situation where she must make her own decision—is the central character in each of the films I have made.

The heroine of *Nine Months* is the most conscious and most mature of all the female characters in my films. She once had a straightforward affair out of which she had a child she wanted and is strong enough to raise it. She works hard to earn money for her child, and has strength enough to complete her studies. Her new love affair, despite containing a variety of conflicting elements, enriches her and she arrives at her decision to have her second child after mature consideration. Women must have the right of choice, the right to make decisions on the fundamental facts of life. The film's heroine is just such a conscious woman who thinks and acts in an independent, responsible manner and who tells the man who loves her that he must accept her as she is—together with her past, her experiences and fully developed personality. □

Further reading:

- "The Most Important Art," East European film after 1945, by Mira Liehm and Antonin J. Liehm, UC Press, 1977.



Nine Months/New Yorker Films Release

Love Through Letters

Love between women is not officially forbidden in East Germany, but it is considered incompatible with socialist morality. The anonymity of living in a large city makes life for lesbians easier than in the confines of a small town.

(Translated from *Courage*, West German monthly, May 1978.)

In *Mann und Frauintim*, an East German textbook published in 1973, homosexuality is referred to as an "abnormality." Love between women is not officially forbidden, but it is considered incompatible with socialist morality. In the following interview a lesbian discusses life in East Germany.

Q: Have homosexuals in East Germany developed a subculture in the form of their own bars? Have you been to any?

A: Yes, a few times. For example, the Schonhauser Ecke in Berlin, and also the Senefelder. People and their families are there until six in the evening. Then they leave, and the clientele changes. This is all unofficial, since people who don't know can still go in. But they are sometimes a little shocked when they catch on. In the Schonhauser Ecke, there are many women, while in the Senefelder there are mostly gay men; women are more or less tolerated.

Q: Can one also dance there?

A: No, dancing is not allowed. There is also no music. One can simply meet there and drink coffee or have a drink.



Q: Is it very difficult to arrange parties?

A: We sometimes have private parties—if a woman had a birthday, for example, or moved into a new apartment. Small women's parties, where one can act freely. The majority live normal everyday lives, go to work, and hide their homosexuality. These are Sunday lesbians. And then sometimes there are parties in the city, where there is also dancing. There are bars where one can rent a room. Then everything takes place under another pretext—Women's Brigade Party—or something.

Q: But aren't there clubs or associations where people can come to know and help each other?

A: We don't have any such groups. And if there are ever private undertakings like that, in apartments, among one another, or in one's circle, they really must not become known. The authorities would immediately intervene, because they have such a damn fear that political dissatisfaction could also come up. For example, if they know that in some bar there are an unusual number of homosexuals, one can be fairly certain that they will send someone from the secret service there. The Cafe Mokka was closed because it was a meeting place for homosexuals from the West and from East Germany. Now they have set up a state-run department store there.

Q: But until a short time ago there was a work group with lesbian women in a medical facility in Berlin.

A: Yes, the group lasted approximately two years and there were between eight and 15 women in it. They had a Department of Psychiatry there—it was also for emotional disturbances, depression, children's psychology and such. And they wanted to eradicate the lesbian culture. The women met every two weeks for two to three hours. All the group discussions were recorded, but what was later done with them never came out. In the beginning, there was an exceptional discourse which lasted a whole day. And they also had to fill out questionnaires with over 470 questions, just like other patients—all the typical behavioral questions. Thus the women began to feel like they were patients. And the questions were designed to determine to



what degree a person had homosexual tendencies.

Q: The questions implied that homosexuality was a disease?

A: At first it was certainly insinuated and there was talk of eventually achieving a cure. But the women in the group agreed that they didn't want that. The doctors also believed that lesbianism derived mostly from asocial conditions, but of course they established that this wasn't true. Then the women took hormone and blood tests. And later, sociological themes were discussed: career; role behavior; surroundings; and such. The doctors' conclusions were made public, but just barely.

Q: Do you have the impression that there are more lesbians in certain professions than in others?

A: No, they come from all possible professions. I know of a crane operator, a machinist, a teacher, a postal employee. One is with the police, another one a theology student. And many are writers or work in the theater. In this way, lesbianism acquires legitimacy.

Q: Do you know of cases in which women have lost their job on this account?

A: No, I don't, because women do not reveal themselves except in private life. Even if women were to reveal themselves, they still wouldn't lose their positions, because everyone has the right and duty to work. But they still don't risk it, because they are certain that they would suffer from collective repression.

Q: Still, there must be women who live together and share each other's lives?

A: When you have a relationship with a woman, you must content yourself with a one-room apartment, which you have as a single person. Everything is confined to this one room: living, sleeping, your whole life. A relationship often collapses as a result of

In Poland

(Translated from *De Homokrant*, Belgian gay monthly, no.10, October 1980.)

Kosakiewicz, a party member and advisor to former party leader Edward Gierek, talks about the situation of homosexuals in Poland:

"Legally, there is no persecution: homosexuality and homosexual prostitution are not punishable. But the police conduct raids in meeting places like coffee houses and public restrooms. They take people, identify them, get information on them, etc. The reason given for these actions is that homosexuality often goes together with crime, such as prostitution.

"The pedagogues think that for tactical reasons one has to be tolerant about homosexuality in sexual education. But it remains a problem when one lives in a society like ours. One has to live two lives, divided between an official and a hidden one, which can lead to neurosis. We try to promote understanding and put an end to persecution. We have not yet reached that goal though.

"It is difficult to conduct a public discussion on this subject. Most Communist Party members are very Catholic. Take Gierek, for example. He criticizes the church on many points, but on sexual

matters he will agree with it, because deep inside he is a Roman Catholic. All deviations, everything not considered 'normal' (homosexuality, prostitution, sadism, fetishism, pedophilia and pornography) are seldomly discussed in the public media. The official point of view is, that writing about something, means propagating it, because one excites interest.

"For lesbians the situation is a lot better than for male homosexuals, and most Poles do not know that it exists between women. Even our own research shows that the majority of the population does not know about the existence of lesbians. They think about it in a real primitive manner: they do not have a penis. You can imagine men making love, but women...

"The situation of lesbians has been researched as well. They are better off psychologically than gay men. If they are unhappy, it is not because of their environment, no one knows that they are different. But lesbians can feel guilty, resulting from Roman Catholic belief. Also, the lesbians do not have their own organizations, publications and the like. And I have to say, any writing about homosexuality is only about men. At most, female homosexuality will be mentioned. □



this. It is also true, however, that many lesbian women marry gay men in order to get larger apartments. They also then appear to be more legitimate.

Q: Do women meet each other through ads? Not just to find a steady relationship, but simply someone to talk to, someone who shares the same experience.

A: We have the *Wochenpost* (Weekly Post). It carries marriage proposals and such. There is a column called "Letter Exchange," which one can use anonymously. I have often responded out of a sense of despair, simply because I wanted some contact. This has sometimes backfired, because one really cannot make out whether this is a lesbian or not. "Woman Seeks Woman Penpal" is the only thing one can say. So, one

responds in order to determine whether the ad meant "lesbian." One gets either a threatening letter back or a positive answer. I saw a woman for a full year once, and we never managed to declare our lesbianism to one another. In the meantime, this channel of communication has been blocked. Notices which state "Woman Seeks Woman Penpal" or "Single Woman Seeks Woman Penpal" have not been accepted for the past two years or so. Now one must express oneself more elusively, and simply "Pen Friendship" appears, no longer "Woman Penpal."

Q: Do you know anything about women in smaller towns?

A: It's even worse for them. Of course, they want to go to Berlin, because they hope it will be better for them there. In the smaller towns, they live their everyday lives in the closet. They run ads in the weekly newspapers. Then they write to each other for years just to be able to open their hearts to one another and say: "I am a lesbian, and have such and such feelings." That is, if they are even able to find another lesbian through the elusive advertisements. This is the hard part; because lesbianism is taboo, the possibility of meeting lesbians is very limited. I think it is sad that lesbians cannot live the way they would like to. □

Further reading:

- "Lesbians in the GDR: Two Women," from "New German Critique," no. 23, Spring/Summer 1981,
- "Still Hidden After All These Years," legalized homosexuality in East Germany and Poland, "Gay Community News," June 5, 1982,

In the USSR

(Translated from *L'Alternative*, French-language bi-monthly about Eastern Europe, no. 3, March-April 1980.)

In 1917, the new Soviet government abolished all legislation in regards to homosexuality. During the years 1920-1922, while the new family code was worked out, gay people from other European countries looked with admiration at the new progressive laws.

Starting in 1928, however, things changed, and with the development of family-oriented politics, the official line was to call homosexuality a "social danger." In March 1934, Article 121 of the Soviet penal code was voted upon, condemning convicted male homosexuals to five years imprisonment and to eight years in case of violence, abuse of power or pederasty.

Today, male homosexuality is still illegal, and gay men can be imprisoned. The filmmaker Sergei Paradjanov for example, spent some time in jail for being a homosexual was later freed and is now denied permission to work on his films. There are no laws punishing female homosexuality, and almost nothing is known about the situation of lesbians in the Soviet Union. □



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"Am I Dreaming?"

(Compiled from *Tsvetaeva. A Pictorial Biography*, Ardis, 1980 and "Remembering Sophia Parnok (1885-1933)," from *Conditions* 6.)

In 1922 at the age of 30, the poet Marina Tsvetaeva left Moscow for Paris. Her first book of poetry had been published in 1910 to wide acclaim. An independent young woman, she cropped her hair, smoked, travelled by herself, and had romances—all quite shocking to her family. Wherever Tsvetaeva lived, she became an outcast: in Moscow, because she could not see herself as a supporter of the Revolution; in Paris, among the émigrés, because her husband, Sergei Efron, openly converted to a Soviet sympathizer; and after her return to Russia in 1939, because she

had been an emigrant and a "White" (an opponent of the Bolsheviks). Her poems no longer being published, and feeling more and more isolated, Marina Tsvetaeva committed suicide in August 1941.

From 1914 to 1916, Tsvetaeva had an intense relationship with Sophia Parnok, another poet. There is no explicit statement that the two women were lovers, but based on their letters and poems, the conclusion seems inescapable. During this period, Tsvetaeva wrote a cycle of poems dedicated to Parnok called *Woman Friend*, in which she says:

"For this trembling, for...am I dreaming?
Could it be?
For this ironic marvel:
That you are you, not he."

In 1916, their relationship ended quite abruptly, and it is not known why. Parnok still kept Tsvetaeva's photograph by her bedside. When later asked about their estrangement, Tsvetaeva answered, "It was so long ago..."

Further reading:

- *"A Captive Spirit: Selected Prose" and "The Demesne of Swans,"* both by Maria Tsvetaeva, Ardis Press, 1980.
- *"Anna Akhmatova: A Poetic Pilgrimage,"* a biography by Amanda Height, Oxford University Press, 1976.
- *"Hope Against Hope" and "Hope Abandoned,"* both by Russian author Nadezhda Mandelstam, Atheneum Press, 1976 and 1981 respectively.

Tsvetaeva. A Pictorial Biography

She looked into my eyes
Wanly and threateningly.
Somewhere thunder answered.
"Oh, young lady!

Let me tell your fortune,
Your destiny on earth."
Blue clouds twisted into a funnel.
Somewhere it thunders—they thunder!
The fortune-teller has fixed
Her sleepy eye on my child.

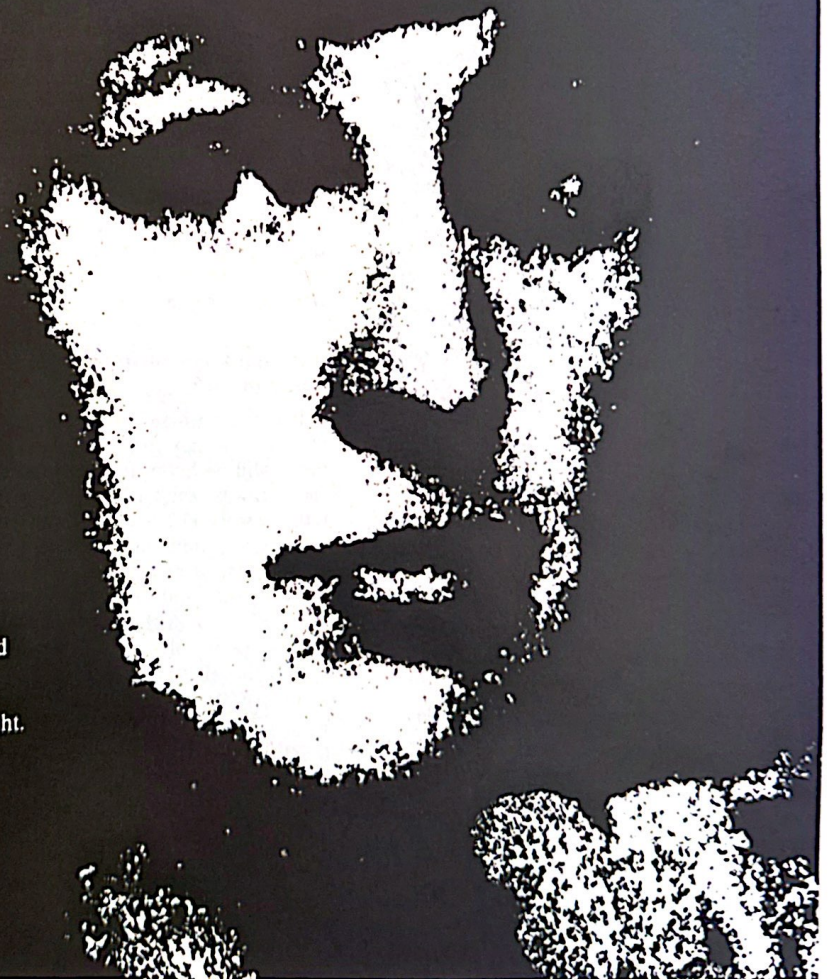
"What can you tell us?"
"Everything without deceit."
"It's too late for me,
And still too early for her..."
"Oh, hold your tongue, my beauty!
Why say 'I don't believe you' too soon?"
And a hand spread a fan of cards,
A black hand—decked in silver.

You are bold of speech,
You are simple of disposition,
You live generously,
You don't hoard your beauty.
In a spoon of water you will be—oh!—drowned
By an evil man.

Soon an unexpected path awaits you in the night.
You have too few lines,
Too little luck.
Gild it—

And a black ace—on black—
Rises up with a clap of thunder.

May 1917



On Leninism and Feminism

Was there a revolution in Russia in October 1917? Do privileged women need a women's movement? Agnes Heller, a Hungarian philosopher, reflects on these questions and takes a different path of thinking in answering them.

During a stay in Italy in 1979, the Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller spoke with an Italian Communist Party member about her ideas on the Russian Revolution, the differences between Marxism and Leninism, and her approach to religion and the feminist movement. This conversation was later published in a book *Per cambiare la vita* (Changing lives) and translated into several European languages. The following is excerpted from this dialogue.

CLASS STRUGGLE

I think that class struggle takes place in the Soviet Union, but we have to realize that it differs from the forms of class struggle known in the West. Before we can analyze class struggle, we have to look at the country's social and economic structure. There are varying points of view about the Soviet Union's structure.

One point of view defines today's Soviet Union as "degenerated socialist." This term was first used by Leon Trotsky in the thirties to defend Lenin and the October Revolution. Lenin was right: the October Revolution was a phenomenon of worldwide significance. But later, due to Stalin's leadership, the socialist countries made mistakes and, therefore, cannot be used as examples.

Another definition is much more pragmatic. It concludes that every country which calls itself socialist has to be accepted as such. The whole world talks about Eastern European societies as socialist societies, and there is no reason to contradict this terminology.

A third opinion contradicts the two mentioned above. It states that there is capitalism in the Soviet Union and the working class is not leading the country, and therefore the masses have no control over what they produce. The Soviet Union is seen as some form of bureaucratic state capitalism. This argument recalls a thesis by Engels in which he describes the possibility of capitalism without capitalists.

I am convinced that all these different views touch upon the truth. If we try to understand the structure of the Soviet

Union, we have to leave aside such terms as capitalism and socialism. We have to define Soviet society as a completely different society. I believe that the Soviet Union is closest to Saint-Simon's model of society. [18th century philosopher who put the importance of industrial and economic progress before civil liberties.] In the Soviet Union development is concentrated around heavy industry, and there are no civil liberties. It is a fact that no free elections have taken place since the Bolsheviks took power.

Most Eastern European countries have other problems than the Soviet Union. Not all these countries had their own revolutions, and different traditions have brought different reforms. Czechoslovakia has its own democratic history; Hungary experienced soviets three times since 1919; and East Germany has special problems since Germany is a divided country. The question for Eastern Europe is will it be possible to achieve socialism without national independence or are these two linked together? I am optimistic and I believe that socialism could be successful in Hungary as well as in Czechoslovakia, maybe more successful than in the Soviet Union.

LENIN'S OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Lenin's differences with the Second International [formed in Paris in 1889, collapsed at the outbreak of World War I] can be summarized in three points. The first point concerns the structure of the Bolshevik Party which was criticized by Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky. All power within the party was in the hands of a small group, first the intellectuals, then later the political leadership. Lenin was convinced that the Bolshevik intellectuals had the correct ideological line and therefore had the task of formulating the needs of the working class.

In 1917 Lenin heralded the slogan: "All power to the soviets." [Worker-elected councils first formed in 1905 in St. Petersburg, Russia.] This slogan held true only as long as the Bolsheviks held the majority in the soviets. As soon as the workers voted for the Mensheviks, the slogan disappeared.



Agnes Heller

Not long after the October Revolution, the soviets lost their power.

The second point is Lenin's theory of imperialism which radically changed Marx's theory on the crisis of capitalism. Marx's theory is based on an analysis of capitalism in industrialized countries. Marx believed that capitalism's crisis would coincide with working class readiness to create new modes of production. Lenin came up with the theory of the weakest link in the chain. He thought that revolution would begin in an agricultural country where capitalism was weak, and spread to the industrialized nations.

The third point is directly related to the second. Lenin believed that if a dictator of an underdeveloped country strictly followed an anti-imperialist line, he is closer to communism than a social democrat. This belief, which still influences the Soviet Union's foreign policy, is very important. It was the first Marxist analysis of the third world's revolutionary potential. I have to add that Rosa Luxemburg had identical ideas about the third world.

But let's get back to the question of political power. Lenin was a Jacobin. [A radical centralist party during the French Revolution. Their power was based mainly on influencing the Parisian masses through agitation and news papers.] Russia was the center of European despotism, and this



situation called for a political revolution. Socialist Jacobinism pursued two interrelated goals: a forced political revolution, and with socialism the goal of the revolution. In order to realize these goals one needed a revolutionary vanguard, a centralized organization, an elite, which was in a position to indoctrinate the masses and to direct them toward the final goal.

Lenin's theory of forcing the political revolution upon the masses did not hold. The political revolution in Russia was sparked without the Leninist organization. In reality, Lenin's party was only able to keep up with the masses by attaching itself to the spontaneous movement of the masses. This is always the case with political revolutions. But Lenin was partially successful in that the centralist organization was able to gain power against the will of the majority of the Russian people.

From the very beginning, Lenin's political praxis contradicted Marx's concept of socialism. We have to judge historic figures and movements by their actions, not by their ideas. Lenin, who always talked

about the proletariat, did not hesitate to repress the soviets as soon as their political views differed from his own. Lenin allowed only his own socialist strategy to prevail—both in Russia as well as abroad. Any movement, which criticized his policies, was called revisionist or counter-revolutionary. He is responsible for causing the split in the international workers' movement.

It is not legitimate to ask what would have happened to the heritage of the October Revolution, if similar revolutions had taken place in Western Europe. This question is based on the assumption that a Bolshevik-style revolution could have been successful in other countries. This is a wrong, or rather doubtful assumption. It also assumes that Bolshevik revolutions are socialist revolutions, and that revolutionary socialist change is identical with the Bolshevik revolution. I believe that the way the Bolsheviks took power and the fear that something similar might happen in other countries blocked the possibility for socialism in Europe for a long historical epoch. One must also realize that at the end of World War I there was a lot of desperation in Europe. The Second International's position on the war had caused great confusion among socialists. People no longer knew who to listen to. When in despair people prefer any solution, even one offered by the devil, to the present order.

Only one great revolution took place in Russia: the February Revolution. It brought great social changes, creating workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets which led to dual power. [Traditionally defined as a brief, unstable situation in which both the rulers and the ruled have their own institutions for holding power.]

Dual power means a lot to me, it is the best point of departure for socialism. Imagine how constructive a system would be, for example in today's Europe, in which dual power was exercised by parliamentary representatives on the one hand and peoples' councils on the other.

ROMANTICISM AND RELIGION

Parties and movements are struggling to find new structures for our lives. I would



like to add that one should not make the mistake of thinking that parties are communities. Parties are set up to represent a certain political stance. Life can be very difficult at times. People suffer, they struggle, they organize and fight back, but often they end up no better off. We have to understand that disappointments cause people to step back from reality and seek refuge in romanticism. Marx said that until we achieve communism, it will be impossible to eliminate the contradiction between liberalism and romanticism. In the meantime, we will have to live with romanticism.

Of course everyone has the right to criticize romanticism. But criticism will not get us anywhere. Young people will turn away from mysticism only if they are offered concrete steps toward a communal life. If we can give some meaning to their lives, they will turn away from medieval ways of thinking. We have to prove to them that it is possible to change this society.

Religion has its roots in the desire to meditate. People need to believe in something which will give meaning to their lives. But there will always be people who want to

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believe in something absolute and will reject rational scepticism. For these people belief provides an inner sanctuary, even if they live a fulfilled life or participate in political movements.

I think that Marxist theory does not properly deal with religion. According to classical interpretation, religious needs arise in a society which does not allow people to control their own affairs. In such a society people are also unable to find a rational explanation for unhappiness and misfortune. In a socialist society the need for religion would disappear.

But I have found a need which cannot be satisfied in socialism: the need to be immortal. The modern human being has difficulties when confronted with death. Not only with his or her own death, but with the death of loved ones. I cannot think of any society, even a just one, which can answer this question. Therefore, I think that religious needs will remain relevant as long as life has meaning.

The struggle for happiness is justified, even if it means only increasing those moments in our lives in which we can be completely ourselves. I consider unhappiness as important as happiness. If we forget the real contradictions in life, if we forget other peoples' misery, if we loose the desire to change, then the struggle for happiness will not be— as it should be—a struggle for freedom.

FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

The slogan, "the personal is political," is a bit farfetched, but it has a point. Private life has a function in society and is a public problem. People's private lives do not have to be the issue for public discussions, though—this would mean the end of the private sphere. Rather, private lives should be models and generate public interest. Changing private models is a process that will bring a change in society. The women's movement raised this question for the first time, but its importance goes beyond feminism.

I consider the birth of feminist "separatist" movements legitimate. Women's lives have an historical praxis that needs to operate in a broader context. The women's movement rallied around a very simple truth: the world as it was structured and organized by men; if we want to change it, we have to change the "form" of this world.

The women's movement also has a special meaning in the struggle against cultural traditions and ingrained values. In movements where men and women work side by side, women are not able to free themselves from century-old traditions. Women are silent; the men speak. Women accept men's domineering role and their intellectual leadership, even if they oppose it on a theoretical level.

Women working together can strengthen their political position. I know that women who work on equal footing with men and have reached a certain social status are less interested in a liberation movement. The so-called famous women do not need a separate women's movement.

But those women who are less educated and traditionally silent need it to learn to express themselves. The belief that a separate women's movement is unnecessary because socialism brings equality for men and women ignores concrete historical and psychological facts.

I think women are less irrational than men. Irrationality is the other side of rationality. In the early stages of bourgeois society, men had to be rational, and they neglected feelings. Men went out into the world and women participated in this world through men.

I have always tried to avoid behaving like a man; but I never needed to be very careful, because it would have been difficult for me to put myself in a man's place. I always have had the impression that men are too serious, and that they are removed from nature. They cannot find simple solutions: I agree with Jean-Paul Satre, who said that men are funny. Maybe that is what makes them nice.

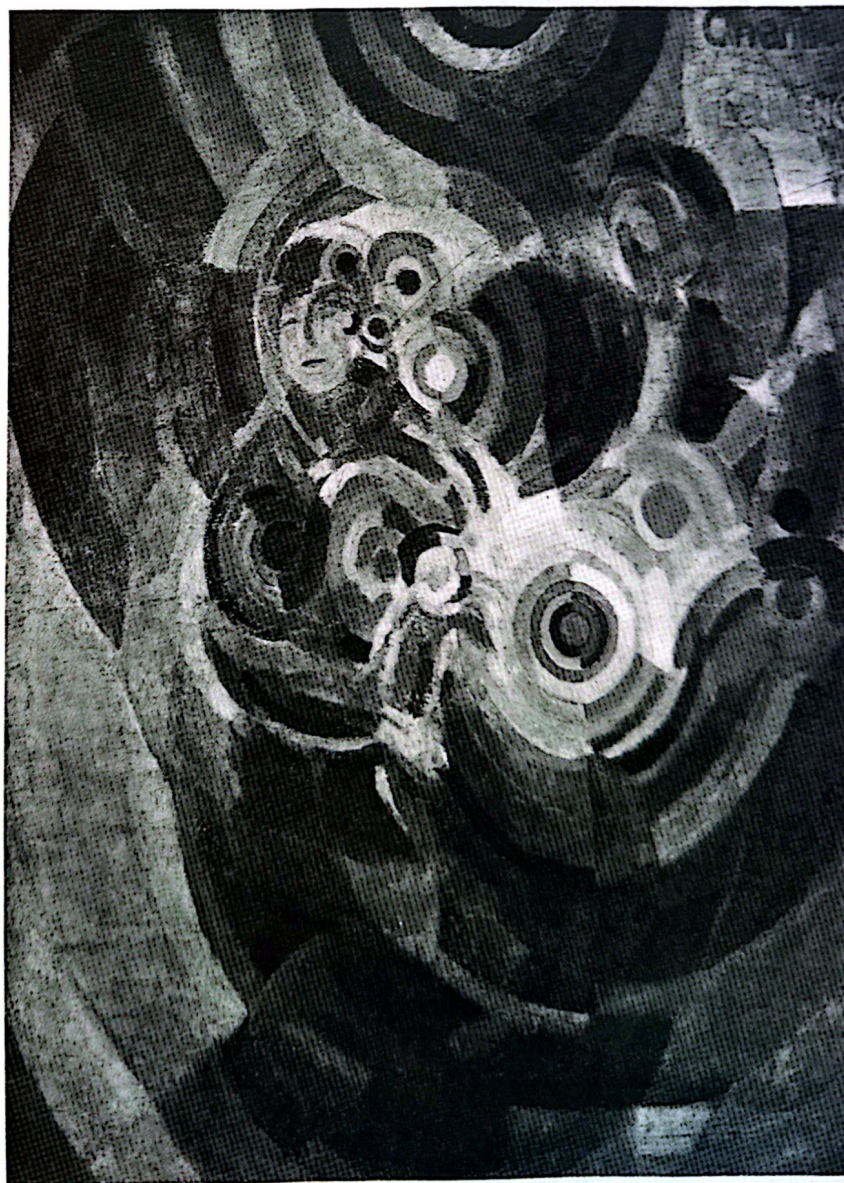
Feminism is a movement and feminist theories are an expression of the difficulty, the need and the radicalism of the movement. There are other feminist movements which only offer happiness for

consumers. All feminist movements are an expression of real problems and needs, even if they are distorted. All have contributed, in one way or another, to the changing consciousness of women. They have also helped to end women's identity crisis. Women now believe that "equal and free" does not mean being like a man, and women have learned to look at women's issues as issues important to humanity.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Love and children are both part of our lives. The biological aspects of this feeling, such as pregnancy and birth, are a special experience and a possibility for joy, and it would be a shame to neglect them. I think it would be wrong to forego these pleasures. And I think that all women who claim that children prevented them from realizing their own goals are victims of an accepted social tradition, or they have themselves renounced a goal, which in truth can be achieved by every woman.

Every woman has the right to say that she does not want to have children. Everyone has the right to lead the life they choose. I do believe that it is possible to give up motherhood; there is no special value attached to it. I only consider it a



Sonia Delaunay/The 1920s in Eastern Europe

means for experiencing joy. Mothers are not saints, the way TV and literature present them. I do not think that we become better people because we have born children. But society has to guarantee women the right to choose if and when they want children.

I do not want to deny the fact that it is more difficult in this society to be a woman than a man. I only want to say that the difficulties of women can result in greater satisfaction if they are overcome.

I know that my theory and the arguments I choose reflect my womanhood. My interests in everyday life, for human needs are also an expression of my being a woman. Marxism, like any other modern philosophy, is for all people, and is therefore open to be interpreted from a male as well as a female perspective.

As a woman, I am closest to Rosa Luxemburg. This does not mean that I am similar to her, but that I would like to be like her. Rosa was the Cassandra of socialism—she was always warning people about upcoming problems and mistakes. She never fell for the "heros" and leaders of socialism. She was a revolutionary and a representative of enlightenment and democracy. She believed in every human being's rationality and she was deeply convinced that no one could free the masses without turning around and oppressing them again. Therefore the masses alone would be able to free themselves. Whenever possible she participated in revolutionary activities, but she opposed cruelties and terror. Killing is a man's job. She was brave and sensitive. She did what she had to do but never let herself become a prisoner of "politics" or of "intellectualizing." She enjoyed life, she enjoyed talks with her friends, men and women alike, and she liked being with them. In the most difficult moments, even in prison, she managed to keep herself in good spirits. She enjoyed simple things, and was able to find them wherever she went. She did not live in the future, but in the present. We should all strive to be like her. □

Further reading:

- "The Theory of Need in Marx", Schocken, New York, 1981
- "Theory of Feelings", Humanities, 1979
- "Renaissance Man", Routledge & Kegan, Boston, 1978

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS


The paintings and drawings pictured with this article were produced by women active in the artistic revolution that accompanied the Russian Revolution. They believed that in art, as in politics, a total break with the past was necessary, and that art should contribute to society. A fascination with the machine was reflected in highly abstract even mechanical forms, while commitment to a new society was shown in Agit-Prop (agitational-propaganda) that would inspire and educate the masses.

WOMEN IN THE BAY AREA

We need more volunteers to help with upcoming issues. If you are interested in working on our project, have language, editing, lay-out, or fundraising skills, we'd like to hear from you. See our address on the inside back cover.

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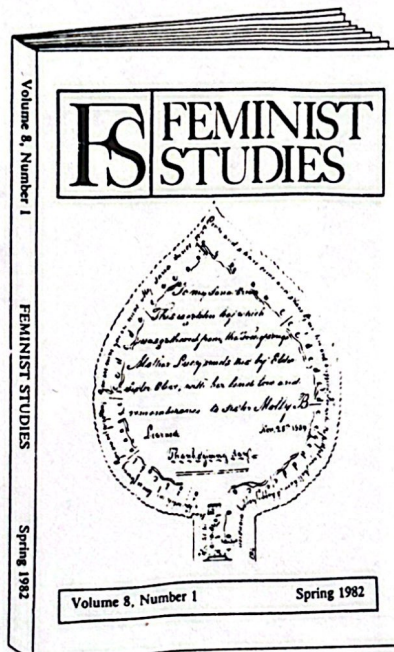
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Letters



Dear *Connexions*,

I'm sending you information about women's groups and publications in Japan. I'm also a member of the International Feminists of Japan. For most of its brief history, the IFJ has functioned as a support group for feminist foreigners here in Japan. Recently, however, we've started looking for ways to make the group more activist-oriented. For the first time we are seeking, as a group, contacts with Japanese women's groups. In the next few months we hope to start a regular exchange of information whereby we'll publish news of the Japanese women's movement in the IFJ monthly newsletter, *The Feminist Forum*, and make available to Japanese women's publications news of the feminist movement abroad which is not available in Japanese elsewhere.

If you have any questions or requests for further information, please let me know.

Yours truly,
Kathy O'Leary for the IFJ
C.P.O Box 1780
Tokyo 100, Japan

Dear *Connexions*,

Thanks very much for your letter. Please forgive the delay in getting this reply to you. The group has been hibernating for the winter!

We'll certainly give you any help we can with regard to your issue on Women in Eastern Europe. We too have problems getting information about Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. We plan on bringing out another newsletter in the near future. This will include articles on such topics as violence against women in Eastern Europe, sex role socialization in the Soviet Union, feminist literature in the GDR, women in Soviet Central Asia, and possibly something on childbirth in the Soviet Union. We still have to find some more money to meet printing costs so we can't predict when it will appear.

We plan to meet on a more regular

basis from now on so the next reply should be more prompt.

In Sisterhood,
Women in Eastern Europe Group
c/o C.R.E.E.S.
University of Birmingham
Birmingham, England

Dear Sisters,

As a woman who also happens to be Israeli, I find it a very sad fact that my sisters "on the other side" are more interested in killing me as a means to obtain their liberation than they are in working with me to stop a patriarchal war and create a better society for us to live in. (Referring to the article "Fences, Laws and Border Patrols," Fall 1981.)

It is disappointing to learn that defense of their honor means the hijacking of civilian planes (taking Leila Khaled as an example), or the shelling of a school bus on its way to drop kids off at school (Avivim), or the murder of two women at work (Shamir)—each side has its unending lists, but I do not want to fall into this patriotic trap.

I fail to see why one killing is better than another. Does the killing of Israeli children pay or rather compensate for the killing of Palestinian children or vice versa? Will more bloodshed bring back the dead or create a better world for us women and for our children?

I am terribly sorry that the liberation of the Palestinian women depends so much on killing. I believe that we should and could be fighting together to stop this men's war, fighting for our right to live fully as women and for our children's right to live, whether we are Israeli by birth or Palestinian.

As always, this war involves two sides, neither of which is wholly right nor wholly wrong, both wanting to survive. Can we not survive together?

I would like to add one more comment on what seems to me is the patriarchal tone of the article. To quote one exam-

ple: "The question of birth control is a particularly difficult one for a population whose continued existence is in danger." I have always assumed that it is a woman's basic right to decide if she wants to have children and not a national question.

With hope that we will all one day manage to overcome our patriotic barriers,

Aviva Suskin
Malmö, Sweden

Dear *Connexions*,

This is in response to your cover "Global Lesbianism," Winter, 1982. The cover is a "snapshot of Indian women from family album." This suggests that this is an Indian family "headed" by two women, one of whom is in drag. Your caption in conjunction with the issue's title also suggests that this is an expression of lesbianism in India.

Nothing can be further from the truth. Lesbianism is not allowed any expression, let alone the blatant form suggested by your cover. Your article, "Bury Us Together," hears this out. If your intention was to suggest that lesbianism was latent in such pastimes as dressing up in men's clothes, then your article in no way supports this. It would also suggest that that lesbianism is latent whenever women have worn men's clothes—no matter what the occasion.

The cover to me in its original form is nothing more than an innocent disguise (probably for a play) and has no relationship whatsoever to the revelation your article makes.

You should show more responsibility and accuracy when presenting any issue to such a vast cultural cross-section which I think your readers form.

I think the subject of Indian feminism could do with a lot more attention on the international front and I appreciate your efforts in this direction.

A.D. Gurnandy
San Francisco

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Solidarity Bulletin

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NETWORKING

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Global Lesbianism #2

Any information pertaining to any of these issues is greatly appreciated.

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by Angelica Balabanoff,
Harper & Row, New York, 1938

Becoming Visible

ed. Bridenthal/Koonz,
Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1977

Six Red Months in Russia

by Louise Bryant, 1918
reprint Carrier Pigeon, Boston, 1981

Burning Lights:

A Unique Double Portrait of Soviet Jewry

by Bella Chagall,
Schocken, New York, 1963

Not by Politics Alone

by Tamara Deutscher,
Allen & Unwin, London, 1973

My Disillusionment in Russia

by Emma Goldmann,
reprinted Crowell, New York, 1970

Love of Workers Bee

by Alexandra Kollontai,
reprinted Virago, London, 1977

Reminiscent of Lenin

by Nadesha Krupskaja, reprinted
International Publishing Co.,
New York, 1970

The Accumulation of Capital

by Rosa Luxemburg,
reprint Monthly Review Press,
New York

Hope Against Hope, and Hope Abandoned

by Nadezhda Mandelstam,
Atheneum, New York 1976 & 1981

Does Socialism Liberate Women?

by Hilda Scott,
Beacon Press, Boston, 1974

The Curious Courtship of

Women's Liberation and Socialism

by Batya Weinbaum,
South End Press, Boston, 1978

Women in Russia—the Almanack

translated and edited by
Sheba Feminist Books, London, 1980

Auf

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cahiers du féminisme

French feminist monthly
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93108 Montreuil, France

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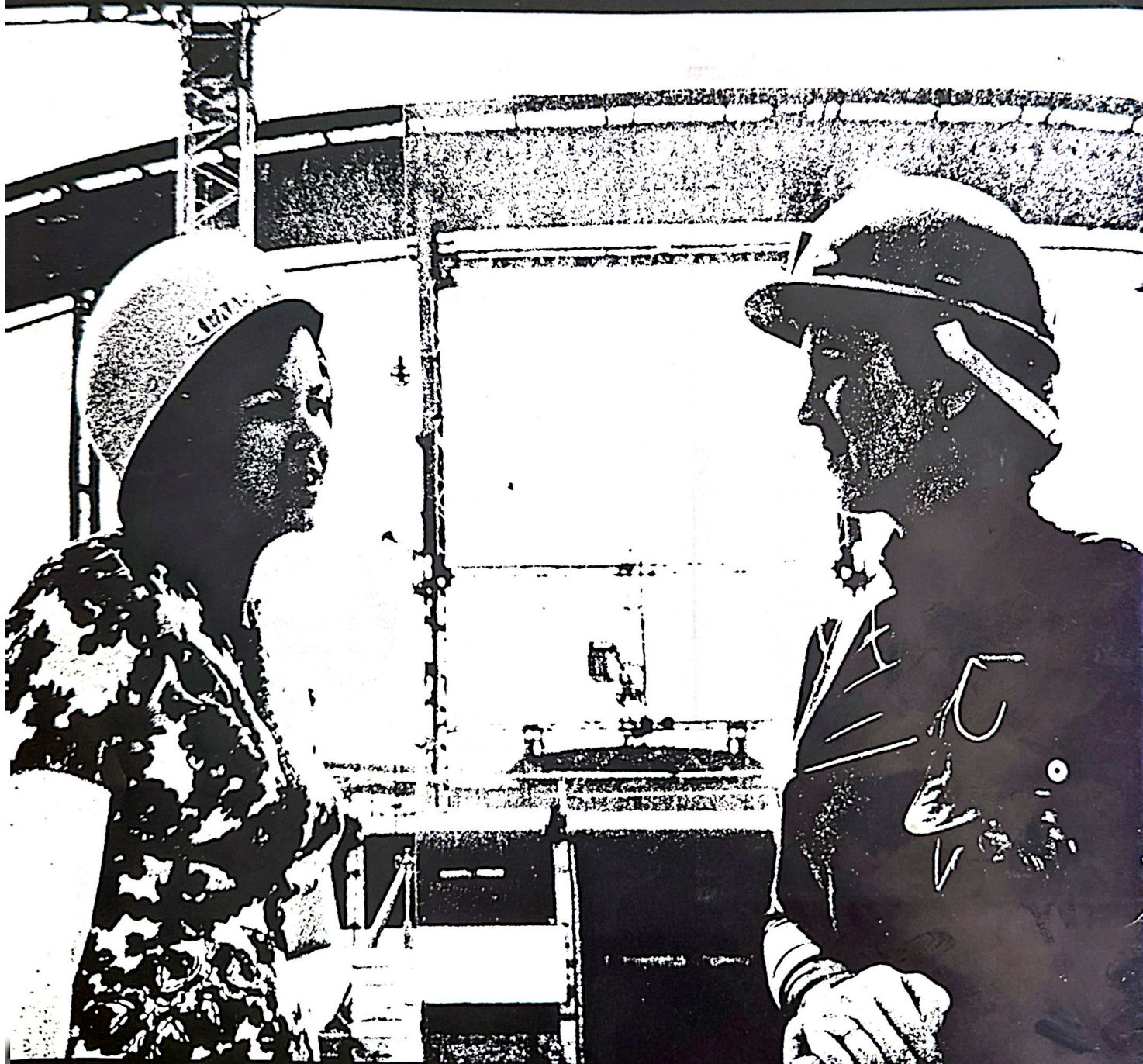
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