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Women in the Stalin Era

Edited by
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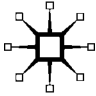

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Glossary of Russian Terms and Abbreviations

ACCTU	All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (see also VTsSPS)
baba/baby	woman/women (sometimes derogatory)
bezkul'tur'e	lack of culture
byt	everyday life
chelovek	person, or human being
dvizhenie zhen	more generalised term for the *obshchestvennitsa*; also applied to the 1920s campaigns
Gulag	Main Administration of Labour Camps
kolkhoz	collective farm
Komsomol	(member of the) Communist Party's youth section
kulak	rich peasant
mat' rodina	Soviet motherland
Memorial	The Memorial Society is a voluntary organisation that is currently collecting and archiving the personal testimonies of former labour camp inmates
nekul'turnost'	uncultured
NKVD	*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del* (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)
oblast'	region
obshchestvennitsa	wife of administrative–professional personnel (including industrial managers and engineers) engaged in voluntary social and public activities; woman involved in the activity, usually referring to the later 1930s (see also *dvizhenie zhen*)
raion	district
sovet	council
Stakhanovite	following the example of Alexei Stakhanov in August 1935, Stakhanovites were workers who vastly exceeded their allocated norms of output
svodki	summaries
traktoristka	woman tractor driver

udarnichestvo	shock-work – a work-based campaign organised in the early 1930s to raise levels of productivity; shock-worker = *udarnik*
VTsSPS	*Vsesoyuznoi Tsentraln'yi Sovet Professional'nykh Soyuzov* (see also ACCTU)
Zhenotdel	*Zhenskii otdel* (Women's Department of the Communist Party)

Archive acronyms used in the notes are detailed in full in the Bibliography.

Introduction

Melanie Ilič

This book brings together for the first time a collection of essays by western scholars (from Britain, the United States and Germany) about women in the Stalin era (1928–53). In my own mind, it has always been subtitled 'Realities and Representations' because the book explores both the realities of women's lived experience in the 1930s and 1940s, and the various forms in which womanhood and femininity were represented and constructed in these decades. As such, the book aims to challenge the scholarly neglect that women's history has suffered at the hands, and pens, of Russian and western historians of the Stalin period. Despite the chronological cohesion of the book and its sole focus on women's history, no single theme runs throughout the individual essays, and no overriding conclusion is drawn from its contents (except perhaps that this area of study is deserving of much more extensive research).

A number of common threads can be identified from the studies included in this volume. It is evident that there was a significant shift in the new Soviet regime's approach to the woman question from the 1920s to the 1930s. The strategies adopted for the realisation of women's liberation in the 1920s were more woman-centred, and often feminist-inspired, than the state-sponsored initiatives of the 1930s. This is not to argue that the policies adopted during the Stalin era did not have positive consequences for the redefinition of gender relations and sex roles, but that these were often the secondary outcomes of the rather more instrumental approach to women and women's issues. An example of such a shift is illustrated by the *obshchestvennitsa* movement. Women were mobilised in the 1920s for their own self-development as part of what could be regarded as somewhat of a consciousness-raising exercise. In contrast, the

obshchestvennitsa of the 1930s was mobilised for service to the economy and the state.

Motherhood and maternity offer another common thread in these essays as a defining feature for women in the Stalin era. Such concerns were evident in socio-economic policies and, moreover, in the construction of the ideal Soviet woman of the period. The cult of motherhood was central to determining women's position in literature and the arts. Women, as actual and potential mothers, acted not only as agents of Stalinist cultural values, but also as their primary audience. Maternity was used metaphorically for the defence of the 'motherland' during the Second World War. Women's reproductive functions in a number of ways also offered them a peculiar form of protection during the Stalin period. It was clearly possible for women to voice dissenting opinions in the 1930s, perhaps because their complaints were taken less seriously. They did so in relation to both the shortfalls in the practical implementation and the general direction of policy initiatives. Women were also far less likely to fall victim of the purges and the labour camp network.

The instrumental use of women in the Stalin period is never more clearly illustrated than in their mobilisation as workers in the command economy. Again, this is a thread common to a number of essays in this volume. When the supply of male labour fell short of requirements women were drawn unreservedly into the labour force in industry and agriculture, as volunteer activists, and into combat during the war. While this undoubtedly offered women opportunities for self-development, education and training, it did not in its entirety provide for their liberation. The Soviet heroines so frequently lauded, and patronised, in the press and fiction were often not so welcome at the workbench, behind the steering wheel of a tractor, organising the works' canteen, or even on the factory floor after the end of the war. Moreover, women's involvement in the production process was in no way accompanied by emancipation from their responsibilities in the domestic sphere.

As with the different academic disciplines that form the foundation for these studies, the sources from which the individual authors have drawn their evidence are many and varied. The scholarship expands on the traditional resources of historical research (such as archival documents, contemporary newspapers, journals and magazines and official government publications, including statute law, autobiographies, biographies and memoirs) and incorporates visual culture, film studies, literary criticism and textual analysis.

The opening of the Russian archives to western scholars, the systematic gathering of life experience testimonies within Russia and the expansion of oral history projects all offer new avenues for researchers interested in the history of Russian women. Now, detailed writings about women in the Stalin era and feminist-inspired scholarship are beginning to challenge the rather heroic image of the progress of sexual equality in the Soviet Union that is presented by the official histories of the period, and which has so often been recounted in western studies. This rewriting of Russian women's post-revolutionary history is continued and expanded upon in this volume.

The general contours of official Russian women's post-revolutionary history, much rehearsed also in western scholarship, are already known to many readers. I will simply summarise them here. The legal equality of women and men was declared immediately after the October revolution in 1917. A number of important legal freedoms were extended to women, including the right to divorce on far more lenient grounds than had been possible before the revolution, extensive maternity entitlements, health and safety measures at work, and the right to abortion on demand from 1920. To enjoy these freedoms fully, women needed to be economically independent of men, and this was to be achieved by drawing women without prejudice into 'the production process', that is paid work. During the 1920s, urban women, in particular, were able to enter the waged labour force and they were rewarded with improvements in their relative levels of payment.

The Communist Party set up a specialist women's department, the *Zhenotdel*, to give publicity to these measures and to oversee the realisation of women's rights and new-found freedoms. The *Zhenotdel* remained active throughout the 1920s. In its operation, the *Zhenotdel* challenged patriarchal attitudes at all levels of society. Its staff organised literacy classes for women, encouraged them to take part in education and technical training programmes, and informed them of their important role in the newly-founded voluntary, political and social organisations that were being set up in the workplace, towns and villages. In the later 1920s, the *Zhenotdel*, under the leadership of Aleksandra Artyukhina from 1925, also spearheaded the campaigns for the unveiling of Muslim women in Central Asia.

The 1920s were a relatively experimental decade in terms of sexual morality, family policy and women's political activism. Women formed part of a new avant-garde movement in artistic and cultural expression. A model 'new Soviet woman', self-sacrificial and dedicated

to revolutionary causes, became a standard character in fiction and film. According to official accounts, women became more politically active, as delegates to Communist Party meetings, local government officials and trade union representatives, for example.

In 1930 it was asserted that the work of the *Zhenotdel* had been completed and the department was disbanded. Hereafter, the equality of women and men was a declared achievement of the Soviet regime. Women's individual and collective achievements continued to be highlighted as part of the annual state-sponsored International Women's Day celebrations on 8 March.

From the beginning of the 1930s women were drawn in unprecedented numbers into the Soviet industrial labour force and began to take on work in formerly male-dominated areas of employment, including heavy and mechanised jobs. Likewise, in the villages, the collectivisation process offered new opportunities for the employment of peasant women in the agricultural sector. Working mothers were to be supported by a network of state-financed childcare centres, public canteens and laundries.

The mid-1930s witnessed the return to more traditional and conservative values in many areas of social and family policy. For example, divorce was made more difficult to obtain in order to bring stability to the Soviet family, and abortion was recriminalised in an effort to boost the birth rate. In employment, women were seen to be active supporters of the various state-initiated work campaigns that were much celebrated in the Soviet press in the 1930s, including socialist competition (a campaign to improve industrial productivity by increasing individual levels of output) and shock-work, Stakhanovism and the volunteer wives' movement (*obshchestvennitsa*). Individual heroines of labour were lauded in the newspapers. The 'new Soviet woman' of the 1930s was not only a dedicated worker, or volunteer, concerned with the day-to-day processes of economic production, she was also an efficient housewife and mother. Maintaining a healthy, and beautiful, physical appearance was also important.

Women were regarded as heroines of the home front during the Second World War. They kept the factories running while men went off to war, and were active in civil defence. Women were promoted to positions of responsibility and leadership in the factories, and became the mainstay of the labour force in agriculture. For the first time, many women trained for the professions, and they became doctors and engineers. They even served in combat alongside front-line troops as fighters and pilots.

Women were ingenious and improvised in the face of shortages. During the Second World War, images of women, more than ever, were used to symbolise patriotism and 'the motherland' (*mat' rodina*). The birth rate fell dramatically, and many married women were widowed by the end of the war. A new campaign to boost the Soviet family was launched in 1944. The demographic losses suffered by the Soviet Union as a result of the war and the demands of post-war recovery meant that women continued to play an important role in the country's economy even after hostilities were over.

What is perhaps interesting to western scholars in the official account of post-revolutionary Russian women's history is not so much the narrative of Soviet achievements towards women's emancipation and sexual equality as the silences within this narrative. The official version does not talk of the high levels of female unemployment, widespread poverty among women and the growth of prostitution during the years of the new economic policy in the 1920s. It does not mention the murders of Muslim women that accompanied the unveiling campaigns, or the internal struggles for survival between *Zhenotdel* staff and the Communist Party hierarchy.

During the 1930s, the success of women's liberation and equality was measured simply by the numerical absorption and accommodation of women into traditional male spheres of activity in politics and the economy, in culture and the arts. What happened to those Soviet women activists of the 1920s who still adhered to women-centred and feminist-inspired goals? Were they, like Aleksandra Artyukhina, as we shall see, largely alienated from party politics? Many women were effectively silenced under Stalin, among them Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya and a number of well-known women writers. At a grassroots level, however, women's resistance to a range of Stalinist policies, including the collectivisation of agriculture and the outlawing of abortion, for example, remained in evidence.

The realisation of many policy goals fell far short of expectations. The state cut back its expenditure on public services and maternity support in the run up to the war. The labour conscription of women, combined with the as yet unchallenged sole responsibility of women for household management, formed the basis of what has become known by western scholars as the 'double burden' in the 1930s. This can be recast as a 'triple burden' if the maternal role in childcare is also taken into account. The changes in the relationship between the sexes brought about by Stalin's policies were the result of strategies for women's accommodation within traditional spheres of male activity

and the established framework of the patriarchal order. Rather than providing for women's liberation, the Stalin era, it could be argued, simply expanded the spheres in which women could be exploited.

The silences of the official women's history of the Stalin era are also important. To offer only a few examples: what were the realities of women's widespread industrial and agricultural employment in the 1930s? What was women's position within and in relation to the emerging cultural norms of the period? What was the fate of women during the great terror and in the prison camps? What was the fate, also, of Soviet wartime heroines, those engaged in combat as well as those serving on the homefront, after 1945? The detailed scholarship contained in the chapters that follow can only hope to scratch the surface of such questions, but it is hoped that they will provide inspiration for future research on women in the Stalin era.

Carmen Scheide uses the political life history of Aleksandra Artyukhina to explore the competing strategies for promoting women's liberation – difference or equality – in the 1920s. She traces also the origins of women's participation in Soviet state-sponsored voluntary organisations in the 1920s (a movement that reached its height with the *obshchestvennitsa* a decade later) and some of the challenges faced by the *Zhenotdel* in the final years of its existence. This chapter includes interesting observations about the genre of Soviet women's autobiographical writing, as well as identifying the failure of Communist Party politics and policies to accommodate fully women's interests by the 1930s.

Lynne Attwood has undertaken a critical reading of articles in the popular women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker) to draw a picture of official attitudes towards women's leisure activities in the interwar period. Leisure was highly gendered, and women had less of it than men. Women's spare time was to be spent in rational self-improvement activities in the 1920s, and in cultured and feminine pursuits in the 1930s. *Rabotnitsa* constructed women's leisure often in the face of, and to make up for, evident deficiencies in state supply.

Choi Chatterjee explores the language and processes by which women, and Soviet heroines in particular, came to symbolise modernity in the 1930s. This language, however, was used as a justification for social policies that were not always woman-friendly and, in addition, reinforced paternal and deferential attitudes to the leadership

cult. In the Soviet example, the language of modernity, which was premised on a model of liberation based on women's adoption of male roles, had echoes also of dependence on the state.

Wendy Goldman's chapter highlights the fact that women's entry into the industrial labour force was far from a smooth process. Women faced verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse from male co-workers and supervisors alike. They were offered work with the least reliable equipment and machines, and were denied access to training and promotion. By the early 1930s, Goldman argues, the Communist Party and the Soviet government had lost any interest in challenging structural inequalities in the workplace.

Sarah Davies demonstrates that the voicing of dissenting opinions was not the sole preserve of men in the 1930s. Women publicly and openly aired their complaints, mostly in relation to their familial and domestic responsibilities, for example in response to shortages of food and clothing. Likewise, the decline in living standards and pro-natalist social policies elicited particular responses from women, which were overshadowed by a class, as much as a gender, rhetoric.

My own chapter traces the emergence of the symbolic image of the woman tractor driver, which was used both to denote economic progress and as a marker of female emancipation and sexual equality in the 1930s. This is contrasted with the realities of the *traktoristka'*s employment. The chapter draws on the reminiscences of the celebrated *traktoristka,* Pasha Angelina, and contemporary debates on labour protection issues to illustrate the difficulties and prejudices women faced as tractor drivers in the 1930s.

Emma Mason adds to our knowledge of the gulag by offering a glimpse of everyday living conditions in the Soviet forced labour camps as experienced by women prisoners in the 1930s. She uses survivor testimonies, both published memoirs and accounts currently being archived by Memorial, to paint a harrowing picture of life in the camps, which is also, in her final analysis, set against the backdrop of the living conditions of the 'free' population in this decade.

Mary Buckley uses the example of the *obshchestvennitsa* to construct a model of women's grassroots political activity in the second half of the 1930s, which challenges the totalitarian interpretation of the Stalinist

regime. On the one hand, *obshchestvennitsa* reinforced traditional gender roles by urging wives to act as helpmeets to their husbands. On the other hand, women's social activism offered them a public voice and direct involvement in local politics, albeit in the service of the state-sponsored goal of cultural improvement.

Rosalind Marsh offers a comprehensive overview of women's writing in the 1930s, a decade in which women's literary production fell significantly. She examines both domestic and émigré women's literature, including underground writing, in a variety of genres. She explores the impact of socialist realism on women's writing. In addition, she undertakes a content analysis of published literatures both to identify themes that interested women and for a literary construction of Russian womanhood. The label 'woman writer' is explored in the conclusion.

Susan Reid provides a view of the new woman in Soviet art, set in the broader context of 'the great retreat' in the second half of the 1930s. Her work on Soviet visual culture, alongside an overview of contemporary art exhibitions, reveals a social hierarchy that maintained the subordination of women. In addition, she points out that the audience for Soviet art in this period was assumed to be composed predominantly of women.

Susanne Conze extends our study of women in the Stalin era into the 1940s. She examines the impact of the Second World War on the structure and scope of women's industrial employment. She points out that by the end of the war the Soviet government was promoting a new ideal of motherhood, yet the mass employment of women continued throughout the post-war period. As in the west, in the Soviet Union the Second World War provided little impetus for the emancipation of women.

1

'Born in October': the Life and Thought of Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina, 1889–1969

Carmen Scheide[1]

> It was not God, but Soviet power – our party – that transformed the fate of women in Russia. Women in the Soviet Union are the most free, most equal and most fortunate in the world. And today, with the establishment of Communism, women's active participation continues to grow. Thus, Lenin's call for women to play an active role in the running of the state is being answered. [1962][2]

This statement by Aleksandra Artyukhina, taken from her memoirs, contains key elements of the official Soviet image of women as it was moulded by the Communist Party at the beginning of the 1930s. Women were portrayed as a social group which had been educated, and thereby emancipated, by the Communist Party and the soviets. The Soviet project established norms for women's social roles; female equality was measured by the fulfilment of quotas for women's representation in state and party organisations. The portrayal of the party, which depicted Lenin (replacing God and Fate) as its leading figure, symbolised a patriarchal order in Soviet form.

Artyukhina's idealisation of the Soviet Union and the unique equality of Soviet women as she represented them in 1962 contrast strongly with her criticisms in 1929 of women's lack of equality. In 1929, as a member of the Bolshevik women's movement, she claimed that women were being ignored, especially in party organisations. This had resulted, she argued, in a female exodus from the party.[3] A year later the 'solution of the woman question' was proclaimed, ending both the debates initiated by the Bolsheviks after the revolution and the practical measures promoting women's equality in Soviet society. The 1936 Constitution guaranteed the formal equality of women with

men, setting male standards as the norm: 'Women in the Soviet Union are granted equal rights to men in all economic, state, cultural and socio-political areas of life.'[4] In reality, the integration of female labour into the industrialisation process created a double burden for Soviet women and they were left with little influence over their role and status in society.[5] The lively discussions about the path to women's emancipation were halted from the beginning of the 1930s, paralleling the consolidation of Stalinism and an end to inner-party debate on the construction of socialism.[6]

In the 1920s, Artyukhina ranked as one of the leading figures in Soviet women's politics. In 1925 and 1927 she was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and from 1925 to 1930 she chaired the party's Women's Department (the *Zhenskii otdel* – *Zhenotdel*). Artyukhina was head of the *Zhenotdel* when it was dissolved in January 1930. Born into a simple working-class family, she died in 1969 a highly decorated and honoured member of the Soviet *nomenklatura* (privileged party members).

Between 1925 and 1930, Artyukhina, as head of the *Zhenotdel*, wrote a number of different articles on the woman question, mostly published in the periodicals *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker) and *Kommunistka* (The Communist Woman). Only limited archival data is available for the *Zhenotdel* in the second half of the 1920s. Artyukhina's personal files are also rather limited and omit details of her work as a Central Committee member and as head of the *Zhenotdel* from 1925, and her involvement in the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel* in 1930.[7] This may be no accident, and we can only guess the extent to which Artyukhina herself was able to influence the collection of archival materials on her life and work. The biographical data used here is drawn from her memoirs, published some years after Stalin's death during the 'thaw' between 1959 and 1967. In these, Artyukhina comments on her politicisation as a Bolshevik, but she writes almost nothing about her private life, marriage, family or personal feelings. The purpose behind the publication of such memoirs, on the whole, was the commemoration of the Bolshevik proletarian women's movement, which had been much neglected in Soviet historiography.

Artyukhina describes herself as an active participant in the Bolshevik women's movement, which she saw as an integral part of the broader revolutionary movement. In this respect her views differ from those of official Soviet historians. Yet her own critique was also limited: she did not recognise the need to work among and for women in the context of an overwhelmingly patriarchal revolutionary movement, nor did

she write about the inner party conflicts of the 1920s. She did not write about her revolutionary ambitions for women or the failure of these to materialise during the 1920s. Her controversial period of office as head of the *Zhenotdel* likewise receives little attention. Instead, she provides a picture of the linear development from the Russian revolutionary movement to the success of the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917. In retrospect, for Artyukhina the Bolshevik revolution provided a new era in human history, and she used the term 'Born in October' to justify her subsequent life as a communist.

In her writings, Artyukhina reiterates the official view of the October revolution as the beginning of the heroic victory of socialism, and, as with other official Soviet histories, she makes no mention of the cruelties of the civil war, the collectivisation of agriculture or Stalin's repressions. Some contradictions relating to the success of women's emancipation are apparent when comparing Artyukhina's contemporary writings with her later memoirs, but there is a clear continuity in her thinking about the role of the party leadership and the existence of special organisations for work among women. She did not question policy decisions and at all times observed party discipline. It is important to remember also with official publications in mind that all texts were subject to censorship. However, individual authors were able to emphasise certain aspects of their lives and to include personal details. Reading between the lines, we are able to draw important conclusions from such offical accounts, including those of Artyukhina's life and work.

Becoming a Bolshevik

Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina (née Afanasenkova) was born on 25 October (6 November) 1889 in Vyshnii Volochek in Tver' province, where she spent her childhood and youth.[8] The family income was derived from factory work and outwork. Artyukhina's childhood was like that of many girls who lived in industrialised areas of provincial Russia. Before 1917 there was no compulsory education and the literacy rate was correspondingly low. Artyukhina attended primary school from 1896 to 1899, though her future husband, Mikhail, by contrast, completed seven years' schooling.[9] Young people at the turn of the century became self-supporting from an early age. Artyukhina learnt the typical female trade of seamstress at the age of twelve, both to earn her own living and to ease the family's financial burden. In addition, as her mother also worked in a factory, she took responsibility for many household tasks.

When her mother temporarily lost her job after joining a political strike, Artyukhina supported the family from her own earnings.

Investigations of Russian workers' lives before the First World War reveal a general picture of poverty and a struggle for subsistence.[10] It was to such circumstances that Artyukhina traced the causes of the revolution. In her memoirs, Artyukhina contrasted proletarian life before and after 1917 in order to emphasise both the necessity and the achievements of the October revolution. She described her employment as an outworker as the period of her politicisation as a Social Democrat. Her political awareness and her perception of working-class disadvantage were not unusual in her social milieu. All of her relatives, including her mother, took part in strikes, were often arrested and sometimes exiled.[11]

Artyukhina's mother plays a central role in her memoirs. She is portrayed as a simple, illiterate woman, who nevertheless possessed a well-developed working-class consciousness. Artyukhina's testimony stands in marked contrast to the classical route to politicisation in which women entered the revolutionary movement before 1905 mostly via fathers or husbands, but rarely via their mothers or female relatives, a pattern more usual only after 1905.[12] Artyukhina's mother hid leaflets at home and was banned from working at the local factory after her participation in the 1903 strike. As a result, she moved to St Petersburg to work at the Rezvoostrovskii textile factory. Her daughter followed soon after and began work as a weaver. In St Petersburg, at the age of 16, Artyukhina witnessed the 1905 revolution and turned to the ideas of the Bolsheviks.[13]

In 1907, the Tsar dissolved the Duma and the prime minister, Stolypin, tried simultaneously to abolish the trade unions, thus plunging the workers' organisations into crisis. Nevertheless, Artyukhina joined the St Petersburg textile trade union in 1908. Overall, few female workers joined a union, but in St Petersburg more than a quarter of the textile trade union members were female. Artyukhina's political education was acquired in the trade union, under the direction of its boss, Nikolai Ivanovich Lebedev, 'an old revolutionary and Bolshevik'.[14] Artyukhina quickly took on responsibilities and was soon elected to the central trade union secretariat. In 1910, when she was 21 years old, she joined the Bolshevik party.

Despite the threat of arrest and periods of exile, Artyukhina's political involvement deepened. She joined the Aivaz metalworking factory as an unskilled worker, attended Marxist gatherings and met some of the leading Bolsheviks. It was here that she was influenced by Mikhail

Ivanovich Kalinin, then a worker at the same factory. He provided basic political education, discussions and lectures. Despite her sex, her youth and her lack of qualifications in the trade, Artyukhina joined the metalworkers' trade union, which was unusual considering that the union was heavily male-dominated. She soon took on a leading role in the union. Little is known about her life in this period, though it is probable that she met and married her husband at this time. Whereas all other trade unions steadily lost members in the crisis years between 1907 and 1911, the membership of the St Petersburg metalworkers' union remained stable.[15] In contrast to the other, predominantly Menshevik-dominated, unions, the Bolsheviks were strongly represented in the metalworkers' union, and this is a possible further reason for Artyukhina's involvement.[16] Her memoirs stress the excellence of the union's work amongst women. This seems surprising when the fact that the proportion of women in the metalworking industry ranged between only 5 and 8 per cent is taken into account.[17] Female workers in the metal industry were subjected to criticism and disapproval from some male workers, who saw them as intruding into their world. Others, however, criticised the hostile response of skilled workers towards women. Through the trade union press, the metalworkers' union made an effort to win new female members by reducing the fee for women. Attention was paid, in the union's political demands and strike activities, to the interests of female workers, such as supporting the demand for a minimum wage. In 1913, two women were elected to the leadership of the union without major opposition.[18]

Artyukhina's commitment attracted the attention of leading Bolshevik women. In 1913 she established contact with *Rabotnitsa* (see p. 10), the Bolsheviks' first magazine for working-class women, set up as a result of *Pravda*'s failure to pay sufficient attention to women's interests. *Rabotnitsa* was the Bolsheviks' only initiative to address the female proletariat directly. The editorial staff consisted of a number of leading Bolshevik women living in exile abroad and in the Russian underground. Along with other women workers in St Petersburg, Artyukhina was invited to participate.

Artyukhina does not mention in her memoirs the reasons why she took up work specifically among women rather than continuing her general involvement in trade union activities. We can only assume that her experiences of work in the textile industry, with its growing number of women workers, was an important reason. Women were under-represented in the trade unions and were generally considered politically 'backward'. In later life she maintained the view that there

had to be specific organisations for women under the general leadership of the party, and she makes no mention in her memoirs of the long years in Soviet history when such organisations ceased to exist. Perhaps by recalling the successes of the *Zhenotdel* and the delegates' assemblies she was hoping to revive a more active policy towards women in the 1960s.

Clements identifies the founding of *Rabotnitsa* as the point at which Bolshevik feminism emerged.[19] *Rabotnitsa* attracted many Bolshevik women activists and addressed a range of issues relating to women's emancipation. Working women's everyday lives were very different from men's. Women had to care for the family, children and the household. They were less educated and had lower levels of work experience and training than men; they had less time to spend on politics and organisational matters. Bolshevik feminists pleaded with the party leadership for work to be undertaken among women.

Artyukhina makes little mention of the struggle by Bolshevik women activists to conduct work among women, which was highly criticised for being separatist and 'feminist'. Aleksandra Kollontai, for example, as the most prominent Bolshevik feminist at the time of the foundation of *Rabotnitsa*, argued that women had specific interests which required separate organisations, at least under the conditions prevalent at the time. From Kollontai's perspective on the woman question, this was not to separate women from the proletarian movement, but to oversee their general interests within it.[20]

Again, we do not know the extent to which Artyukhina participated in such discussions, or her own personal views on this issue apart from the fact that she did not make claims for distinct women's organisations. In retrospect, she appears to advocate a shared interest of female and male revolutionaries, and she later recorded that such organisational work was for 'technical purposes'.[21] In general, it appears that Artyukhina took a pragmatic approach, adapting to changes in official policy without becoming identified with specific factions.

As a member of the revolutionary underground, Artyukhina was arrested several times, imprisoned and exiled to Siberia during the First World War. In her memoirs, she skips over the period of the war and resumes her account with the 1917 February revolution, when, returning to Vyshnii Volochek from exile, she promptly became involved in party work.[22] Shortly afterwards she went to Petrograd to become an active contributor to the relaunched *Rabotnitsa*. Here she witnessed the October revolution and met Lenin, who greatly impressed her. Especially important, in her opinion, was his public appearance at the

First Congress of Women Workers and Peasants in November 1918, in which Artyukhina 'was lucky enough to take part'.[23]

She saw the congress as significant in two distinct ways. First, the congress expressed the new self-confidence of women workers and peasants, whose activities prompted a discussion of women's issues in the Communist Party and demonstrated the theory of gender equality in practice. Following the requests of the delegates, the party finally agreed to undertake separate work among women. Second, the party authorised the congress to mobilise women for general political tasks and the struggle against counter-revolution. In her memoirs, Artyukhina conjured up historic unity between the women's movement and the broader revolutionary movement, whereas the relationship between these was, in reality, very tense. Writing in the heroic genre of Soviet history, she ignored this fact.

Congress deputies were sent off to combat areas and to the front, as partisans and political commissars. Selfless and self-sacrificing women, as portrayed by Artyukhina, fought for the revolution alongside the soldiers of the Red Army, and later served as role models for the early conceptualisation of the 'new Soviet woman'.[24] Artyukhina herself fitted the image. After serving at the Ukrainian front during the civil war, she worked for local party women's departments in several places, including Tver'.[25]

After the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924, Artyukhina returned to the editorial board of *Rabotnitsa*.[26] Along with Klavdiya Nikolaeva, Artyukhina was elected as a candidate member of the Central Committee. In the same year, Nikolaeva (who was close politically to Lenin's successors) became *Zhenotdel'*s director and Artyukhina was made her deputy. By 1925 the internal power struggle for the party leadership had grown more intense. Political events had a direct impact on the *Zhenotdel*. Nikolaeva, an opposition supporter, lost her job.[27] Artyukhina's personal files do not reveal exactly when she took over as head of the *Zhenotdel*.[28] She makes little reference in her memoirs to her role in the department, sometimes concealing it altogether, but we will examine this phase of her life more closely in the next section.

Chairwoman of the *Zhenotdel*, 1925–30

In a period of high female unemployment in industry and the closer involvement of the unions in work among women, it was expedient to

choose an experienced trade unionist such as Artyukhina as director of the *Zhenotdel*. However, Artyukhina was probably also chosen in 1925 because, unlike her controversial predecessors, she was regarded as someone who would not cause difficulties and would follow instructions. She was not involved in inner-party conflicts and was a respected tactician. When she assumed office the *Zhenotdel* had already been deprived of influence. The party leadership and the trade unions now decided policy on women's issues.[29]

As *Zhenotdel*'s director Artyukhina published programmatic statements about women. She publicly adhered to the instructions of the party leadership and thereby was seen to avoid taking an independent stand. In the little she wrote, she agreed with party directives and applied them to the *Zhenotdel*. In accordance with the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Bebel, Artyukhina strove to achieve social emancipation through economic equality via the destruction of capitalism. She was convinced that a better future would be created by the establishment of a classless socialist society.

A more general solution to the woman question by other party or state institutions, however, was far less obvious. It would be interesting to know if Artyukhina developed a concept of her own in relation to the transition from difference to equality. In my opinion, she favoured the delegates' assemblies as a mass organisation for the mobilisation of women from different backgrounds. Unlike the *Zhenotdel*, the delegates' assemblies were not tainted by feminism and did not articulate the radical demand of equal rights for women. It is perhaps this – the emergence of the gendered notion of woman as *obshchestvennitsa* (socially active) – that corresponded most to Artyukhina's understanding of the woman question.

The idea of organising women from different social groups and giving them access to basic political education and literacy had first been envisaged by Inessa Armand in 1919. The proposed delegates' assemblies, led and instructed by the *Zhenotdel*, were to serve as the link between the party and the 'female masses'. Artyukhina regarded the delegates' assemblies, which she called the 'School of Communism', as the most important aspect of the party's policy towards women.[30] Under the scheme, the delegates worked for a year and then discussed their experiences at a conference. This initiative to involve women in public life without obliging them to join either the party or a trade union met with success, especially among peasant women.[31] The assemblies were discontinued in 1933, however, when it was claimed that they were no longer needed.[32]

Before their dissolution, the delegates' assemblies served as a forerunner of the 1930s *obshchestvennitsa* movement.[33] Politically inexperienced women, such as housewives, workers' wives, servants and peasant women, were mobilised and trained for socio-political work. Their tasks were closely connected to the daily life of women, such as child and health care, food preparation, doing the laundry and housekeeping. Compared to Kollontai's ideas of the withering away of the family, the socialisation of domestic labour, free love and redefining sex roles for both women and men, the delegates advocated more traditional gender roles and restored the family as an area for female concern and as a basic social institution. Despite the fact that they mobilised many women, the delegates' assemblies themselves contributed to gender stereotypes, by setting women apart from, and not equal to, men. Such thinking about a 'natural' hierarchy between the sexes was common. The delegates themselves often saw no problem in contributing to traditionally female tasks.

The image of the socially active soviet woman (the *obshchestvennitsa*), taking care of the orderly running and daily life of their families, neighbourhood and workplace, emerged from the middle of the 1920s. This image became very popular and reached its ideological peak in the *dvizhenie zhen obshchestvennits* (volunteer wives' movement) between 1936 and 1940.[34] Originally, '*obshchestvennitsa'* did not have a specific political meaning for women. The term was used primarily for the mobilisation of peasant women as it seemed to reflect their lifestyle more accurately than 'communist', or even 'delegate'. The delegate became more and more an *obshchestvennitsa* as she took on responsibility not only for private, but also for public morality and behaviour. Such women saw no contradiction in the social role differentiation between the sexes because it was generally supposed that this was natural and biologically determined. This suggests that some Soviet women, instead of looking to revolutionary ideology, regarded the fulfilment of a traditionally female role as in itself emancipatory.

Artyukhina regarded the delegates' assemblies as important organisations through which women could overcome their social inequality by, for example, acquiring access to education and public activity. This type of organisation gave working-class and peasant women the opportunity to emancipate themselves through political involvement, as they articulated and realised their objectives. Artyukhina thought it essential for women's issues to be promoted under the political direction of the party. She asked the party to recognise the delegates' assemblies as important organisations operating in women's interests.

Gendering

During the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the October revolution in 1927, the Second Congress of Women Workers and Peasants was held in Moscow. Artyukhina delivered a speech entitled 'The situation of women workers and peasants in the USSR on the tenth anniversary of the October revolution'.[35] In contrast to the stereotyped negative portrayal of the 'backward' woman, Artyukhina's conference report offered a different picture. Women – workers and especially peasants – had become politically educated and now demonstrated a social consciousness. In particular, women in the countryside were aware of the discrimination they faced and demanded improvements in their living conditions. A focal point was the demand for easier access to jobs, which necessitated the organisation of a regulated childcare system. More and more women were beginning to work for wages and they began to demand more constructive support, such as the opening of summer nurseries in the countryside or the establishment of medical centres. The delegates' system had clearly contributed to a change in outlook among women. The women who were mobilised demanded measures – such as the improvement of their living conditions – appropriate to their own social circumstances. With this in mind, Artyukhina wrote in her conference report:

> Here, for example, are the words of the peasant Khodusevich from Belorus: 'Little is done for women in the localities: there are few midwives, the support for mothers is poor, there are no nurseries, no kindergartens in the villages. It is here that our organs of power should look for a solution, with the help of the activists and all organisations, the party and the soviets'.[36]

Artyukhina countered the male assumption of female inferiority with a picture of a self-consciously committed woman who formulated her equal rights as political demands. Artyukhina stressed her concern for the protection of mothers and children, which can be seen as a typically female issue. It is probable that she did not intend to force women into traditional roles, but she pursued emancipatory politics by identifying such roles as her central theme and as specific issues for female concern. Different concepts of emancipation are evident: the party sought equalisation of roles, but some women wanted equal rights through the recognition of gender-specific interests. Artyukhina focused the goals of equal rights on specific measures by emphasising

female independence, the support of local organisations and the formulation of a new way of living.

Artyukhina's tone became sharper in 1928 in connection with the campaign for self-criticism which was imposed by the party in order to unveil mismanagement. She achieved a level of notoriety by stressing the role of the *Zhenotdel* in its work among women, and by criticising the deplorable state of affairs within the party. She supported Stalin's plans for the industrialisation of the country in the hope that the building of a socialist society would be accelerated. In an unusually euphoric mood, Artyukhina supported the integration of women into the production process. She bravely adopted the practice of self-criticism in the *Zhenotdel*. Artyukhina criticised the *Zhenotdel* for its conservatism and failure to provide a solution to the woman question. It had also distanced itself from women workers and their needs. In addition, she complained that married women workers were being made redundant and that women faced discrimination from men, including communists.

Artyukhina used economic arguments to criticise managers: women were equal members of society and often the ones, as wives and mothers, who earned the money to feed their family. They also had a claim to a job in their own right. Therefore, the dismissal of woman workers was not to be tolerated. Artyukhina criticised patriarchal behaviour and discrimination against women without being aware that she was articulating a feminist point of view.

The aggressive policy of self-criticism was also applied to the private sphere. The tactics employed by the political culture of self-criticism, playing off one section of the population against another – such as the poor peasant against the richer *kulak* – were also now transferred to the sexes. Artyukhina was critical of relations between the sexes within the family and she called for the unmasking of domestic violence.[37]

> For eleven years the proletariat has held power in its hands, and it is exactly with these hands that the proletarian man beats his wife in front of his class comrades. On this matter the women workers shall now take up the battle themselves. … If you see such a case, you should know that it is unavoidable for you, as a proletarian woman, to take up the battle.[38]

Such cutting statements, however, concealed her disappointment over the revolution's failure to achieve its goals. Despite the revolution, socialism had not been established in all spheres of life. Artyukhina

also included in her critique the behaviour of woman workers, who, in her opinion, understood equality as the adoption of male norms, instead of seeking independence and, consequently, equal rights. In place of the official party line, Artyukhina prescribed for women traditional gender roles.[39] Drinking alcohol, cursing and behaving like a hooligan were regarded as male behaviour, and not attributes of emancipation as some female workers supposed. She condemned these unfeminine activities and demanded that women instead should lead the struggle against such undisciplined behaviour in the working class, and that they should provide a positive model of sobriety, order and sense of duty in private life, society and in the workplace. These were central tenets of the delegates' assemblies.

For Artyukhina, the 'new Soviet woman' was less revolutionary and more traditional. She only found social approval by fulfilling her role as mother, wife and worker. She had to be independent, not emotionally, but economically, and she had to build the new way of living herself. The consequent burden of housework and waged labour, which was widespread by the 1930s, had not been anticipated by Artyukhina. The question of women's identity – as worker or housewife – remained unresolved in the context of the rationalisation of private life.[40] Artyukhina started from the premise of an improvement in living conditions and a strengthening of the *Zhenotdel*. The true goal of the party, however, consisted of a functional use of women as a reserve army of labour in the industrialisation process, without having to fulfil the demands for the socialisation of housework and educational tasks, and without having to continue to maintain an independent apparatus for women's politics.

Dissolution of the *Zhenotdel* – equalisation, not equal rights

The process of liquidating the work of the *Zhenotdel* was already in evidence by the end of 1927. Women's committees in the trade unions and local party organisations were abolished. Despite her protests, Artyukhina received no response from the Central Committee, which instead announced further plans for the reorganisation of work among women at its plenum in April 1929.[41] Such measures need to be seen also against the background of industrialisation, collectivisation and the reorganisation of the party apparatus. In practice, the reorganisation of work among women signalled the liquidation of the *Zhenotdel* after January 1930, although no official announcement was made. The

successful and popular delegates' assemblies, which attracted a growing number of women, continued to meet until 1933, when they too were closed down. They were now regarded as having fulfilled their purpose and were believed to be a potential platform for opposition.[42] In so far as the party was concerned, women's politics were reduced to the symbolic 8 March, International Women's Day, celebrations. However, work among women did continue in state organisations, such as the Department for the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood (OMM), but there has been little research to date on the effectiveness of such work in addressing women's needs.[43]

Kaganovich, a senior party and government official, took up the debate on the woman question in *Kommunistka* and exploited it for the party's work among women and wider political ends. In his opinion, the granting of equal rights to women was hampered by the *kulaks*, who opposed women's emancipation and even used women to pursue their own ends. The liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class would break the opposition to equal rights; the aim of a classless society included the equality of all of its members.

Kaganovich proclaimed that the question of women's emancipation no longer played such an important role as the class struggle, arguing that the working class as a whole had shared interests and that there should be no separation of the sexes.[44] On this matter, Artyukhina adhered to the opinion of the Bolshevik feminists who argued that special women's organisations were necessary in order to give visibility to sexual differences. Instead of focusing attention on this and questions of daily life during the transition period, which were always central concerns of the *Zhenotdel*, Kaganovich demanded that complaints over these matters should cease and that class differences should now be perceived as the main obstacle to building an equal society. In his opinion there was no such thing as discrimination against women; as Artyukhina had stressed in a number of different articles, it was possible to find equally bad experiences among both men and women. The *Zhenotdel* was seen to be overburdened with its tasks, but also to be insufficiently aware of political necessities. Artyukhina and other women activists disagreed. Kaganovich argued that its future work should only be advisory, and it should no longer have its own responsibilities and decision-making functions: 'We will not create any special women's organisations, because we are not a bourgeois country. In our country there is only the one, all-class-embracing organisation.'[45] Official announcements did not formally set out the abolition of the *Zhenotdel*, but outlined a reorganisation of

its work involving a redistribution of its tasks to other party organisations, the trade unions and soviets.

In effect, the women's department was left with the functions of ratification and endorsement. Artyukhina, as head of the *Zhenotdel*, was assigned the task of commenting on Central Committee resolutions. In official statements she supported the measures. However, she did this without concealing her own position on the woman question, which was strongly influenced by Bolshevik feminism. Such left communist ideas had no support among the new political elite surrounding Stalin. In contrast to Kaganovich, and remaining very tactical, she continued to emphasise the significance of work among women.[46] She started from the assumption that 'work amongst women workers and peasants will be put on a new and higher level'.[47] Citing Lenin, she pointed to the fact that women should now see to their liberation themselves. Her article appeared as a reminder to continue the achievements gained so far with the mobilisation of women in all institutions. She also gave her blessing to the reorganisation, hoping for a better future with the anticipated building of socialism. Simultaneously, however, she continued to justify the existence of the *Zhenotdel* as a necessary political organisation.

An earlier and stronger statement by Artyukhina followed the meeting of Moscow party activists on 18 October 1929.[48] In this unpublished document, Artyukhina's attitude towards the woman question becomes clearer. She elaborated on the general and gender-specific political goals of the party during the reorganisation process. These goals were supported by a broad mass of men and women and were therefore legitimate. To realise these goals, the problem was not so much how to mobilise women workers and peasants as how to train them properly thereafter.

She regarded the workers' traditional ways of living and working as a problem. For example, older workers – especially those in the textile industry – were not prepared to transfer to a seven-hour day with a three- or four-shift system. Artyukhina addressed the central problems of the workforce at the beginning of industrialisation: little production experience, low levels of skill, and often a tenacious link to the village. The political unity between the labour force and the Bolsheviks could no longer be assumed because – expressed as a percentage – the old and experienced workers were the ones least organised in the party.[49] Artyukhina's critique has to be viewed in the perspective of the social changes in the labour force at the beginning of the 1930s and the changing nature of cadres within the party.

Artyukhina outlined the successes of the *Zhenotdel*. Through the delegates' assemblies, the women's departments had already developed a female consciousness towards political and social activities – especially among the women peasants – yet support for such work was lacking in the trade unions, soviets and the party. Provided the *Zhenotdel* were retained, Artyukhina would accept its reorganisation if this meant a return to the grassroots of the question of work among women. This would also alleviate the problem of understaffing in the women's departments. She based her argument on the existing difference between the sexes, which could no longer be ignored.

It was not only women's organisations that should be concerned with the specific interests of women, but now every organisation should finally be made aware of these differences, take them seriously and work for their eradication. The redistribution of work on all levels would lead to changes that had been demanded for some time in the spheres of daily life, culture and the workplace, and all women would be reached, rather than only a few of them. Artyukhina actively supported the advancement of women, and their equal rights, through the promotion of political and vocational training, education and quotas in all organisations, including positions of leadership. She aimed at the removal of all gender-related discrimination by seeking ways to promote women. She renewed her attacks on male prejudices and attitudes and demanded that women should finally be accepted as equal members of the soviets.[50]

The return to a traditional image of the 'Soviet woman', which idealised maternity and feminine values, also occurred during this period. This is not surprising if one takes into account the probability that the majority of party members would have maintained strong links to the village and thus transposed traditional ideas of gender roles into the new political institutions. Simultaneously, the old party elite was being pushed aside. Artyukhina criticised the party's ignorance of women and their specific living conditions and needs. This ignorance was expressed in the party's dismissive attitude towards the *Zhenotdel*, and also came to be reflected in the social hierarchy of gender relations within the communist family.

Artyukhina approved of the general political course of collectivisation and industrialisation and recognised the necessity to centralise the *Zhenotdel*. She was unable to influence political decisions and so submitted to them. With the proclamation of 'the resolution of the woman question' in 1930 the *Zhenotdel* was dissolved.

Little is known about Artyukhina's career after the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel*. During the 1930s she worked in state organisations. She gave party education courses and worked in Rabkrin (the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate). Between 1934 and 1938 she was head of the cotton producers' trade union. At the beginning of the Second World War she became director of the 'Liberated Labour' textile mill. Artyukhina retired from work in 1951, aged 62, but she continued to write and publish, including her memoirs. She twice received the 'Order of Lenin' and was decorated as a 'Hero of Socialist Labour'. She died in Moscow on 7 April 1969.

One can reconstruct Artyukhina's opinion of the Stalin period only indirectly: her emphasis on Lenin as an important leader, and the failure to mention Stalin's name are evident in her assessment. Her reluctance to discuss the years after 1930 and her emphasis on the important times before then suggest that Artyukhina, like other party members after Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' at the Twentieth Party Congress, condemned the period of Stalin's personality cult without offering an explanation of how it came about. In the 'Secret Speech' Stalin was accused of many criminal acts, but the Soviet system remained untainted. It is also interesting to note that Artyukhina not only criticised the personality cult as a betrayal of the revolutionary ideal, but by 1964 was also indirectly calling for the rehabilitation of innocent victims.[51]

In general, there was no obvious pattern in the choice of victims of Stalin's terror. It is surprising that Artyukhina, as an 'old Bolshevik', was not affected by the purges. She survived the Stalin era unharmed, and was later even decorated. One explanation is that Artyukhina followed party instructions and did not belong to any opposition grouping. We can assume that Artyukhina was regarded as conformist and, therefore, unproblematic. Politically, she was neither high ranking nor important within the party. She did not seem to have any incriminating relatives, and she was also, after all, a woman.

Conclusions

Artyukhina's identity as a 'participant in the Bolshevik revolutionary women's movement' was based on her political experiences from 1905 until the beginning of the First World War.[52] This period saw the shaping of her understanding of equality. She emphasised the importance of sexual difference, and identified the category of gender as equally important to that of class. Although the proportion of women

Social Democrats in 1905 was relatively high, amounting to around 15 per cent, the party did not have its own policy on women. It was widely felt that a separate policy for women would be detrimental to the development of the party.[53] Apart from the insistence of Kollontai that the party should turn its attention to the specific problems of the female proletariat, a view which was heavily criticised as being feminist, there was almost no distinctive work among women until after the October revolution.[54]

In her memoirs, Artyukhina spoke of 'women's struggle for liberation', which she proudly glorified: 'During the difficult years of Stolypin's reactionary activities we women workers became Bolsheviks.'[55] As one of the first to work on the editorial staff of *Rabotnitsa*, she belonged to that group of women who were aware of specifically female interests and supported the cause within the party. At the same time, she stressed the union of interests between men and women in the proletarian movement. Thus, she often subordinated gender to class and followed the official party line, which viewed the abolition of all kinds of oppressive relations as providing simultaneously for the liberation of women.[56] On a practical level, Artyukhina probably saw no contradiction in these different approaches. This is important in understanding her reaction in 1930 when she opposed the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel*, but ultimately accepted it. Having been born into a poor, working-class family, the Bolshevik movement had given her access to a better life and social standing. This could also be one reason why she assessed the party's tasks – revolution, civil war, the building of socialism, industrialisation – as superior goals when compared to the emancipation of women. Like many other Social Democrats, Artyukhina also steered a course between ideology and expediency.[57]

Notes

1 This chapter was prepared with the help of Linda Edmondson, Stefanie Harter and Melanie Ilič. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Conference on Gender in Russian History and Culture, University of Birmingham, 1996.

2 A.V. Artyukhina, 'Nashi zavoevaniya', in *Uchastnitsy velikogo sozidaniya* (Moscow, 1962) p. 37.

3 Artyukhina, 'Ocherednye zadachi Partii po rabote sredi zhenshchin v SSSR: doklad zasedanii Moskovskogo partaktiva' (18 October 1929), RGASPI, f. 17, o. 10, d. 490, l. 51.

4 D. Petrovskii, '122-ya stat'ya Stalinskoi Konstitutsii', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 1, 1936, p. 6.
5 P.M. Chirkov, *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR (1917–1937 gg.)* (Moscow, 1978); V.L. Bil'shai, *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR* (Moscow, 1956); M. Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (London, 1989), pp. 108–35.
6 H. Haumann, *Geschichte Russlands* (Munich, 1996), and E.A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1997).
7 Artyukhina's personal files in the Tver' regional archives may possibly hold more details on these topics.
8 According to B.E. Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge, 1997) p. 27, Artyukhina's maiden name was Sorokina.
9 *Tverskaya oblast': entsiklopedicheskii spravochnik* (Tver, 1994) p. 46.
10 See, for example, W.B. Husband, *Revolution in the Factory: the Birth of the Soviet Textile Industry* (Oxford, 1990) p. 18, who describes the distinctive characteristics of the everyday life of factory workers before the First World War as long working hours, cramped living conditions and a simple, unbalanced diet.
11 A. Hillyar and J. McDermid, *Revolutionary Women in Russia, 1870–1917: a Study in Collective Biography* (Manchester, 2000) pp. 142, 146.
12 B. Fieseler, *Frauen auf dem Weg in die russische Sozialdemokratie, 1890–1917: eine kollektive Biographie* (Stuttgart, 1995) p. 178.
13 There were two generations of Russian women Social Democrats – those who belonged to the Social Democratic movement before the founding of the party in 1898, and those who became active after 1905. The second generation, politicised by revolutionary events, tended to join the revolutionary movement at a relatively young age. Ibid., pp. 34–5.
14 Artyukhina, 'Polveka', in *Oktyabrem rozhdennye* (Moscow, 1967) p. 15.
15 V.E. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organisations in St Petersburg and Moscow, 1900–14* (Berkeley, California, 1983) p. 321.
16 Ibid., pp. 338–44.
17 H. Hogan, 'Industrial Rationalization and the Roots of Labor Militance in the St Petersburg Metalworking Industry, 1901–14', *Russian Review,* vol. 42, no. 2, 1983, p. 185.
18 Ibid., pp. 185–6; R. Glickman, *Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880–1914* (London, 1984) p. 200. The names of the women are not mentioned, but presumably Artyukhina was one of them.
19 Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp. 100–9.
20 A. Bobroff, 'The Bolsheviks and Working Women, 1905–20', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1974, pp. 540–67; B. Williams, 'Kollontai and After: Women in the Russian Revolution', in S. Reynolds (ed.), *Women, State and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789* (Brighton, 1986) pp. 65–6.
21 Artyukhina, 'Proidennyi put', in *Zhenshchiny v revolyutsii* (Moscow, 1959) p. 31.
22 Ibid., p. 28
23 Artyukhina, 'Polveka', p. 21.

24 B. E. Clements, 'The Birth of the New Soviet Woman', in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985) p. 220.
25 RGASPI, f. 124, o. 1, ed. khr. 83, l. 5.
26 Artyukhina, 'Pervyi zhenskii rabochii zhurnal v Rossii', in *Vsegda s vami: sbornik posvyashchennyi 50–letiyu zhurnala 'Rabotnitsa'* (Moscow, 1964) p. 138.
27 For comments on Nikolaeva's participation in the opposition, see E.H. Carr and R.W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926–29*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, 1969) p. 714.
28 RGASPI f. 124, o. 1, ed. khr. 83; GARF, f. R-9601, o. 1. The notes in the files are limited to short biographic details and some messages of greeting to Artyukhina.
29 See also Wood, op. cit., pp. 210–14.
30 Artyukhina, 'Delegatskie sobraniya – shkola kommunisma', *Kommunistka*, no. 7, 1925, pp. 4–9; T. Krasnykh, 'V obshchezhitii ...', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 34, 1927, p. 7; Anon., 'Mysli delegatki', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 11, 1923, p. 28; 'Novym delegatkam', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 23, 1927, p. 1.
31 There were 209 000 delegates in 1924, of whom 24 per cent were workers, 59 per cent peasants, 9 per cent employees and 8 per cent housewives and wives of workers. In 1925, the total number increased to 378 000 delegates. See *Zhenshchina i byt: materialy po rabote sredi zhenshchin v klube, krasnom ugolke, obshchezhitii, zhenkruzhke i dr.* (Moscow, 1926) p. 53. The number of peasant delegates rose from 322 000 in 1926 to 607 000 in 1928. In 1929 the total number of delegates amounted to over 1.5 million: RGASPI, f. 17, o. 10, d. 490, l. 32, and Artyukhina, 'Delegatskie sobraniya v sotsialisticheskoi perestroike derevni', *Kommunistka*, no. 1, 1930, p. 9. On the success of the delegates' meetings, see also B. Farnsworth, 'Village Women Experience the Revolution', in B. Farnsworth and L. Viola (eds), *Russian Peasant Women* (Oxford, 1992) pp. 145–66.
32 Chirkov, op. cit., 89.
33 See Chapter 8 by Mary Buckley in this volume.
34 In addition to Buckley's chapter, see R. Maier, 'Die Hausfrau als *kul'turtreger* im Sozialismus', in G. Gorzka (ed.), *Kultur im Stalinismus* (Bremen, 1994) pp. 39–45, and T. Schrand, 'Soviet "Civic-minded Women" in the 1930s: Gender, Class and Industrialization in a Socialist Society', *Journal of Women's History,* vol. 11, no. 3, 1999, pp. 126–50.
35 Artyukhina, *Itogi vsesoyuznogo s"ezda rabotnits i krestyanok – chlenov sovetov* (Moscow, 1927).
36 Ibid., p. 33.
37 Artyukhina, 'Na bor'bu s nedostatkami v bytu i stroitel'stve', *Kommunistka,* no. 5, 1928, pp. 3–8.
38 Artyukhina, 'Melochi byta', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 18, 1928, p. 3.
39 Ibid., p. 4.
40 K. Mänicke-Gyöngyösi, 'Soziale Rationalisierung und Geschlechterverhältnisse in der Sowjetunion der zwanziger und dreissiger Jahre', in D. Reese, E. Rosenhaft, C. Sachse and T. Siegel (eds), *Rationale Beziehungen? Geschlechterverhältnisse im Rationalisierungsprozess* (Frankfurt, 1993) p. 320.

41 See Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, Wood, op. cit. and W.Z. Goldman, 'Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR', *Slavic Review*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, pp. 46–77.
42 Chirkov, op. cit., pp. 79–81.
43 See, for example, E.M. Konius, *Puti razvitiya sovetskoi okhrany materinstva i mladenchestva* (Moscow, 1954). Work in this area has not yet received the full attention of western researchers in women's history.
44 L.M. Kaganovich, 'Perestroit' rabotu sredi rabotnits i krest'yanok', *Kommunistka*, no. 14, 1929, p. 4.
45 Ibid.
46 Artyukhina, 'Zhenrabotu vesti vse partiei v tselom', *Kommunistka*, no. 2/3, 1930, pp. 6–10.
47 Ibid., p. 6.
48 RGASPI, f. 17, o. 10, d. 490, ll. 31–55.
49 Haumann, op. cit. pp. 551–2.
50 RGASPI, f. 17, o. 10, d. 490, ll. 31–55.
51 Artyukhina, 'Pervyi zhenskii rabochii zhurnal', p. 144.
52 Artyukhina, 'Nashi zavoevaniya', p. 22.
53 Fieseler, op. cit., p. 246.
54 Ibid., pp. 246–58.
55 Artyukhina, 'Proidennyi put'', p. 21.
56 A. Holt, 'Marxism and Women's Oppression: Bolshevik Theory and Practice in the 1920s', in T. Yedlin (ed.), *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York, 1980) pp. 87–114.
57 Clements, 'Birth of the New Soviet Woman', pp. 225–6, points out that 'in ideology and in policy, the Bolsheviks always subordinated women's emancipation to the greater goal of revolution of an entire society'.

2

Women Workers at Play: the Portrayal of Leisure in the Magazine *Rabotnitsa* in the First Two Decades of Soviet Power

Lynne Attwood

Leisure has been variously defined as 'freedom from the demands of work or duty',[1] 'time at one's own disposal',[2] that period of the day or week when one can rest and recuperate from the stresses of work, enjoy a break from routine, develop non-work interests and activities.[3] It has been argued that leisure came into existence as a separate, compartmentalised part of people's lives only with the industrial revolution; there were fairs, holy days, feasts, markets and other occasions for fun in pre-industrial times, but a clear split between work and leisure, as with the split between the workplace and the home, were products of industrialisation and urbanisation.[4]

Leisure, like work, was a gendered phenomenon in industrialising countries in the late ninteenth and early twentieth centuries. For women there was no distinct split between work and leisure, just as there was no split between work and home. Much of their work revolved around the family and was home-based. Few had the time or money to indulge in leisure activities. There were exceptions: young women might go out to work before they 'settled down', and this gave them the opportunity to indulge in leisure activities. Yet this period ended when they married and had children. Thereafter, the time in which husbands and children were free from work or school constituted the period when women were at their busiest, tending to their needs.[5]

Even if male workers had free time, they were not left alone to decide for themselves how to spend it. There was, as James Walvin put

it, 'a positive fear of plebeian idleness' among more 'civilised' sections of society. It was seen as a fertile breeding ground for vices 'inimical to good social order and even to the safe preservation of private property'.[6] Working men's leisure had to be controlled, channelled into respectable activities. Sunday schools were established in England in the nineteenth century to lure workers away from undesirable pursuits by offering them not just religious instruction but also literacy classes, general education, and day trips to the seaside. Later, leisure became a major commercial enterprise, with workers pushed towards activities that produced profit for their providers.[7]

How working-class men spent their leisure was not just of interest to those who wanted to preserve the status quo, or to line their own pockets. Engels devoted considerable attention to the subject in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. He was concerned that poor education, the stress wrought by overwork and job insecurity, appalling housing, and an inability to sacrifice immediate pleasures for long-term improvements had resulted in working-class men squandering their leisure on 'sexual indulgence and intoxicating liquors. Every day they have to work until they are physically and mentally exhausted. This forces them to excessive indulgence in the only two pleasures remaining to them.'[8] Engels did make some reference to women, observing that in the drinking places frequented by the working class 'men, women and children, and even mothers with babies in their arms, meet with thieves, prostitutes and swindlers'.[9] For the most part, however, leisure was depicted as a male province. Indeed, women were more often providers than consumers of leisure activities, serving the beer and sex to male customers.

We would expect leisure to be a very different phenomenon in a socialist society. Work was supposedly no longer an alienating experience but something fulfilling in itself, so there would not be the same need for respite through negative leisure. Workers would have educational opportunities which would provide them with positive interests and activities. Nor would leisure be commercialised, with workers' free time providing a 'market for capitalist entrepreneurs'.[10] Furthermore, women under socialism would be freed from domestic servitude and drawn into the workforce, so they would now have the same leisure opportunities as men.

This chapter sets out to test whether these assumptions are accurately reflected in the pages of one magazine, *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker), in the first two decades of Soviet power. Particular concerns are how leisure is portrayed, how this portrayal differs in relation to men and

women, and how it changes with the transition to the Stalin era. The concluding paragraphs discuss the reasons for these changes.

Rabotnitsa was first launched in 1914, but the First World War brought publication to a halt. The magazine was revived briefly after the February revolution but went out of print again in 1918 because of a paper shortage. It resumed publication in 1923, and thereafter appeared on a regular basis, first as a monthly, then, by the end of the 1920s, as a bi-weekly. It was aimed at the so-called female 'mass': simple, uneducated and politically undeveloped women. In the first year of publication it claimed to have 10 000 subscribers; the print run had reached 165 000 by 1928 and 400 000 in 1941. The number of people reading the magazine would probably have been much higher since magazines were habitually passed from friend to friend, from one family member to another, and between the members of a work collective.

In the west, women's magazines of this era were concerned primarily with women as consumers. The home was depicted as their special domain, and this was defined at least in part 'by its difference from the masculine world of politics and economics'.[11] *Rabotnitsa*, in contrast, sought in the 1920s to break down the division between the male and female realms. Accordingly, there were articles and stories setting out the aims of the new regime, the successes already achieved and the problems still to be overcome. There were reports on the new acts which had been passed, on the clubs and cooperatives that had been set up, and on the training courses which were being run to help women find work and to play a full role in constructing the new society.

In fact, finding work in the 1920s was not easy for women, who were less attractive employees for a combination of reasons: they had fewer qualifications than men, more family responsibilities, and were hampered by the 'protective legislation' introduced in the 1918 Labour Code to protect them from hazardous working conditions.[12] The New Economic Policy (NEP) had legalised small-scale private business and spawned a new class of entrepreneurs, the so-called 'Nepmen'. This combination of men with money and women without had an inevitable consequence: while prostitutes had virtually disappeared from Russian streets during the civil war, they were now back plying their trade.[13]

Rabotnitsa insisted that unemployment was a temporary problem and would end when the economy was back on its feet. In the meantime women should prepare themselves for work by attending the new

clubs and training courses provided by the Bolsheviks.[14] What they should not do was squander their leisure on that peculiarly female pastime, gossip. One writer complained: 'the majority of housewives … still sit on the bench outside their houses and click their tongues about their neighbours. It's time to put an end to this!'[15]

In due course, women's domestic chores were supposed to be taken over by state institutions. However, in the prevailing economic climate there were not sufficient resources. Accordingly, whether or not women worked outside the home, they still had the cooking, cleaning and childcare to cope with. *Rabotnitsa* acknowledged that life was hard for women, especially those living in the new settlements built around single factories. These remained semi-rural communities, with most families keeping a few animals (cows, goats, chickens) to supplement their wages, the care of which was considered to be a female duty. A 1925 article about a settlement attached to a china factory described the women's daily grind:

> Women workers usually get up at 5 o'clock, clean out and feed the livestock, prepare breakfast, and at 8 o'clock, already tired, go to the factory, where they work until six in the evening with a break between twelve and two for lunch. In this break they have to tend to the family again: make the lunch, feed the livestock again, wash the little children, and again run to the factory, often just eating a scrap of bread themselves on the way. In the evening there is more work: getting the livestock ready for the night, feeding the husband and children their dinner, and then the washing, sewing, and darning still has to be done.

Men, in contrast, were said to enjoy spending their evenings 'in the club, at a meeting, a lecture, or chatting with the neighbours'.[16] Significantly, the author was concerned about the lack of opportunity women had for self-improvement, not relaxation: with no chance of education, she argued, they would not become 'builder[s] of the new life'.[17] It is also worth noting that although she was unhappy about men having so much more free time than their wives, she did not portray 'chatting with neighbours' as a negative pastime in itself. It was, apparently, quite different to the 'gossip' practised by housewives.[18]

Rabotnitsa insisted that women could alleviate their problems by getting together and organising their domestic tasks collectively. It urged them to get involved in the cooperative movement, which was

setting up public dining rooms, crèches and kindergartens. It advocated 'House Communes' primarily because they would have communal kitchens, so women would not have to cook for their own families. It was up to women themselves, it argued, to set up and run all these communal facilities. 'Women workers must take this matter on themselves', it told them.[19] Hence, even if they were relieved of caring for their individual families, domestic tasks would continue to remain female functions and to occupy at least a portion of their 'leisure' time.

All the same, the magazine objected to men treating their wives primarily as servants. A male contributor bemoaned the fact that:

> Once we get married, almost all of us, with no trace of conscience, turn our wives into cooks and washer women for ourselves and nannies for our children. Almost all of us feel indignant if we come home and find our wives not at the stove, or washing dirty nappies, or darning our trousers, but reading a book or a newspaper instead … How many of us really relate to our wives as comrades? How often do women hear us say: 'You go to the club today, I'll stay home with the child'? Isn't it true that we still, in 1927, laugh at a husband who is forced to wash nappies?[20]

Yet *Rabotnitsa* was not entirely consistent on this subject. When a male factory worker wrote to ask if the behaviour of his colleague's wife was really acceptable – she was a political activist, he explained, and her husband would often come home from work to find her engrossed in a book while the room remained cold and dirty, the children unwashed, and the supper uncooked – the magazine did not criticise him for assuming that husbands were entitled to expect domestic services from their wives, but lamely insisted that many female activists also managed to be responsible wives and mothers.[21]

Like their counterparts in capitalist countries, young, unmarried and childless women in paid work were likely to have some leisure. This should be devoted to self-improvement at the clubs and classes now held in factories after work hours. Women should then pass on their new-found knowledge to others. Urban women had a particular duty to help their less advanced country cousins. They could involve themselves in 'patronage work', getting together with other workers in their factory to 'adopt' a village and give it advice and help in all matters from health care to farming methods. They could also devote their free day and even their annual leave to setting a particular village on the right path.[22] Many of the magazines' short stories took up this theme.

In one typical tale, a young worker called Anyuta spent her vacation introducing the peasants in her old village to the information she had obtained from the lectures held in her factory club. At first the peasants refused to listen: 'It had been this way for hundreds of years, and so it would always be.' By the time she left, however, the village had a crèche and a well-stocked reading room.[23] In another story, Mar'ya went back to her village and was regaling her relatives with descriptions of city life – 'the factory, the clubs where workers spent their free time, the wall newspaper, the crèches, the children's clinics, the delegates' meetings' – when a distraught young woman rushed in to say her mother was in the midst of a difficult labour, and would Mar'ya come and help. Mar'ya had no experience of delivering babies but she was from the city, which was apparently qualification enough. Despite her efforts the woman died, however, and Mar'ya insisted this was due to 'village ignorance'. By the end of the story she had set up a reading hut and a maternity clinic.[24]

Leisure was not a time for rest and recuperation from the stresses of work. On the contrary, it was an extension of work. This is reflected in *Rabotnitsa*'s attitude towards beauty and fashion. Again, the magazine was not entirely consistent, condemning fashion and cosmetics in its articles at the same time as providing readers with stylish dress patterns and even advertising the products of a private cosmetics firm.[25] Yet its general attitude was that there was no place for such things in socialist society: 'Our beauty … lies in simplicity, in reality, in the rouge of hot blood', it explained. Make-up and short skirts would fail to attract the 'simple and healthy attention of a man from our "proletarian society"', and would also hinder the cause of female equality, since men would not see women as comrades and co-workers. Overly long skirts were also inappropriate since they would interfere with work. Jewellery should be shunned: 'The hands of a worker must be free from all adornment.' Female beauty was now perceived in an entirely new way: it lay in 'the possession of knowledge, of a strong character … and of strong capable hands for working'.[26] Readers who thought otherwise, and protested that it was fun to dress up in the evening after a hard day at work, were accused of flippancy and of petty-bourgeois tendencies.[27] Cosmetics, fancy clothes, and going out on the town were associated with decadence, with the new entrepreneurs whose cafe society *Rabotnitsa*'s readers were warned to steel themselves against.[28] Right-minded citizens had more serious things to think about.

By the end of the 1920s Stalin had emerged as leader of the Soviet Union and launched what is sometimes referred to as the 'revolution

from above'.[29] This involved a massive industrialisation drive and the forced collectivisation of agriculture. Both aimed at improving productivity, making the Soviet Union self-sufficient, and 'raising … the well-being of the working class and the many millions of poor- and middle-ranking peasants'.[30] The reality was somewhat different, however. Workers' wages and standards of living dropped considerably, the rapid expansion of the cities created an enormous urban housing crisis, and the famine of 1933 resulted in millions of deaths. There was no hint of this in *Rabotnitsa*. In the 1920s there had been some genuine information about the problems that the country faced and what steps were being taken to resolve them. This was no longer the case; the magazine now presented an idealised image of the country, showing life as it should be rather than life as it actually was. The transformation was complete with the introduction of socialist realism in 1934. This was ostensibly a blueprint for artists and novelists, who were now required to be 'engineers of the [human] soul' and play an active role in the creation of a new type of person and society. Yet it governed journalism no less than fiction. As Katerina Clark has noted, 'at this time, as at no other … the difference between fiction and fact, between theatre and political event, between literary plot and factual reporting, all became somewhat hazy'.[31]

The magazine's attitude towards leisure also changed. The industrialisation programme ensured that there was now work for everyone, including women. At the same time, citizens were told they should not devote themselves exclusively to work. 'A person who is unable to rest will work badly', *Rabotnitsa* told its readers,[32] and insisted that a balance be established between the two. A series of articles appeared under the rubric: 'You know how to work. Now learn how to rest.'

During the first five-year plan communal housing was still heavily promoted, with *Rabotnitsa* pointing in particular to the leisure opportunities that residents would be able to enjoy. The magazine was especially enthusiastic about the new 'socialist cities' which were to 'arise alongside the new gigantic industrial plants'[33] and in which recreational facilities were a prime feature. These were vital because socialism would produce such high levels of productivity that 'in 10 to 15 years the seven-hour day in industry will be shortened; the five-day week will become four days, and the length of leave from work will be increased'.[34] There would be clubs and libraries, music and sports rooms, solaria and swimming pools. Women would be able to enjoy these facilities no less than men since all housing in socialist cities would take the form of house-communes, and these would free women

from housework. Children would be housed separately to enable mothers 'to relax in [their] own room[s], away from the children's continual racket'.[35] There would be communal dining facilities and laundries to take over women's other domestic duties. Women were still expected to run these services, however. An article on the first custom-built house-commune in Moscow mentioned that the communal dining room, which would feed up to 2000 people daily, was the responsibility of the house's female residents.[36]

By the end of the first five-year plan, communal living no longer received official backing. The few socialist cities which had emerged had not been a great success, at least partly due to underfunding of housing and services. In Magnitogorsk the steelworks were already in operation before a single house-commune had been built, and workers had to live in a shanty-town of tents, huts and primitive barracks.[37] The few communal domestic facilities which had been set up could not cope with the demand, and women were inevitably expected to make up for their inadequacies.[38] Furthermore, the upheavals wrought by the five-year plan had resulted in a worrying drop in the birth rate, and it was felt that any more experimentation would exacerbate the problem. Old-fashioned families were to be rehabilitated, to function, as Lapidus put it, as 'islands of stability in a sea of social chaos'.[39] Women would retain the role of housekeeper, as well as taking on that of full-time worker. They would come home from the factory to a second shift of domestic chores.

There was clearly little opportunity for leisure in the life of one apparently typical Soviet woman featured in *Rabotnitsa*. An award-winning worker in a car factory, she was also the mother of four children, three sons and a daughter. Her sons were at an age when 'one often hears about children falling under bad influences', so she tried

> to follow every step my children take, know how they are studying, how they relax, who their friends are, where they go, what interests them. All the free time I have from work I spend with my children, apart, of course, from the time I devote to social work: I am a member of the departmental trade union committee and a member of the management committee of my daughter's kindergarten … When I get home from work I prepare supper and help my sons do their homework [while] my daughter plays with her doll … I sit near them, listening intently as I sew something or other … I am often at the school, I talk to the Pioneer leader, I have been several times to the swimming pool and talked to the instructor. I go to the

> children's club where Yura is training to play in the children's orchestra.

Yet she still found time to break records at work. She concluded by insisting that she was in no way special: 'I consider that I only do what every mother is obliged to do.' Her husband seemed to play little role in relation to his family; she mentioned him only once, to say that he helped the boys with their homework on the occasions when she worked the night shift.[40]

According to the 1936 Constitution, all citizens had a duty to work. However, there were exceptions. The wives of key workers such as Stakhanovites, military officers and engineers, as well as women whose husbands' jobs had taken them to areas where there was insufficient work for women, were relieved of the obligation. They should not waste their time gossiping, however, as housewives had done in the past; this was still portrayed as a thoroughly negative activity.[41] Instead, they were urged to become *obshchestvennitsy*, volunteer workers. *Rabotnitsa* regularly published letters from members of housewives' brigades describing the work they did for their local community. They ran literacy programmes, kindergartens and children's clubs. They cleaned up the courtyards between apartment blocks. They did 'sanitary raids' on canteens, and monitored the quality of the workers' food. They made sure the hostels for single male workers were clean and cosy, and washed and repaired the men's bedlinen. They grew fresh vegetables for the workers in vegetable gardens.[42] They also kept a close eye on their own husbands and made sure the latter were working to the best of their ability.[43] Some wives even helped out, without pay, at their husbands' places of work. One housewives' brigade took over the men's jobs when the latter had their day off[44] (thus removing any opportunity for family recreation), while a group of miners' wives carried out what was considered less demanding auxiliary jobs at the mine: 'We hack coal, transport it to the railway line, load it onto the wagons … We fought together with our husbands on the front in the civil war, to achieve a new, happy life. How could we not help on the work front?'[45]

Workers were urged to lay down their tools from time to time and renew their strength through recreation. To help them, a network of sanitoria and holiday homes was established. Some of the homes took residential guests for several weeks, others could be visited by workers on their day off. In either case, their time would be 'spent intelligently and in an organised fashion'.[46] One writer, having visited a residential

holiday home, enthused: 'On each of the 14 evenings spent in the rest-home there is provided … a new entertainment: cinema, a play, concerts.'[47] Another described the regime in Zelenyi Gorod, a recreation centre near Moscow, which catered for workers on their day off:

> In the morning, on arrival, is registration, then physical exercises, followed by breakfast, an excursion to Mamontovka, or a boat trip; in the summer there is swimming, in the winter skiing, skating and tobogganing. There are lectures in the club room. Before lunch there is choir practice; after lunch, 'rest hour' [*mertvyi chas*] in the fresh air or inside. At 4 o'clock, tea. After an excursion with a talk about the construction of Zelenyi Gorod and the woods, there is a game in the clearing, volleyball and tennis in the summer, winter sports in the winter. At 6 o'clock there is a concert, at 7 o'clock dinner, and then departure.

If residents preferred not to sleep during the rest hour, they could listen to music in the club room or borrow a book from the library.[48] It is clear that as little as possible was to be left to their own potentially dangerous whims. This organised leisure was contrasted with that in pre-revolutionary times, when workers were left to their own devices and invariably ended up drunk and violent.[49] It is perhaps no coincidence that Soviet crèches and kindergartens also had a *mertvyi chas* after lunch, in which the children were put to bed. Adult citizens were children of the state, to be policed and protected in just the same way as their own offspring.

Husband and wife might spend their day off together, taking an excursion out of town[50] or visiting a botanical garden.[51] However, there was no concept of an annual family holiday. Passes for sanitoria and holiday homes were given to individuals, not couples. Some homes allowed mothers to take children of pre-school age with them,[52] but the impression given by *Rabotnitsa* is that they would spend little time together; the children were looked after by professional carers, so that 'it is possible for the working mother to really rest'.[53]

Although *Rabotnitsa* did refer to 'ordinary' workers receiving passes to sanitoria and holiday homes, most were given out to 'the best workers'. Since the majority of Stakhanovites were men, this must mean that women, particularly non-working women, were placed at a disadvantage. *Rabotnitsa* held that many passes were given to *obshchestvennitsy*,[54] but sometimes it implicitly acknowledged that women who were not in paid work were less likely to get passes. One

short story about a middle-aged woman worried that she had achieved nothing in her life noted that her Stakhanovite husband 'had won prizes, including sea-side holidays', but all she had ever received was a letter thanking her for her voluntary work. The story ended with the postman bringing her birthday greetings both from her husband's factory and from her adult children, all of whom insisted that their own success had been largely due to her. This convinced her of the importance of the 'imperceptible but responsible and fruitful work of the housewife', and restored her self-confidence.[55] Men might need holidays as reward for their hard work, but it was apparently enough for women to know they were loved and appreciated.

If the chief goal of recreation was to restore workers' strength and send them back to their jobs with renewed energy and vigour, *Rabotnitsa* gives the impression that this was successfully achieved. Interviews with holidaying workers found them happy and relaxed, but eager to get back to their factories. As the author of an article about a sanitarium on the Black Sea put it: 'Even here, by the sea and the mountains, thoughts about production do not desert [the holiday-makers]'. They were continually discussing and comparing their achievements at work, and one worker told her happily: 'I'll be home soon. I want to get back to work. It's good to be away, but home is better. I can't go for long without work.'[56] Even a humble canteen worker, who had been sent to a sanitarium because of her ill health, was ready to get back to her post: 'I will be able to work in the canteen with still more enthusiasm', she declared.[57] It would seem from such articles that the Marxist promise had been achieved: work was no longer an alienating experience but was intrinsically pleasurable and fulfilling.

Recreation had another purpose to serve in addition to renewing the country's work force. It could be used to make people fit, strong and better able to defend their country. Throughout the 1930s there was constant reference to the likelihood of war, and citizens were urged to use their leisure time to get themselves into peak physical condition. This applied to women no less than men. There was a series of articles about shooting and flying clubs for women, aimed at turning them into 'defenders of the Soviet country'[58] and ensuring that they were able to 'repel those who dare to attack the Soviet Union'.[59] Polina Osipenko, one of a celebrated team of record-breaking female pilots, explained that their primary concern had been to 'show what Soviet women are capable of when our participation is required in a future war' and pledged that they would be willing to do anything for their

country, including carrying out 'a terrible raid on the camp of an enemy which had dared to attack our country'.[60] Female parachutists told reporters that 'we go step in step with our husbands in their glorious defensive activities'.[61] A young woman who set a new world record for the highest parachute jump by a woman declared that 'I completed this jump in honour of our great, glorious motherland, for which I am always ready to give even my life.'[62] The title of another article on parachute jumping put it bluntly: 'this is not only a sport, but military preparation'.[63]

The same was supposedly true even of sports with no obvious military connection. A group of female mountain climbers explained that one third of the Soviet borderland lay in the mountains, and so it was likely that an enemy attack would start from there. If women knew how to climb and survive in the mountains they could 'actively participate in the defence of the country'.[64] A woman show-jumper insisted that 'horse riding is not just a pastime, but a great, difficult job which has great significance in terms of defence'.[65] Cycling, skiing and long-distance walking were also said to prepare women for military activities.[66]

Although women were encouraged to take on roles which defied traditional understandings of femininity, they were also now expected to cultivate a feminine appearance. In complete contrast to its position in the previous decade, in the 1930s *Rabotnitsa* claimed with approval that women had a 'natural' desire to look attractive. One short story described in careful detail the protagonist's toilette: Zinaida

> devoted considerable time to her appearance, but managed to convey the impression that her beauty was not something she had to work at, but was entirely natural … She dressed, it is true, pleasantly, with taste, and with a good understanding of what suited her face and figure. But all this was done modestly … She powdered her face, but in such a way that you would not be able to say that she powdered it. She painted her lips, but with such subtlety, so artistically, that it seemed that nature had given her such cherry coloured lips.[67]

Soviet women were no longer to be admired only for their 'strong capable hands'.

Rabotnitsa assured women that doing 'men's work' was not incompatible with femininity. Articles about one of the toughest new jobs women had entered, construction work on the Moscow metro, made

the female drillers out to be girlish and vivacious. One had 'a very young sweet face, she looked more like a school girl than an underground worker'.[68] Others were described as 'energetic jolly girls in bright berets'.[69] They dressed immaculately when they finished their shifts: they 'changed their overalls for bright red spring dresses',[70] they sported 'new, fashionable coats'.[71] One female metro builder explained to *Rabotnitsa* readers that,

> I go to work underground in resin shoes, trousers, my head covered with a scarf. But at home and on my day off I love my clothes to be fashionable, beautiful and smart. All our girls love to dress well. If you were to meet one of our metro builders at the theatre or at a party, you would not be able to guess that she works underground.[72]

The magazine also now included enthusiastic reports on fashion shows, with details of the materials and styles available to Soviet women. It assured readers that the country could now satisfy women's dreams of possessing 'a woollen dress, wine-coloured, delicate blue or brown … a spring coat made of light, bright wool in the colour beige, or with grey check or stripes'. Dress materials were available which would please the most discerning tastes: 'Women will be particularly interested in silk voile and velour, a soft, light material with silk and velvet ribs. Crepe satin and artificial silk are also good.'[73]

Women who did not manage to combine heavy work with femininity were cause for concern. In a short story by Fedor Panferov, a journalist was sent to interview the female president of a collective farm. He was expecting 'a simple country woman in a long wide skirt, a blouse with gathered sleeves, a blue headscarf on her head, and a shy and modest manner'. Instead, to his confusion, he was met by a creature in khaki-coloured jacket and great heavy boots, who approached him with a wide stride 'like a man's', and greeted him in 'a deep, throaty voice'. She seemed to talk 'not in her natural voice but in a deliberately masculine way [and] strode in an intentionally masculine manner'. She was, in short, 'a female bloke (*myzhichka*)'.[74] This, the author made clear, was not an appropriate image of the new Soviet woman.

There are a number of possible reasons for the revival of interest in fashion and beauty in the 1930s. It might be due, in part, to the state's abandonment of its earlier pledge to free women from their traditional housekeeping duties. Women might have to be workers and soldiers, but they were also 'keepers of the family hearth', and they needed traditional feminine traits in order to perform this role. Accordingly, tra-

ditional feminine appearance was promoted once more. In addition, Stalin insisted that 'life has become better, life has become merrier'. For this myth to be at all convincing, there had to be a relaxation of the austerity of the revolutionary period. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was now meant to be a society in a state of progress, its citizens 'special' people.[75] This meant not only being extraordinary workers but being 'cultured', a nebulous term which included an appreciation of music, theatre and literature as well as 'good taste' in things such as clothes and furnishings.[76]

Being 'cultured' became a major *Rabotnitsa* theme of the 1930s. The magazine even insisted that it was time for Soviet citizens to live 'in a "bourgeois" way: not in the sense of exploiting other people', it explained, 'but in the sense of having culture, elegance and comfort in their personal lives'.[77] Ordinary factory workers were quoted declaring with pride that: 'We do not deny ourselves anything. Every month we spend around 200 rubles on buying shoes and clothes. We regularly go to the theatre and cinema.'[78]

A short story, 'Suede gloves', makes the new thinking particularly clear. Nastya was an exemplary and committed worker, who was also involved in setting up a new factory club house; but all of this left her with little time to think about her appearance. One day she saw two of the decorators working on the club, attractive young women, preparing to go home. One of them took from her pocket a pair of brown suede gloves 'and with soft elegant movements began to pull them onto her fingers' while the other buckled a belt 'round her lovely, well-fitting coat'. Nastya thought how beautiful they were and how well their clothes fit, and remembered with shame her own baggy coat. It turned out that beauty and culture went together. Nastya found herself walking behind the women as they made their way home, and heard them talk with confidence about literature and their favourite writers. Much of the conversation was over her head and she began to realise how ignorant she was. Next day she proposed to her two best friends that they form a 'beauty brigade'; they would get together every day during their lunch break and think of ways to improve their appearance and make their clothes more elegant. Work was not enough in itself, she explained to them. Soviet women had to 'not only be builders of life, but also artists of life'; they had to refashion themselves 'like the artists have designed the club, so that it gladdens people's eyes'. She started her new resolution by buying a felt hat and altering her coat, and to her family's astonishment stood preening herself in front of the mirror. Nastya's mother was confused and unhappy at the change in her daughter, but her brother 'understood … why she had

become so concerned about cleanliness, tidiness and beautiful clothes' and 'thought with pride that she would not now put the club to shame at the grand opening'. Her father was also converted, and urged his wife to smarten up her own appearance: 'A cultured life is beginning, old woman! … we should be able to dress well, eh? … We've done enough scrimping and making do!'[79]

In conclusion, the portrayal of leisure in *Rabotnitsa* underwent considerable change in the first two decades of Soviet power. In the 1920s the regime was committed to creating an entirely new type of society, and all human energy had to be directed to this goal. Relaxation and the pursuit of pleasure were luxuries the state could not afford. Any free time had to be put to good use. Unemployed women were urged not to waste their time but to attend the clubs and courses which would help them develop the skills they needed to enter the workforce. Women who had paid jobs had little free time to waste, but all the same they should make the most of the opportunities put on by their factories, and do what they could to pass on their knowledge to others less fortunate. They could reduce their domestic work through involvement in the cooperative movement, which would turn it into a less time-consuming communal venture. That their husbands could take on a share of the housework was seemingly too radical a thought even for a regime so committed to change. Women's physical appearance was supposed to reflect the nation's preoccupation with work. Like the woman depicted on the magazine's covers, *Rabotnitsa*'s readers were to wear work-like clothes and shun all artificial beauty aids.

When Stalin came to power, the image of a vibrant socialist society in a state of progress was all important. Life had become 'better and merrier', so workers had to be portrayed as enjoying themselves. Work itself was now presented as a pleasurable experience, but this was not enough; workers had to have some non-work time to develop the level of 'culture' appropriate to this advanced society. They also had to develop the strength and skills to enable them to work to the best of their ability, and to defend their country when called on to do so. Leisure played a prominent role in the country's new image, but it had to be spent in an 'intelligent' way.

In reality, women's experience of leisure remained, as ever, different to that of men. Most notably, they had much less of it. While most women now worked, almost all available resources were poured into industry, with little left for the state-funded domestic services they had once been promised. Communal living had been promoted in the 1920s partly on the grounds that it would reduce women's domestic

workload; now the traditional family was back in the centre of Soviet life, generating its usual set of domestic tasks. There was still no suggestion that men should do their share. Instead, women were left to labour under a 'double burden' of paid work and family duties. This fact was implicitly acknowledged in some *Rabotnitsa* articles, but completely disavowed in others. While some commentators made it obvious that women's lives were devoted almost entirely to work in one form or another, others made out that there was a glut of leisure opportunities available to them, and that they also had ample time to lavish on their appearance. Indeed, they were now obliged to do so, even – or especially – if they spent their working days wielding pneumatic drills or flying aeroplanes.

The Stalin era was, in general, a mix of radical changes and conservative attitudes. This was reflected in the contradictory attitude towards women. The state wanted to get as much work as it could from women, while pretending they were cosseted and pampered. It wanted to develop their strength and fitness so that they could assist men in the event of war, while making out that they were dainty and feminine.

Enjoying the requisite leisure, and achieving the requisite culture, was, of course, beyond the bounds of possibility for the real Soviet woman. She had neither the time nor the amenities. *Rabotnitsa* did occasionally acknowledge the difficulties. For example, a series of brief articles drew attention to a stark shortage of facilities, such as hairdressing salons,[80] and of ready-made clothes and accessories.[81] One author demanded angrily: 'The Soviet woman awaits a stylish, elegant, and comfortable hat, and this need must be satisfied!'[82] She was fated to wait a long time.

Notes

Many articles in *Rabotnitsa* were either anonymous or pseudonymous.

1 *Random House Dictionary* (New York, 1980)
2 *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford, 1964)
3 See, for example, L. Haywood, F. Kew and P. Bramham, *Understanding Leisure* (London, 1990) chapter 1.
4 Ibid., pp. 27–8.
5 See R. Deem, 'Feminism and Leisure Studies: Opening up New Directions', in E. Wimbush and M. Talbot (eds) *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure* (Milton Keynes, 1988) p. 11. The relative absence of leisure in women's lives meant that until recently sociologists working on leisure tended either

to ignore them, or to argue that for them work and leisure could not be separated. Stanley Parker, one of the great veterans of leisure studies, has argued that most female activities can be seen as 'non-work obligations' or 'semi-leisure', and that women find some of their household chores – cooking for instance – so pleasurable that they count as leisure activities. See S. Parker, *The Sociology of Leisure* (London, 1976) p. 87.

6 J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830–1950* (London, 1978) p. 51.
7 C. Rojek, 'Deskilling and Forced Labour: Steps beyond Class Analysis', in F. Coalter, *Freedom and Constraint* (London, 1989) pp. 37–8.
8 F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford, 1958) p. 111.
9 Ibid., p. 143.
10 Rojek, op. cit., pp. 37–8.
11 M. Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?* (London, 1996) p. 3.
12 See M. Ilic, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: from 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London, 1999).
13 See N. Semashko, 'Prostitutsiya i bor'ba s nei', *Kommunistka*, no. 5, 1923, p. 28.
14 R.T., 'Kak borot'sya s bezrabotitsei', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 2, 1923, p. 16; and A. Artyukhina, 'Sorok protsentov vsekh bezrabotnykh na birzhakh truda – zhenshchiny. Kak pomoch' im?', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 21, 1926, p. 3.
15 'Domokhazyaikam tozhe nuzhen klub', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 2, 1925, p. 26.
16 Svet, 'Rabochim nado pomoch' svoim zhenam', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 13, 1925, p. 17.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 M. Zarina, 'Revolyutsiya byta: stroitel'stvo narodnogo pitaniya', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 6, 1924, pp. 25–6.
20 D. Sverchikov, 'Otvet chitatel'itsam zhurnala "Rabotnitsa" (o rasskaze "Staroe derzhit")', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 28, 1927, p. 15.
21 M.S. Kudpryashov, 'Kakoi ona dolshna byt'?', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 18, 1927, p. 15.
22 E. Vasil'eva, 'Rabotnitsa v derev'ne', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 30, 1928, pp. 12–13.
23 Pavel Dorokhov, 'Anyutin otpusk', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1, 1924, pp. 3–6.
24 E. Anrovaya, 'Pervyi podarok', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1925, pp. 16–18. For other examples of such stories, see Vladimir Polyanskii, 'Komsomolovka', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 9, 1925, pp. 15–16; and A. Pil'chevskii, 'Gosti iz goroda', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 11, 1925, pp. 17–19.
25 See, for example, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 21, 1926.
26 Mariya Il'ina, 'V chem krasota?', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 37, 1927, pp. 15–16.
27 Ibid.
28 P. Yarovoi, 'Ulya bezrabotnaya', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 2, 1923, pp. 7–10.
29 See, for example, the chapter of this name in G. Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: a History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Cambridge, MA, 1995).
30 S. Uritskii, 'Promyshlennost' cherez pyat' let', *Krest'yanka*, no. 13, 1929, p. 1.
31 K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1981) pp. 146–7.
32 'Umeesh' rabotat', umei i otdikhat'', editorial article, *Rabonitsa*, no. 3, 1929, pp. 3–4.

33 L.B., 'Kak stroit' goroda budushchego?', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 4, 1930, p. 15.
34 Ibid.
35 M. Ilyushina, 'Ya golosuyu za dom-kommunu', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 19, 1931, pp. 4–5.
36 B-ba, 'Dom-kommuna No 1', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 41, 1929, p. 12.
37 S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, CA, 1995) p. 157.
38 In Kotkin's words: 'it was an open secret among male workers that … if they wanted to keep their living areas and clothes clean, and to improve their diet, they needed to get married'. Ibid., p. 173.
39 G.W. Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley, CA, 1978) p. 97.
40 K. Ryazhenova, 'Mat' i deti', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 25, 1938, pp. 10–11.
41 For example, one short story derided the endless gossip of full-time housewives in a communal apartment: 'all week, in the kitchen, the corridor, on the benches near the house, in the neighbours' rooms, [Nadya] heard the same conversations and scandals'. S. Ptitsina, 'Razlag', serialised in *Rabotnitsa*, no. 8, 1930, pp. 13–14; no. 9, 1930, pp. 8–10; and no. 10, 1930, pp. 11–13.
42 See, for example, E. Miloradova, 'Zamechatelnyi sovetskii aktiv', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 15, 1938, pp. 6–7; P. Porgen, 'Pyat'desyat dve', in a collection of short articles under the general heading 'Zheny shakterov gorlovki v bor'be za ugol', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 36, 1931, pp. 4–5; 'Otvechaem rabochim i rabotnitsam avtoza voda imeni tovarishcha Stalina', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12, 1932, pp. 8–9; 'Zheny rabochikh na sotsialisticheskoi stroike', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 35, 1931, p. 8.
43 'Otvechaem rabochim i rabotnitsam avtoza voda imeni tovarishcha Stalina', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12, 1932, pp. 8–9.
44 Porgen, op. cit., pp. 4–5.
45 V.A. Zubkova, 'Pomozhem nashim muzh'yam', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 16, 1939, p. 7. Even women who actually had paid employment were sometimes caught up in the spirit of voluntary work. For example, a woman who had been taken on as a miner in her own right also worked in the housewives' brigade in her free time, growing vegetables, sewing sheets for the male miners and doing auxilliary work at the mine. See the piece by Chernukhina in a collection of five short articles under the heading 'Zheny shakterov: gorlovki v bor'be za ugol', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 36, 1931, pp. 4–5.
46 R. Gurovich, 'Pyatyi den'', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 16, 1933, p. 11.
47 E. Yakob, 'V etoi zamechatel'noi strane', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 19, 1934, pp. 12–13.
48 Gurovich, op. cit., p. 11.
49 Ibid.
50 'Umeesh' rabotat', umei i otdikhat'', editorial article, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1929, pp. 3–4.
51 N. Ash, 'Ot tronnikov do tundry', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 17–18, 1934, pp. 12–13.
52 See A. Shibaev, 'Zdes' otdikhayut mat' i rebenok', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 9, 1934; E. Yakob, 'V etoi zamechatel'noi strane', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 17, 1935, pp. 14–15; and 'Materi i detii na kurorte Anara', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 26, 1935, p. 12.
53 E. Yakob, 'V etoi zamechatel'noi strane', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 17, 1935, pp. 14–15.

54 Shibaev, op. cit.
55 F.G. Tremyakov, ‘Domashnyaya khozyaika’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 15, 1939, p. 16.
56 Dusya Pantilieva, ‘Umeesh’ rabotat’ – umei i otdikhat’’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 34, 1931, pp. 10–11.
57 Anna Ukushenko, ‘Ran’she ya i dumat’ ne mogla o kurorte’, *Rabotnitsa*, nos. 17–18, 1934, p. 12.
58 E. Filippova, ‘Devushka snaiper’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 2, 1934, p. 18.
59 T. Nekrasov, ‘Letchitsy, vsadnitsy, puletchitsy’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 21, 1938, pp. 10–11.
60 Polina Osipenko, ‘Vo imya mogushchestva rodiny’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 21, 1938, pp. 5–6.
61 ‘My prizyvaem’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 22, 1935, pp. 8–9.
62 V.I. Fedorova, ‘Kak ya ustanovila mirovoi rekord’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12, 1935, pp. 8–9.
63 A. Vavilova, ‘Eto ne tol’ko sport – eto boevaya podgotovka’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 30, 1934, pp. 8–9.
64 E. Filippova, ‘Otvazhnye al’pinistki’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 18, 1935, pp. 6–7.
65 M. Shchelkanova, ‘Kavaleristy-otlichnitsy’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 25, 1935, pp. 6–7.
66 See ‘Veloprobeg imeni zhurnala “Rabotnitsa”’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 18, 1935, pp. 6–7.
67 N. Leshchinskii, ‘Strazhnaya bolezn’’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 20 1938, pp. 17–18; the story is continued in nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24. There is an ironic twist to this story: Zinaida turns out to be a spy, intent on getting the narrator, a military engineer, to fall in love with her and provide her with state secrets. This does not alter the fact that she provided the classic image of the new Soviet woman. This was, after all, the height of Stalin’s ‘terror’, when enemies were said to be taking on the most cunning of disguises; even the new Soviet woman was not beyond them.
68 M. Sergeeva, ‘Trudnosti menya ne pugayut’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1, 1933, p. 9.
69 ‘Est’ Metro!’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 14–15, 1935, p. 7.
70 Ibid.
71 M. Shchelkanova, ‘My sozdali nashe zamechatel’noe metro’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 7, 1935, pp. 10–11.
72 See E.F., ‘Inzhener metro’, *Rabotnitsa*, no 2, 1937, p. 15.
73 A. Ash-na, ‘Vystavka tkanei’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 11, 1935, p. 13.
74 F. Panferov, ‘Tat’yana Khrebtova’ , *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12, 1938, pp. 17–18. The same story also appeared in *Krest’yanka*, no. 20, 1937, pp. 11–13.
75 See, for example, Stalin’s speech to the II Congress of Soviets of the USSR, 1924; quoted in ‘My klyanemsya’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 2, 1929, pp. 7–8.
76 For a more detailed discussion on *kul’turnost’* (being cultured) in the Stalin era, see C. Kelly and V. Volkov, ‘Directed Desires: *Kul’turnost’* and Consumption’, in C. Kelly and D. Shepherd (eds), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution, 1881–1940* (Oxford, 1998) pp. 291–313.
77 T. Kholodyi, ‘Drugaya zhizn’’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 6, 1934, pp 26–7.
78 E. Yakub-Kitaevich, ‘Udarno rabotaem, kul’turno zhivem’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1934, pp. 8–9.
79 Anna Zemnaya, ‘Zamshevye perchatki’, *Rabotnitsa*, nos. 11–12, 1934, pp. 15–16, continued in next two issues.

80 M. Yurina, ‘Malen’komy granzhdaninu trebuetsya parikmakher’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 4, 1937, p. 17.
81 Mariya Yurina, ‘Plat’ev mnogo, a vybrat’ nechego’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1937, pp. 14–15; A. Ashmarina, ‘Pochemy takoi skudnyi assortiment golovnykh uborov?’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 3, 1937, p. 14.
82 Ashmarina, op. cit., p. 14.

3

Soviet Heroines and the Language of Modernity, 1930–39

Choi Chatterjee[1]

During the 1930s the narrative structures and symbolic imagery used to represent Soviet women in the public sphere underwent important modifications. Perhaps the most prominent feature in the process of re-imaging public female identity was the creation of Soviet heroines. Heroines were feted and lavishly promoted by the media in a language peculiarly overladen with Stalinist hyperbole. The process of heroicisation lay at the epicentre of the Stalinist discourse about women and served as a legitimising myth in a society of uncertain social values and cultural forms.

In this chapter I will, firstly, argue that the transformation of the Russian woman from a symbol of backwardness to a symbol of modernity in Soviet propaganda served as a means of justification for Stalinist policies. Second, in the process of this re-structuring, I will show that the Soviet discourse relating to modernity, industrialisation and collectivisation and the welfare state was gendered both in spirit and tone. Finally, the chapter also addresses the limitations inherent in Soviet narratives on modernity. While the Stalinist heroine aspired to become a modern woman, her overt dependence on the state and the abject gratitude that she publicly expressed towards Stalin reinforced pre-modern notions of personal and political subordination, rather than the autonomy of a modern citizen. Protestations of devotion to Stalin formed an essential component of the public addresses made by women in the 1930s.[2]

Although the Soviet system advocated systematic modernisation as a desirable goal, its repressive policies constituted the biggest obstacle to the evolution of a civil society. As John Gray, a political theorist, has suggested, ‘there is an inherent paradox in totalitarianism in that it deploys modern ideology in the service of an anti-modernist project’.[3]

Scholars are deeply divided as to what exactly constitutes modernisation, but I would posit that it includes the transformation of societies due to industrial revolution, the primacy of secular/scientific knowledge and the growth of a bureaucratic welfare state that engages in rational planning.[4] Others, such as Habermas, see the evolution of civil society and its attendant public sphere as one of the main characteristics of the transition to modernity.[5] According to Habermas, the public sphere came into existence at the same time that the state became a locus of depersonalised authority. This sphere was marked by free communication and a spirit of criticism that helped the transition from absolutist monarchies to parliamentary regimes.

The Soviet Union fulfilled several of the conditions of modernisation while at the same time creating institutions and conditions that were unique. By the 1930s the Soviet Union was well on its way to becoming an industrialised nation under the disciplinary impetus of a bureaucratic welfare state. At the same time, however, the state, far from being an impersonal locus of power, was almost medieval in the staged performance of authority embodied in the public persona of Stalin and a few other key figures. Marxist theorists had claimed that the liberal distinction between the public and the private would collapse with the dawn of socialism.[6] In reality, in Stalinist Russia, a new public sphere was created.

This sphere was neither autonomous like the Habermasian model, nor characterised by the exercise of rational discourse by the participants. Although this particular public sphere was an emanation of the state rather than of civil society, it was characterised by popular participation.[7] The price of admission to this realm was the exposure to a body of hyperbolic and extravagant phrases known as propaganda that was loosely based on certain elements of Marxist ideology. Participation in meetings, demonstrations, public holidays, the act of reading newspapers and journals, watching plays and sport displays, hearing the radio, were all activities which entailed an engagement in the public sphere for both the representatives of the state and the citizens. In the interplay of languages and discursive practices, new identities were created. In this chapter, rather than understand how people appropriated or resisted official discourse, I will analyse the various stories that were being told about Stalinist women in the media in order to untangle the contradictory and ambiguous messages that were being communicated to the population.

Feminist scholars have claimed that the public sphere of western civil society was explicitly gendered male and that the subordination

of women to men was a principal feature of both liberalism and modern civil society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8] In the Soviet Union the continuing prominence of the themes of female liberation and gender equality in public propaganda was especially striking when one contrasts it to the retrograde language adopted towards women in the 1930s in Italy and Germany.

However, the rhetoric did not always translate into reality; like the art of socialist realism, narratives about women served as a means of legitimation for the regime. Soviet identity was created against an imagined European identity, both liberal and fascist. Soviet accomplishments were repeatedly contrasted with the shortcomings and limitations of the more 'advanced' western Europe. In this dialogue, the 'New Soviet Woman' served as the embodiment of Soviet belief in gender equality and welfare policies. Although the Soviet Union did not create a truly efficient system of childcare or domestic services, it was a goal to which the state publicly adhered. The idea of a welfare state responsive to women's needs as working mothers was a novel political idea, especially compared to the western world, where welfare policies were often temporary measures intended to strengthen the patriarchal family and keep women out of the waged labour market.[9] In the Soviet Union, the labour shortage obviated this necessity, and women were exhorted to become both model workers and mothers. Although Soviet women lacked the power to force the state to meet its self-proclaimed obligations, Soviet propaganda provided citizens with a yardstick against which they could measure the various deficiencies of the system. Therefore, propaganda could serve as a means of empowerment by providing a permissible vocabulary of complaint and criticism.

The Stalinist heroine also served as a justification for the creative and innovative nature of the Stalinist revolution. Under Stalin, or so state propaganda claimed, material conditions had changed so dramatically that Soviet superwomen were to be found in every corner of the Union: on collective farms, in the military, in educational circles and institutions of higher learning, in factories, in the field of sports, even in the tunnels of the Moscow metro. In the 1930s, the morally ambiguous and rather complex models of the preceding decade, such as Dasha Chumalova, the heroine of Gladkov's novel *Cement*, were replaced by Stalinist heroines, identifiable symbols of modernity and proof of the innate superiority of Stalinism to all other social, economic and political systems.[10]

Stalinism did not fulfil the ideals of the October revolution in that gender parity remained an abstract dream throughout the life of the

Soviet Union. The boundaries between the public and private spheres of existence were not erased. The ideal of communal living was abandoned, and the state failed to institute the welfare utopia it had promised. Yet Stalinism did complete one part of the Bolshevik gender project: it managed to re-encode semiotically the category of 'woman' in Soviet public discourse. Starting from the 1930s, in contrast to the previous decades when women were usually represented as politically immature or backward, heroines embodied in the abstract the progressive modernity of the Soviet system.

Stalinist revolution and women

In Soviet literature, the first five-year plan did not merely result in the industrialisation of a peasant nation, but also in the modernisation of a backward and uncultured female population.[11] The gendered dimensions of industrialisation were figured in the re-imaging of the Soviet woman as a liberated, reconstructed persona who symbolised progress. Marxist theories had claimed that women's participation in the public sphere would lead to liberation. Stalin's industrial revolution had dragged women into the public sphere of production. All that remained was the further education and acculturation of the 'New Soviet Woman'. Education, especially technical education, *udarnichestvo* (shock-work), and later Stakhanovism, held the key to future upward mobility.

The inception of the first five-year plan in 1928 created a huge labour shortage in the country, and women were recruited into heavy industry in significant numbers. Women made some modest gains in the agricultural sector, which barely compensated for the extensive dislocation and trauma caused by collectivisation. Women were encouraged to join technical schools and colleges.[12] Also, the state started spending precious resources on the construction of day care centres, kindergartens and medical facilities.[13] Needless to say these facilities were inadequate in number and the quality of care provided left much to be desired. Yet, compared to the 1920s, the new facilities represented a considerable improvement. Finally, the 1930s witnessed the unprecedented upward mobility of women in the discrete fields of aviation, defence, agriculture, industry, arts and sports.

Statistically, this cohort of Soviet heroines was not significant, but the publicity that surrounded them fostered the creation of a heroine myth that is revealing of certain social values and gender relations that the Stalinist state promoted.[14] From this small pool of upwardly mobile women, a few were selected as heroines to be celebrated in the media.

The narrative about Soviet heroines was an important element in Stalinist discourse, as it served as a gendered justification of the modernity of the regime. The heroines were memorable chiefly as repositories of state-mandated values and their testimonies fleshed out the bare bones of Stalinist historiography.

I have selected as sources the life histories of Soviet heroines, as written by journalists and narrated by heroines themselves on public occasions, and from published compendiums of short biographies of women, a genre that became especially popular in the 1930s.[15] The lives of real heroines bear an eerie resemblance to the lives of fictional heroines, a testament to the ubiquitous power of the tropes of socialist realism.[16] The conventions governing this highly politicised body of literature were fairly simple and included a straightforward narrative style, the transformation of consciousness through the retelling of one's life history and the moral theme of personal redemption through identification with the goals of the Stalinist state.[17] The protagonists were often middle-level heroines, extraordinary for their times but not necessarily national celebrities like Maria Demchenko, the Stakhanovka, Polina Osipenko, the aviator, or Pasha Angelina, the tractor driver. Nor were they the tried and true old female party activists. Rather they were underprivileged women from poor families who had achieved a measure of success under the Stalinist system and were in turn promoted as the privileged products of Stalinist policies. Yet in structure and content the stories of lesser heroines were similar to those of the national celebrities, and this literature served a political purpose.

International Women's Day

Women, who were for the most part subordinate in Soviet public discourse, became the centre of attention around International Women's Day, 8 March.[18] Initially, International Women's Day was adopted at the women's conference of the Second International held in Copenhagen in 1910 in order to further the cause of women's suffrage and emancipation. A group of Bolshevik women in St Petersburg used the holiday as a means to popularise their political programme among factory women and it was celebrated sporadically in the next few years. However, after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, International Women's Day joined May Day and the anniversary of the October revolution as one of the more important events on the Soviet calendar. Although women's needs occupied a subordinate position in Soviet calculations, and were routinely

ignored by the Communist Party, during the month of March, especially around International Women's Day, issues relating to women took on a spurious urgency in the press, party circles, trade unions, women's departments in various ministries, workers' clubs and schools. Despite the greater prominence of female imagery in Soviet propaganda during the 1930s, Women's Day celebrations continued to be the central showcase for women and their achievements. Regional and local party organisations were instructed 'to shower special attention and honours on women heroines'.[19] Trade unions were ordered to arrange exhibitions of the production results of the shock-work brigades and hold rallies where exemplary women workers were feted.[20] Factories, collective farms and clubs treated women to traditional Russian feasts, dancing and hortatory speeches reminding them of the benefits that they had gained under Stalinism.

The political significance of the holiday was marked in the 1930s by important gatherings held at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.[21] At these meetings, women pilots, directors of collective farms, transport workers, Stakhanovites in industry, scientific personnel, and, of course, famous female Bolsheviks, such as Nadezhda Krupskaya, Aleksandra Artyukhina, Mariya Ulyanova, Klavdiya Nikolaeva and Elena Stasova, represented the broad spectrum of women's achievements in the Soviet Union. Members of the upper echelons of the party, including Stalin himself, made occasional appearances. At these ceremonial events, Soviet heroines (that is, women who had apparently penetrated the bastions of male primacy) were asked to recount their life histories. Naturally, the heroines speak in an edited voice and the conjuncture between the state discourse and these public stories is quite remarkable. Nonetheless, these accounts reveal a depth of knowledge about the construction of a 'public' female identity in Stalin's Russia. Unfortunately, they tell us next to nothing about private identities.

Soviet heroines in the public sphere

In public discourse, the crux of the female identity in the 1930s was formed by the heroine's attachment to work.[22] The mystical attachment to norm fulfilment that many of the heroines exhibited was in part the material realisation of the Marxist prophecy of unalienated labour. Free from exploitation, our heroines toiled in factories, farms, railway yards and combat units for the greater glory of Stalin and the country. If this dedication to work was a state-approved theme, exemplary labour output was also the means to upward social mobility.[23]

Professional success also gave women financial independence, social prestige, and helped in the renegotiation of power relationships within the family.[24]

As my first example I have selected a chairwoman of a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) of the Shakhovskii *raion* in Moscow *oblast'*, Smirnova. Smirnova was invited to speak at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow at a Women's Day celebration in 1936.[25] Smirnova was a redoubtable matron, 40 years old, palpably aware of her own worth and quite overcome at the miraculous nature of her achievements.[26] In her account, Smirnova stressed her incredulity that she, a farm-worker, was addressing the heads of state. As she said, this rarely happened anywhere in the world and it was especially surprising in Russia where the village woman was a notorious symbol of backwardness.[27] From her speech it appeared that Smirnova was a simple peasant woman, but the collectivisation of agriculture opened new opportunities for her. She worked hard and was appointed the chairwoman of a *kolkhoz* in Moscow *oblast'*. As she said, 'before I was nothing and now I am a heroine of labour and I was awarded the Red Banner of Labour'.[28] In contrast to her previous insignificance, the recognition of her services by the state gave her life a measure of meaning. Smirnova's identity, therefore, was deeply intertwined with her occupation, her skills and her power in the *kolkhoz*.

Creation of female identity was closely tied to the chronology of the revolution.[29] The Soviet press in the 1930s was replete with Cinderella stories of women born to poor peasant families who, in the wake of collectivisation, rose to responsible positions within the *kolkhoz* sector.[30] Even the noted director, Sergei Eisenstein, developed this theme in his film, *Staroe i novoe* (The Old and the New, 1929).[31] These Soviet heroines realised that collectivisation would free them from their miserable dependence on their husbands and fathers. From the very inception of the campaign, they worked energetically to convince the other village women to join the *kolkhoz*. Later, some of these heroines recollected how they were cursed, taunted and treated as the apostles of the Antichrist by the village women. Often they became the subjects of vile rumours in their communities. In one extreme case, an exemplary agricultural worker named Khitrikova from the Kurgansk *raion* in the Northern Caucasus was wrongfully sentenced to one-year's hard labour by class enemies.[32]

This basic theme of the lone heroine pitted against a foolish and improvident village formed the principal narrative for the biographies of Soviet heroines. Their stories were constructed around the poles of

pre-revolutionary oppression and post-revolutionary liberation. More often than not, however, the crucial moment in women's lives was not the October revolution, but the Stalinist revolution. An article in the journal *Obshchestvennitsa* explained that following the October revolution women received legal rights and little more. After the inception of the first five-year plan, however, women became economically independent and fully-fledged Soviet citizens.[33] The story of Matrena Doroshenko, a poor peasant woman from the northern Caucasus, offers a good illustration of the Stalinist version of women's history. The October revolution did not make any substantial change in her situation and she continued to be abused by her husband and his family. Yet during collectivisation, she sided with the party even though her husband's family was part of the *kulak* counter-offensive. She testified against their affiliation with the White Russians in the civil war and denounced the *kulaks* who had gained control of their collective farm. Matrena suffered murderous reprisals; her home was burnt down, she was physically attacked. The state rewarded her for her collaboration and she was appointed to the administrative board of the 'Krasnyi Donbass' *kolkhoz*.[34] Such stories also served to sanitise the brutal record of collectivisation by associating terror and violence exclusively with class enemies while reserving the modern means of persuasion – reason and legal testimony – for the party activists.

Although these 'exemplary' women were demarcated sharply from the rest of the *temnye baby* (backward village women), this was a temporary hiatus. In the later 1930s, the notion of sisterhood formed a crucial element in female identity. Sisterhood served a variety of functions in the Soviet Union, and in the press we find repeated instances of women turning to one another for support and friendship. Mashalkina, a chairwoman of the Orshanskii district mutual aid fund, in a conversation with Kalinin, President of the Russian Soviet Republic, in 1934, said that her primary objective was to acquire an automobile so that they could convey medical help quickly to women in labour.[35] In a similar vein, a report about Halima Apa Kasakova, an administrator of the Women's Club in Tashkent, referred to the loving relationships that she maintained with the women of the city. Apparently, whenever she appeared in the club or in the streets, local women clustered around her with cries of 'Mother', shook her hand, and complained about conservative and recalcitrant husbands. Halima Apa always responded with affectionate concern and sound practical suggestions.[36]

Finally, we have considerable evidence from camp memoirs that female solidarity often provided the only key to survival.[37] At a time when the purges were atomising Soviet society into a collection of suspicious strangers, it was important for the media to stress the theme of socialist *gemeinschaft* (intimate community). Soviet society was described in familial metaphors, and ties between citizens were represented as bonds of kinship.[38]

During the 1930s, Women's Day stories about the heroines emphasised the fact that they were not lone pioneers, but belonged to a nucleus of caring and like-minded women. Thus, the ten women skiers from an electric factory, who skied the 1400 kilometres from Moscow to Tyumen in 1935, referred to their close and friendly relations with each other. They also spoke eloquently about the warmth and hospitality that they received on their journey from various Soviet citizens.[39] In a similar manner, the women's brigade in the eighteenth shaft of the Moscow metro was enthusiastic about the harmony that prevailed in their labour group. Not only did the female miners work together, they shared common interests in the arts and theatre. On occasion they even joined forces in order to reform uncouth and lazy male comrades.[40]

Women workers at the L.M. Kaganovich ball-bearing factory in Moscow took the kinship metaphor one step further. According to the leader of the group, their unit literally functioned as a surrogate family for one of their co-workers who had a baby boy. No one referred to Masha Krokhotkina's husband, but her female co-workers in essence adopted her baby, showered her with gifts and advice on child rearing, relieved her from the night shift and helped take care of the infant so the mother would not be overwhelmed by the double burden.[41] What was rarely mentioned in the press, however, was the fact that women workers were often forced to form female work brigades because of the hostility of male co-workers and management.[42]

If the female sense of self was created in relation to other women, at the same time it was articulated in sharp contradistinction to that of the archetypal Russian male.[43] There were two elements in the portrayal of this antagonistic relationship with men. In the first instance, men, especially family members, were invariably presented in the literature as a brake on women's cultural and professional development. This marked a decisive change from earlier Bolshevik propaganda where women were often characterised as a drag on the class-consciousness of proletarian men and a counter-revolutionary

force.[44] In the second instance, heroines such as Smirnova apparently displayed great satisfaction at the reversal of power relationships within the family, which was invariably predicated on the greater earning power of the women vis-à-vis their husbands.

In stories we find references to husbands who try to prevent women from achieving their personal ambitions, or male co-workers who refuse to accept a female overseer.[45] Ollennikova, a Stakhanovite worker and the first female railroad controller in her section, said that she faced a great deal of hostility from male co-workers. Once a machinist came up to her and said that he wanted to meet the controller. When she identified herself, he replied: 'What kind of a controller are you, I can hear a woman's voice, get me the controller.'[46] Finally, with the help of the party and due to her own perseverance, her authority was recognised.

Flight Navigator, Marina Raskova, lecturer at the Zhukov Air Force Academy, recalled how her husband tried to prevent her from becoming a pilot. Ignoring his entreaties, she went on to have a spectacular career in the air force.[47] Similarly Agafiya Durnyasheva, a Stakhanovite worker at the Trekhgornaya factory, a teacher at a technical school, a party worker and the mother of six, revealed that her husband had hindered her career development considerably. In her interview she stated that she earned more than her husband, and the fact that she was a party member while he was not had created problems in their relationship. Initially, when she had wanted to go to trade school, her husband had sought to dissuade her, citing her maternal responsibilities as a deterrent. She ignored his advice, completed the apprenticeship courses, joined the party, and was rewarded with a spacious apartment for her family.[48]

In her Women's Day address, Smirnova's feelings of superiority towards her husband and other men were an important part of her perception of self. She said that during the years of collectivisation the men ran away and left them in the lurch, and when they returned, the women no longer needed them.[49] This was perhaps the most disingenuous explanation on record of the forced deportation of millions, one that reduced the tragedy of collectivisation to the farce of coy melodrama. Savouring the irony of role reversal in her family, she said,

> I am the chairwoman of the *kolkhoz* … and all the men submit to my authority (laughter in the audience). I am the chairwoman of the *kolkhoz* while my husband is a simple *rabochii* [manual worker]

> ... Before, when my husband went to the *skhod* [village assembly] and I asked him about the proceedings, he would reply that it was none of my business. Now I come and tell him all that we decided and he listens to me, now he is humble.[50]

Soviet heroines in the private sphere

The discourse on motherhood and maternalism constituted an important element in women's public identity in the 1930s. There was a substantial difference in the Stalinist construction of motherhood and maternalism. Here I use the term motherhood to refer to the act of reproduction; maternalism denotes notions of parenting and the idealised relationship of the mother and child that was enforced by state and society. Thus, in nineteenth century western Europe and in the United States, women were supposed to seek fulfilment through reproduction and discharge civic obligations by transmitting to children appropriate social and moral values.[51] In Russia, however, there was little historical precedent for limiting women's functions exclusively to child rearing and domesticity.[52] While the Russian aristocracy routinely entrusted their servants with the care of children, peasant and factory women relied on children and older women who were themselves unable to work.

Despite their declared animosity towards bourgeois culture, the Bolsheviks tried to inculcate typically bourgeois notions of child rearing in citizenry. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, magazines for women carried simple articles explaining modern methods of child rearing and information on obstetrics. In 'Red Corners' in factories, doctors and nurses held seminars on infant care and personal and domestic hygiene. The organisation *Okhrana Materinstvo i Mladenchestvo* (Protection of Motherhood and Childhood) printed popular tracts on hygiene, nutritional information on children's diets and articles on pre- and post-natal care.[53] Parents were encouraged to pay attention to children's homework and take an interest in their social development. However, at the same time, it was repeatedly emphasised that maternal functions were supposed to consume only a portion of women's time, the rest of which was to be spent in socialist labour and community oriented activity.[54]

The discourse on motherhood was created along statist lines. By reproducing, Soviet women were fulfilling the obligations of good citizenship. Mothers of large families were seen as exemplifications of

civic virtue and social conscience. Unlike the Victorian construction of maternalism, which exhorted women to fulfil their feminine destiny within the bonds of matrimony, in the Soviet Union, motherhood became a public act. When a Soviet woman had a child, she was fulfilling an important national function: she was ensuring the reproduction of a future generation of socialists who would work for the fatherland and protect the motherland from the aggression of fascists and capitalists.

Soviet discourse on motherhood was created in reference to both the 'decadent' bourgeois west and the more demonic fascist order. While the nationalisation of women's reproductive and productive capacities was part of a pan-European phenomenon, Soviet propaganda strove to distinguish the modernity of its pro-natalist policies from the retrograde nature of those pursued in the west.[55] Of the various images used to contrast the youthfulness and vitality of the young Soviet Union with the degenerate and effete west, birth rates were one of the most popular means. Popular articles cited comparative mortality and fertility figures that contrasted the Soviet Union favourably with the west. In this instance, Soviet propaganda merely echoed the demographic anxiety that was being expressed in countries such as France, Spain, Scandinavia, Italy and Germany. It was claimed, rather spuriously, that while mortality rates were declining and birth rates were rising in the Soviet Union, in France, England, Italy and Germany, birth rates were dropping precipitously.[56] The Soviets alleged that by closing down nursing homes, and by denying working mothers access to doctors, the fascists were trying to control the growth of the proletarian population in Germany.[57]

Soviet propaganda claimed that since biological reproduction was a social act and a civic obligation in the Soviet Union, the health and welfare of pregnant women was a matter of public concern. If motherhood was celebrated as a public act, the image of a caring and paternalistic state order was given equal visibility in the media. Thus, Maria Il'inichna, mother of ten children, in an interview for Women's Day in 1936, highlighted the fact that three of her children went to a nursery, one to kindergarten, while the older ones attended school.[58] There was a constant tension implicit in the construction of maternalism. On the one hand, Soviet women were being taught to become modern mothers, told to replace traditional Russian practices of child rearing with scientific methods. Yet, at the same time, women were not perceived purely as caregivers, nor was reproduction their only function. Soviet children were citizens in their own right, and the

Stalinist state promised to provide adequate medical care, childcare and educational opportunities. Inflated and often spurious facts and figures on social service organisations accompanied the rhetoric extolling motherhood.[59]

During the 1930s there was a remarkable expansion in state social services, but they were grossly inadequate in number and the quality of service they offered left much to be desired.[60] The argument was circular: since the state provided the social circumstances that were conducive to promoting motherhood, there was no compelling need for Soviet women to limit the size of their families. At the same time, due to the availability of social services, there was no reason why women should spend all of their time on childcare. When asked how she managed to be a mother of five, teacher, worker and social activist, Agaf'ya Karpovna explained that it was all a matter of time management.[61] A Women's Day film clip from 1937 showed women moving effortlessly from mothering at home, to working in the factory, to socialising in clubs with their children.[62] Notions of efficient ordering of time evoked images of modernity. The multiple roles that Soviet women were expected to play were represented not as a burden or the double shift, but as a testimonial both to the indomitable Bolshevik spirit, and to the innate superiority of Soviet women over their international counterparts.[63] A recently published memoir of a social activist (*obshchestvennitsa*) from the 1930s provides us with intimate details of how Soviet women negotiated the double shift. While the author seems overwhelmed in trying to complete both her domestic and public duties, she appears very reluctant to give up her community activity and devote herself full-time to the care of her family.[64]

Abortion represented a threat to images of joyous fecundity and the arguments against it were constructed along the same lines that sought to promote motherhood. It is instructive to remember that the infamous abortion decree of 27 June 1936 carried several supplementary conditions in addition to the restrictions on abortion. These included the rendering of material assistance to pregnant women, growth in the number of childcare centres and clinics, increase in alimony to wives with large families and strict punishment of defaulters on alimony payment.[65] Once again, the abortion decree was used to contrast the limitations of the October revolution with the achievements of the Stalinist revolution. It was argued that abortion had been reluctantly allowed in the 1920s because of the material poverty of the country.[66] By the 1930s, because of better living conditions and the social services

provided by the state, there was no need to deny women their natural right to motherhood.

The abortion decree, however, unleashed a storm of protest from Soviet women across the nation.[67] Although public acrimony was soon stifled, the number of illegal abortions in the cities of Leningrad and Moscow rose dramatically in 1937 and 1938.[68] During these years, a modest propaganda campaign was waged that warned against the evil repercussions of abortions. Articles, purportedly written by doctors, warned that abortions invariably led to barrenness, premature ageing and medical complications.[69] Soviet propaganda stressed the fact that women who resorted to backstreet abortions were reverting to the mores of a pre-socialist and pre-modern Russia. As these were performed principally by old women lacking scientific skill and knowledge, it was inconceivable that the modern Soviet women would patronise such butchers.

In stark contrast to the nurturing role of the party, males, especially husbands and boyfriends, were typified as evil seducers who promoted abortions in order to escape the consequences of their irresponsible sexual behaviour.[70] An article in *Molodaya gvardiya*, analysing letters written by women in response to the abortion decree, concluded that in most instances it was men who were guilty of forcing women to have abortions.[71] While women's agency in motherhood was stressed, abortion was represented as an infringement on women's free will and modernity. During this period, in consonance with the other clauses of the abortion decree, there was a statewide crackdown on errant husbands who refused to pay alimony or child support.[72]

The limitations of Soviet modernity

In this classic struggle of the sexes, propaganda stressed the fact that it was the Stalinist state that supported the heroine and ensured her success in every sphere of her existence. It was claimed that the *trudoden'* (workday payment) system in the *kolkhoz* made the peasant woman financially independent of a husband or a father, and for the first time rewarded her materially for her labour. Masha Scott later recalled that her mother used to wave her collective farm card in her husband's face and taunt him, 'You always said you supported me. Now you see I am earning as much as you', she declared. 'So I have as much say as you have, don't I? You had better not say anything more to me.'[73] As Stalin said and was quoted ad nauseam thereafter, 'only

collective farm life could have destroyed inequality and put women on their feet'.[74]

It was constantly reiterated that it was the party that nurtured the hidden talents of women peasants and helped them become opera singers and parachutists.[75] The party created circumstances in which women could advance to high administrative positions. The party admonished Soviet men who held traditional attitudes towards women and wanted to limit them within the confines of domesticity.[76] Men were urged to help with childcare and housework.[77] The party also held modern notions that marriage was founded on equality between men and women and urged men to do their fair share of parenting.[78] Finally, it was repeatedly claimed that the party upheld women's rights to motherhood against the depredations of husbands, boyfriends and evil quacks.

The hyperbole surrounding the Soviet heroine was used to buttress the myth of upward mobility in the Soviet Union. Here, the traditional social and cultural stigma surrounding Russian women was especially useful. The creation of a Soviet hero was less miraculous in a society long accustomed to the myths of strong male rulers and valiant knights. The transformation of the illiterate, uncultured and counter-revolutionary Russian woman, however, was an achievement of far greater magnitude. The conversion of the *baba* (uncultured peasant woman) to a civic subject constituted a revolution of unique social dimensions and was represented in propaganda as one of the most triumphant results of Stalinism. As Stalin said in his speech to the November 1935 Congress of 'Five-Hundreders', 'there were not, nor could there have been such women in the old days'.[79]

The extensive 'thank you Stalin' literature that emerged in the 1930s exemplified this symbiotic relationship between Stalin and Soviet heroines. The correspondents addressed Stalin with the familiar form of 'you', *ty*, rather than the more formal *vy*, 'thou' and prefixed Stalin's name with the adjective *rodnoi* (one's own) to underscore the familial relationship that bound them to Stalin. The women thanked Stalin for the extraordinary improvement in their cultural and material position. The extensive concern for women's welfare that Stalin was credited with was in consonance with the public imaging of the dictator as the paternal champion of women's rights, and the sole guarantor of their upward mobility.[80]

Thus, the modernity of the 'New Soviet Woman' was deeply compromised. If, in her dedication to work and upward mobility, gender equality, efficient time management and nationalism, the Soviet heroine

exemplified the modern citizen, her pro-natalism, reliance on sisterhood and devotion to Stalin was redolent of politics of a pre-modern era. Finally, the statist orientation of the category of modernity revealed its ambiguous nature. Soviet heroines were completely dependent on the state to uphold their authority in both the public and the private sphere. Their power was based on the artificial support extended by the state, not grounded in any fundamental change in popular attitudes or gender relations. Also, since Soviet heroines rarely occupied positions of political power or strategic party posts, they could not form a serious pressure group for women's rights within the system. The heroines' claim to fame rested on the fact that they engaged in occupations traditionally reserved for men and by doing so lent credibility to the alleged Soviet commitment to women's liberation. At the same time, the miraculously transformative power of Stalinism was revealed. Not only had Russia modernised almost overnight into an industrial giant, but the *baba*, the most benighted expression of Russian backwardness, had transmuted into a modern, confident, politically mature citizen – in short a *chelovek* (human being).[81]

Notes

1 An earlier version of this essay was published as 'Soviet Heroines and Public Identity, 1930–1939', *Carl Beck Papers*, no. 1402 (Pittsburgh, October 1999).
2 *Geroini sotsialisticheskogo truda* (Partizdat, 1936).
3 J. Gray, *Post-liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (New York, 1993) p. 158.
4 L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); M. Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982).
5 J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger (Cambridge, MA, 1989).
6 E. Kamenka, 'Public/Private in Marxist Theory and Marxist Practice', in S.I. Benn and G.F. Gauss (eds), *Public and Private in Social Life* (New York, 1983) pp. 266–79.
7 J. Weintraub and K. Kumar (eds), *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago, 1997)
8 S. Benhabib and D. Cornell (eds), *Feminism as Critique: on the Politics of Gender* (Minneapolis, 1987); C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, 1988).
9 L. Gordon (ed.), *Women, the State and Welfare* (London, 1990); S. Koven and S. Michel (eds), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993).
10 B.E. Clements, 'The Birth of the New Soviet Woman', in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the*

Russian Revolution (Bloomington, IN, 1985) pp. 220–37, and T.M. Durfee, '*Cement* and *How the Steel was Tempered*: Variations on the New Soviet Woman', in S.S. Hoisington (ed.), *A Plot of her Own: the Female Protagonist in Russian Literature* (Evanston, IL, 1995) pp. 89–101.

11 'Vypolnit' plan vovlecheniya zhenshchin v promyshlennost'', *Kul'tura i byt*, no. 6, 1931, p. 4; 'Mezhdunarodnyi zhenskii den': vosmoe marta', *Kul'tura i byt*, no. 4, 1932, pp. 4–5.

12 E. Lishchina, 'Podgotovka spetsialistov', *V edinom stroyu* (Moscow, 1960) p. 317; TsGAGM, f. 150, o. 25, d. 78, ll. 37–8.

13 Ya. Perel and A.A. Lyubimova (eds), *Okhrana materinstva i mladenchestva* (Moscow, 1932) pp. 24, 25, 27, 31–2; GARF, f. 5451, o. 16, d. 854, l. 4. Finances were not always the problem, as funds often remained unutilised: TsGA, f. 482, o. 24, d. 43, l. 22.

14 In 1933 there were only 305 women serving as directors of factories, and a total of 26 264 women were employed by the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry as specialists, managers and research scientists. M.A. Shaburova, *Zhenshchina-bol'shaya sila* (Partizdat, 1935) p. 51.

15 *Naidionnaya doroga: sbornik ocherkov o rabote zhenshchin v kolkhoze* (OGIZ, 1935); *Geroiny sotsialisticheskogo truda* (Partizdat, 1936); *Povesti Minuvshego* (Leningrad, 1937); *Sovetskie zhenshchiny* (Moscow, 1938); I.S. Akopyan (ed.), *Zhenshchiny strany sotsializma* (OGIZ, 1939).

16 See, for example, B. Pilnyak, *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*, trans. C. Malamuth (New York, 1931) pp. 240–1.

17 See also Chapter 1 by Carmen Scheide in this volume.

18 C. Chatterjee, *Celebrating Women: the International Women's Day in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1909–39*, (Pittsburgh, 2002).

19 *'O mezhdunarodnom kommunisticheskom zhenskom dne 8 marta'*, postanovlenie TsK VKP(b): *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, no. 2, March 1936, p. 25.

20 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 364(1), l. 14; f. 5451, o. 16, d. 845, ll. 1–11; f. 5451, o. 18, d. 553, ll. 4–6; f. 5457, o. 19, d. 196, ll. 33, 44; f. 5457, o. 22, d. 80, l. 31.

21 For a complete transcript of these meetings from 1934–39 see TsMAM, f. 150, o. 25, dd. 77, 78, 83; f. 150, o. 5, dd. 91, 94 and 150. Similar meetings were held in provincial capitals on International Women's Day.

22 See, for example, 'Boevoe pokolenie stroitelyi kommunizma', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 11, 1939, p. 2.

23 M. Isaakovna, an employee at a book-printing factory, saw her pay rise 30 per cent after she became a Stakhanovka. She and her family lived in a three-room apartment: GARF, f. 5451, o. 19, d. 401, l. 40. For similar data on women Stakhanovites see, ll. 42, 50, 51 and 62; and M. Buckley, 'Why be a Shock-worker or a Stakhanovite', in R. Marsh (ed.), *Women in Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge, 1996) pp. 199–213. However, women workers were substantially under-represented among Stakhanovites: L. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–41* (Cambridge, 1988) pp. 170–2.

24 Pasha Angelina, the celebrated tractor driver, actually divorced her husband when he demanded that she spend more time with her family. A. Slavutskii, *Praskov'ya Angelina* (Moscow, 1960) pp. 20–30, 178–9.

25 *Izvestiya*, 9 March 1936.
26 Smirnova and other heroines became a recognisable social type and were satirised by the novelist Vladimir Voinovich in the character of Lyushka in the novel, *The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Chonkin*, trans. R. Lourie (New York, 1977).
27 TsMAM, f. 150, o. 25, d. 83, l. 19.
28 Ibid., l. 26.
29 See, for example, V.E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin* (London, 1997).
30 *Sovetskie zhenshchiny* (Moscow, 1938); *Zhenshchina v kolkhoze – bol'shaya sila* (Moscow, 1934) pp. 26–32. The film, *Member of the Government* (1939), by A. Zarkhi and I. Kheifits, pictures a down-trodden woman farm-worker, who eventually becomes the head of the collective farm and a delegate to the Supreme Soviet: L. Attwood, *Red Women on the Silver Screen* (London, 1993) p. 65.
31 D.J. Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918–35* (Ann Arbor, 1985) pp. 204–6.
32 *Zhenshchiny v sotsialisticheskom stroitel'stve SSSR* (Leningrad, 1932), p. 27; *Krest'yanka*, no. 4, 1932, p. 11; RGASPI, f. 78, o. 1, d. 483, l. 29.
33 M. Yur'eva, 'Oktyabr'skaya revolyutsiya i raskreposchenie zhenshchiny', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 19, 1937, pp. 10–13.
34 *Pravda*, 8 March 1933. For a cinematic treatment of the same theme, see I. Pyrev's film, *The Party Card*, cited in P. Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society 1917–53* (Oxford, 1992) pp. 145–6.
35 RGASPI, f. 78, o. 1, d. 483, l. 5;
36 *Pravda*, 8 March 1937.
37 E. Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind* (London, 1967). See also Chapter 7 by Emma Mason in this volume.
38 For an elaboration of this concept see K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1985).
39 *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 10 March 1936.
40 *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 7 March 1935. See also the biography of Klavdiya Sakharova, deputy to the Supreme Soviet, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny* (Moscow, 1938) pp. 44–5.
41 *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 8 March 1938.
42 D. Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929–41* (London, 1994) p. 119.
43 The contrast between a weak man and a strong Russian woman has deep roots in the Russian literary tradition: V. Dunham, 'The Strong-woman Motif', in C.E. Black (ed.), *The Transformation of Russian Society* (Cambridge, 1967) pp. 459–83.
44 For representations of female backwardness see E. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN, 1997).
45 A.F. Smirnova, deputy to the Supreme Soviet, was forced to divorce her husband as he interfered with her professional life. M. Mikhailov, 'Zhenshchiny-deputaty ver'khovnogo soveta', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 21, 1937, p. 27.
46 TsMAM, f. 150, o. 25, d. 83, l. 15.

47 *Pravda*, 8 March 1936. Maria Osipenko faced similar problems with her fiancé: 'Maria Osipenko letchik', *Sovetskie zhenshchiny* (Moscow, 1938) p. 122.
48 T. Slovachekaya, 'Agitator Agafiya Karpovna Durnyashova', *Sputnik agitatora*, no. 4, 1936, pp. 32–5.
49 See also 'Dva Delegata', *Leningradskaya pravda*, 8 March 1933.
50 TsMAM, f. 150, o. 25, d. 83, l. 26. We find an identical sentiment expressed by Seligeeva, a secretary of a party cell in a *kolkhoz* in the Black Earth region: RGASPI, f. 78, o. 1, d. 483, l. 21.
51 See, for example, L. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980).
52 J. Tovrov, *The Russian Noble Family: Structure and Change* (New York, 1987); D.L. Ransel (ed.), *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research* (Urbana, IL, 1978).
53 E.D. Emelyanova, *Revolyutsiya, partiya, zhenshchina* (Smolensk, 1971), pp. 151–8; E. Waters, 'The Modernisation of Russian Motherhood', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1992, pp. 123–35.
54 *Materialy k mezhdunarodnomu kommunisticheskomu zhenskomu dnyu: 8 marta 1936* (Rostov-Don, 1936) pp. 28–53.
55 G. Bock and P. Thane (eds), *Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London, 1991).
56 *Sputnik agitatora*, no. 4, 1937, pp. 18–23; *Sputnik agitatora*, no. 4, 1938, pp. 10–11, *Sputnik agitatora*, no. 3, 1939, p. 33; RGASPI, f. 507, o. 2, d. 243, l. 18; f. 507, o. 2, d. 242, ll. 24, 25.
57 '8 marta – mezhdunarodnyi kommunisticheskii zhenskii den': Materialy dlya dokladov i besed', *Sputnik agitatora*, no. 4, 1938, p. 10.
58 *Pravda*, 12 March 1936.
59 For typical Soviet hyperbole see V. Zorin, 'Vospitanie novogo pokolenie', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 4, 1936, pp. 3–4.
60 Many of the new crèches were revamped old schools and living quarters: GARF, f. 5451, o. 17, d. 386, ll. 92–3; f. 5451, o. 21, d. 133, l. 16. Kindergartens were often congested and unhygienic, employees poorly qualified, and the food supply intermittent: GARF, f. 5451, o. 17, d. 385, ll. 62–8; f. 5451, o. 17, d. 386, ll. 91, 92, 100, 101b, 115; and f. 5451, o. 19, d. 453, ll. 92–103.
61 N. Lur'i, 'Mat'', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 12, 1937, pp. 12–13.
62 I. Setkina (director), *Mart' 1937*, Soyuz Kinozhurnal, T-I 2190, TsGAKFD.
63 A. Kollontai, 'Mezhdunarodnyi zhenskyi den'', RGASPI, f. 134, o. 1, d. 238, ll. 96–100.
64 'Diary of Galina Vladimirovna Shtange', in V. Garros (ed.), *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York, 1995), pp. 167–217.
65 *Pravda*, 26 May 1936.
66 *Sbornik instruktsii otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin* (Moscow, 1920) pp. 76–7.
67 For letters criticising the 1936 decree see RGASPI, f. 78, o. 1, d. 588, ll. 55; *Pravda*, 1 June 1936, 4 June 1936, 6 June 1936, 30 June 1936.
68 TsGA, f. 482, o. 29, d. 5, ll. 9–10.
69 *Rabotnitsa*: no. 17, 1936, pp. 4–6; no. 18, 1936, pp. 12–13; *Pravda*: 12 March 1936; 10 March 1936; Dr V. Yushkova, 'Kakoi vred prinosit zhenshchine abort', *Obshchestvennitsa*, no. 20, 1937, pp. 38–9.

70 See, for example, the letter from a woman worker to *Rabotnitsa*, no. 16, 1936, p. 6.
71 A. Agranovskii, 'Materinstvo', *Molodaya gvardiya*, January 1936, p. 178.
72 W. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life* (Cambridge, 1993) pp. 327–31.
73 P.S. Buck, *Talk about Russia with Masha Scott* (New York, 1945) p. 37.
74 'Rech na prieme kol'khoznits-udarnits sveklovichnykh polei rukovoditelyami partii i pravitel'stva' [10 November 1935], R.H. McNeal (ed.), *I.V. Stalin: Works*, vol. 1 (XIV) 1934–40 (Stanford, CA, 1967) pp. 74–7.
75 *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 7 March 1937.
76 See A. Kollontai's articles written for International Women's Day in 1933, 1934 and 1937: RGASPI, f. 134, o. 1, d. 238, ll. 2, 4, 34, 3, and 99.
77 See E. Yaroslavsky's strictures to irresponsible men in 'Kommunisticheskaya moral', *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 30 May 1936; *Zhenshchina v strane sovetov: v pomosche besedchikam i agitatoram* (n.p., 1938) p. 30.
78 *Pravda*, 11 March 1936; K. Nikolaeva, *Zhenshchiny v boiyakh za kommunizm* (Moscow, 1940) pp. 21–2.
79 *Pravda*, 11 November 1935.
80 *Pravda*, 11 March 1936; Pravda, 10 March 1938; *Rabotnitsa i krest'yanka*, no. 14, 1936, p. 14.
81 *Pravda*, 8 March 1937, uses the phrase 'miraculous transformation' when speaking of Tamra Vladimirova, who went from being an unskilled labourer to the leader of a team of 20 workers.

4

Babas at the Bench: Gender Conflict in Soviet Industry in the 1930s*

Wendy Goldman

In the annals of industrialisation, the scale and speed of the Soviet experience was unique.[1] The changes that transformed Europe over centuries were telescoped into a mere decade. The Soviet working class grew at an unprecedented rate, changing in size and social composition. Even more striking was the critical role played by women: in no other country did women come to constitute such a significant part of the working class in so short a time. In 1930 alone, 473 000 women entered industry, followed by 587 000 more in 1931. Between 1929 and 1935, almost 4 million women began to work for wages, 1.7 million of these in industry. By 1935, 42 per cent of all industrial workers were women.[2] Not only did women enter the labour force in record numbers, but they moved into industries that were traditionally dominated by men. Crossing older lines of sex segregation, they entered new industries such as machine building and electronics, as well as new and expanding branches of older industries such as mining, metallurgy and chemicals. They filled newly-created, semi-skilled jobs as well as older jobs previously held exclusively by men. Their sheer numbers and new position overwhelmed the older patterns of sex segregation that had persisted in Soviet industry through the 1920s. As the strict hierarchies of skill and gender were unexpectedly undercut, male workers were forced to re-examine their ideas about skill, 'masculine' and 'feminine' work and women's role in the workplace.

Despite a powerful faith in planning, leaders in the Communist Party, the Commissariat of Labour and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (ACCTU) never fully controlled the growth or transformation of the working class. Chaotic conditions in the factories and on the new building sites, minimal record keeping and high labour turnover severely undercut the efficacy of planning, especially at the local level. Almost half a million women had already entered industry

spontaneously before the party made any official effort to recruit female labour. Even foremen, in daily contact with workers in their shops, could not provide the most rudimentary attendance records, let alone enumerate the number or percentage of women employed. Yet by November 1930, paralysing labour shortages throughout the country prompted the party to applaud women's entrance into the labour force and to launch a well-publicised campaign to recruit 1.6 million women by the end of 1931. Various planning agencies were instructed to create target figures for hiring women in every factory and work site in the country. Women, targeted as a critical and largely untapped source of new labour, were to compose fully 50 per cent of all new workers. The party's decision abruptly elevated women, long scorned for their backwardness and lack of skills, to a crucial position in the industrialisation drive. *Trud*, the country's labour newspaper, printed a bold front page headline calling women to enter the factories: 'A Million Women to the Work Bench and the Machine!'[3] The campaign ignited and fuelled a fiery public discussion over the role of female labour. *Trud*'s call to place one million women at machines aggressively challenged male prejudices, placing heavy pressure on managers to hire, train and promote women.

Women in Russia traditionally worked in the least-skilled and lowest-paid 'support' positions in the factories: as unskilled labourers, hauliers, lifters and janitors who cleaned the factory yards and mopped the floors. Male workers, foremen, managers, labour officials and local party activists did not object to women in the factories and on construction sites, but many shared the view that women did not belong in skilled jobs. This view, rooted in pre-revolutionary patterns of gender segregation, was not based on a chivalric notion of protecting the 'weaker sex'. Men did not object to women doing heavy, dirty, unskilled, or even dangerous labour, they objected to women in skilled work, at the machine and in production. These objections were not peculiar to Russian workers. Throughout the nineteenth century, unions and artisan associations actively excluded women in an attempt to protect the livelihoods and privileges of their members.[4] In the Soviet Union, prejudices against women workers persisted at the local level despite the state's official insistence on equality.[5] In the 1920s, a period of unemployment and keen competition for jobs, Soviet trade unions vigorously protected the rights and privileges of their members against inroads by unemployed women and peasants. Union and women's activists fought bitterly over whether women workers should be organised separately from men. As late as 1930, the ACCTU reluctantly acknowledged strong anti-female moods in local unions, party

cells and factory committees. The Politburo had dissolved the party's Women's Department (the *Zhenotdel*) in January 1930, and women's activists within and outside the factories were angry and demoralised.[6] One union activist noted that local unions interpreted the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel* 'as a signal to liquidate all work with women'. The ACCTU informed the Central Committee in 1931 that the entire union hierarchy had abandoned work among women during the past two years. In many places, local unionists destroyed all separate organising aimed at women, declaring with relief, 'When the *baba* falls out of the carriage, the horse is better off.'[7]

The newly-recognised need for women to enter the workforce jolted both the party and the ACCTU into looking more closely at male attitudes and women's experiences on the local level.[8] If large numbers of women were to enter the labour force, the party would need to mobilise support from below. With this aim, the party encouraged women workers and factory activists to air their views at public forums. It organised meetings and printed women's comments, speeches and ideas in newspapers. Women seized the moment to speak frankly about gender relations in the workplace, boldly denouncing factory managers, union and party officials and male workers. The public discussion that ensued was the result of a confluence of interests: the party's interest in meeting the labour shortage; and women's interest in venting their long-suppressed individual and collective grievances.

The public discussion of male prejudice, so skilfully promoted and framed by the party, was brief. The Stalinist industrialisation programme was based on a frantic drive for production. Based on high capital investment in heavy industry, it aimed to build a modern, industrialised economy in the shortest time possible. All goals were ruthlessly subordinated to production. In the new drive for industrialisation, workers and unions alike were ordered to 'face to production'. Women's entrance into the labour force coincided with a decline in real wages, the ability of the unions to defend workers and the power of an older cadre of revolutionary, skilled workers. As 4 million women streamed into the work force, wages fell, skilled jobs 'at the work bench' were replaced by semi-skilled jobs on the line and older workers lost power and privileges. Although women took jobs in an expanding labour market and their recruitment was strongly supported by the state, the process was marked nonetheless by many of the same features that had produced intra-class hatred between male and female workers in the past.

The All-Union Meeting for Work among Women

The ACCTU launched the opening salvo in the campaign to pull 1.6 million women into the labour force. In December 1930, it began planning a large meeting with representatives from unions throughout the country. Officially, the meeting sought to develop a plan for mass recruitment, to revive the organisational links with women that local unionists had destroyed and to emphasise the new importance of women.[9] The ACCTU recognised that unless local union officials changed their attitudes toward women, they would be useless in the upcoming campaign. In the words of *Trud*, top union leaders aimed 'to strike a powerful blow against the conservative elements that undermine the role of female labour for industrialisation and defence'.[10] The line toward female labour had changed decisively.

Many union officials, however, were not interested in the meeting. The ACCTU initially hoped to convene the delegates in January, but was forced to postpone the meeting several times because the unions were so slow to gather material on women.[11] These early organisational difficulties provided a hint of attitudes at the local level. A report to the Central Committee after the meeting noted that despite repeated postponements, union leaders were still unprepared. Conducting its own research prior to the meeting, the ACCTU uncovered 'conservatism toward female labour not only from many managers, union officials, and backward workers, but among many leading party workers' as well. Conditions were not conducive for recruiting women into production: the vast majority of enterprises had no plans for female labour, plant managers claimed to have no jobs, and neither union nor party organisations had ever discussed the issue of female labour or done any organisational work with women.[12]

The ACCTU finally convened the All-Union Meeting for Work among Women on 1 February 1931, bringing together about 100 union representatives for five days of speeches and testimony. A number of the delegates were former *Zhenotdel* organisers and women shock-workers from the factories who had personally experienced male prejudice. Andrei Zhdanov, the leader of the Nizhegorod party committee, noted that many union leaders had refused to attend the meeting, sending former *Zhenotdel* organisers instead. 'We come to this meeting with shameful results', he thundered. 'The role of the unions is not to chatter about the backwardness of women' or to moan about 'objective reasons' for failure to work among women. The time had come for local organisations, the economic organs, and the

commissariats to pay attention to the issue of female labour. Speaking bluntly about the party's decision to mobilise 1.6 million women, he stressed that the basic task of the unions now was to recruit women. The task demanded, in his view, 'a total change in the consciousness of male unionists'. If women were to enter production and contribute to industrialisation, the apathy, discrimination and hostility characterising union attitudes toward women would have to be eliminated. Zhdanov, who strongly supported the Stalinist programme of industrialisation and the purge of Tomsky from his position as head of the ACCTU, manipulated the issue of women to once again attack the 'right devi-ation'. 'The question of women's mobilisation into the industrial proletariat had almost no place in the work of the old leadership', he charged. Yet Zhdanov admitted that the purge had changed little in regard to women: the entire union apparatus was still guilty of indifference. 'The task of every woman worker', he boomed, 'of every more or less comprehending unionist, is to change the consciousness of unionists on the issue of work among women.'[13]

Several party leaders also tried to deflect blame onto 'the old opportunistic leadership' of the Commissariat of Labour and the unions. Lenau, the head of the sector for mass campaigns within the ACCTU, claimed that the purges had eliminated the main source of discrimination. Blaming 'rightists' such as Tomsky, he implied that new leaders would chart a new direction. Yet the women representatives from the factories expressed a different view. The problem, as they understood it, was not politics at the highest level, but rather discriminatory practices that infected men from top to bottom.[14] Berdakina, a representative from the Crimea, openly challenged the idea that the problem rested with the old leadership. 'I would say that we do not see any new leadership', she responded tartly. In her view, new leaders had not provided a fresh approach to women's issues; leadership at the local level 'had absolutely not changed its attitudes'. Women were still being placed in the least-skilled, most physically arduous jobs. Ordered to hire women, managers complied by sending them to work as stevedores. When Berdakina questioned whether this was permissible, union officials contemptuously brushed her off. 'You asked about female labour', they said, 'well, now it is being used.' She concluded, 'there is a definite unwillingness to understand and fulfil the directives correctly'.[15]

Zhdanov and Lenau found it difficult to steer the meeting through the 'correct' political channels as more women began to expose the abuse, discrimination and indifference they experienced from male officials at every level. Local party leaders, managers, officials in the

Commissariat of Labour, labour exchanges, the economic organs and the ACCTU were not immune from the delegates' scathing criticisms. The unions had delegated the former *Zhenotdelki* to attend what they clearly viewed as an insignificant 'women's' meeting. Although the ACCTU clearly hoped to use women's anger to ratify the purge of the right and to shake up local officials, they did not expect to be subjected to such fierce public denunciations. As women rose, one after another, to describe the angry and troubled gender relations within the factories and new industrial sites, the meeting provided a rare glimpse into their consciousness and experiences.

Women workers described an industrial world rigidly stratified by skill. Workers in skilled positions commanded higher wages, greater respect, more autonomy and control over the work process. Women, however, were rarely admitted to the apprenticeships that opened access to skilled positions. They worked in 'support' or janitorial services, rather than in production. They did heavy physical labour, unskilled and poorly paid, filling the lowest positions, even in industries such as textiles, where they constituted the majority of workers. Soviet labour analysts in the 1920s and 1930s explained women's concentration at the bottom of the industrial hierarchy by 'objective' or structural reasons: family responsibilities, poor skills and education, and physical weakness. Although conscious of discrimination, they gave it relatively little explanatory weight. They carefully skirted the role of men, particularly male workers, in maintaining a gender hierarchy in the workplace. Favouring 'objective' structural causes over a more 'subjective' cultural approach, they assumed that training women would quickly eliminate inequality.[16] Women workers, however, dwelt at length on the attitudes, behaviour and practices shared by men at every level: from directors to foremen, masters, submasters, brigade leaders, skilled and unskilled workers. While labour experts emphasised the structural inequality between the sexes, women workers focused on the behaviour that produced and reproduced these inequalities.

Women delegates were particularly frustrated by plant managers who openly held that women belonged in janitorial or 'support' work rather than in production or at the bench. Managers argued that training women, who would eventually leave the factory to marry or have babies, was a waste of valuable resources. Such prejudices were so strong that when the Commissariat of Labour trained women *outside* the factory, many managers still refused to place them in skilled positions.[17] Spivak, a delegate from East Siberia, noted that most of the factory women in his region did janitorial work. 'We have met with extraordinarily

conservative attitudes', he reported. The director of one porcelain factory believed he had fulfilled the directives of the party to involve women by employing them as janitors. This director declared, 'enough with the involvement of women, there is no place else to put them'. Spivak responded, 'they think that if they involve women in janitorial work, this means they have involved them in production'. Fully 30 per cent of the workers in the porcelain factory were women, but there were no female lathe operators or moulders, both skilled positions. Spivak explained that the leaders of the economic organs were also opposed to women entering skilled jobs. The Committee for the Improvement of Life and Labour, a small island of female activism, tried to force the ACCTU and the local department of labour to survey the status of women in the factories, but neither complied. Spivak also stressed 'the sluggishness' of the unions and cooperatives. Expressing his own view of local conditions, he noted, 'if this question took the economic organs in the centre by surprise, what do you expect in East Siberia?'[18]

Delegates enumerated the tactics used to discourage women from taking skilled jobs. Lisenkova, a delegate from the Red Sormovo chemical factory, explained that 'no work at all' was done with the 3300 women in her factory. Women were sent on three-month training courses, but then managers explained that no machines were available and sent them back to unskilled jobs. 'This is how we approach female labour', Lisenkova exclaimed angrily, 'they studied a certain skill, and they put them back to work with a broom… What did they study for?'[19] Even when managers permitted women into skilled positions, they often made it impossible for them to work effectively. Nazarova, a delegate from the Donbass, told the story of four women who were finally promoted to lathe operators. 'They wanted very much to be lathe operators', Nazarova explained, 'but the proper conditions were not created for them.' Given the poorest machines and oldest equipment, they were finally forced to quit after six months. The union then used this incident to announce, 'Women cannot operate lathes.'[20]

Managers and local officials were not alone in their opposition to skilling women. Delegates spoke repeatedly about foremen and male workers who refused to permit women in skilled positions, denied them apprenticeships and harassed them mercilessly on the job. Acting together, men created an insurmountable barrier to women's advancement through the factory hierarchy. Gudrova, a woman metal-worker in the Mekhanicheskii Factory, noted that not a single women had been promoted to a leadership position in her factory in the 13 years since the revolution! The only two production workshops composed of

women had been disbanded. Although there were many suitable jobs, not a single woman worked in the production sector. When several women were finally promoted to the machine shop the men harassed them mercilessly: 'here come the hairy machinists'. Gudrova explained the result: 'the women listened to endless such conversations and at the end of the year, they left'.[21] Kravchenko, a delegate from Dneprostroi, the huge new dam and hydroelectric station, noted that many skilled male workers shared management's view that promoting women was a waste of resources. One central mechanical master, a member of the workers' committee, told him, 'you know, it is better not to raise this issue. That trick won't work here. There's a good reason why I won't permit more than two women at the bench. You skill them and then they get married and the work is ruined. What does the government want to spend money on this for?'[22]

Lenau corroborated the arguments made by the women delegates. Men, he argued, were generally promoted more quickly than women because of widespread prejudice against female labour. 'A woman can sit in a trivial job for more than a year', he said, 'while a man stays no more than two to three weeks before they promote him.'[23] Newspaper reports and journals were also filled with stories about discrimination. Prejudice against promoting women was widespread in every industry, including textiles, which employed a majority of women. One woman, reporting on work conditions in the Stalin district, called the relations of men to women workers 'uncomradely'. Women were subjected to 'hooligan attacks and abuse' (*khuliganskie vypady i rugan'*). In the rolling rail shop of the Stalingrad plant, several women were promoted to crane machinists. Male workers, party members included, denounced the promotions as 'a pointless waste of resources'. The men commented, 'if there was a shortage of men, it would be another matter'. Managers generally preferred men over women. The head of the coke shop told the shop bureau that he would not take any responsibility for the women promoted to soakers in his shop. He argued that 80 rubles a month was enough for women: 'a higher salary would spoil them'. Many male workers thought it wrong for a woman to earn more than a man. A miner in the Vetka mine announced at a local party meeting, 'not only is it not necessary to promote women to skilled jobs, but in general, they should not work as long as there are men without work. When there are no more unemployed men, then let them work.' Skilled male workers did not want to teach women. In one mining school, the instructor explained, 'girls do not need to study to be masters. They should only study stockings and lace.'[24] Men offered a

wide variety of justifications not to hire, train or promote women. Yet regardless of their reasons, men at every level actively helped to maintain the hierarchy of skill and gender in the factories, construction sites and mines that kept women at the bottom.

The hostility that women faced at every level was strengthened by the lack of organisations willing to counter discrimination or promote women's interests. Unions, factory committees, local departments of labour and party committees not only failed to challenge male attitudes and actions, they tacitly accepted, overlooked or even supported gender inequality. Delegates to the All-Union Meeting for Work among Women testified repeatedly that unions refused to recognise women as a constituency or address women's issues. 'Our union organisations treat women coldly', noted one delegate. 'They say our women cannot cope with work, but I would say that our unions do not know how to lead our women.'[25] Several delegates linked the decision of the VIII Trade Union Congress in December 1928 to abolish separate women's organisers in the factories with the subsequent collapse of union work among women. One delegate observed, 'in the past few years, a great coldness toward work among women has been felt'.[26] The liquidation of the *Zhenotdel* in 1930 reflected and intensified this mood. Unions, receiving no guidance and no leadership, quickly jettisoned issues such as childcare, education, promotion, training and gender relations in the factories.[27] When women challenged the union officials about their refusal to do work among women, they responded with the same line that the party used to liquidate the *Zhenotdel*: 'We do not carry on separate work among women. We carry on work *in general.'* Pimenova, a metal-worker, announced, 'I think it's time to put an end to this "in general".' She insisted that unions and factory committees take responsibility for work among women.[28] Many delegates repeated the view, 'the unions do poor work among women'.[29] According to Serina, a representative of the Commissariat of Labour and a strong advocate of women's interests, the Commissariat of Communications, the economic organs and unions were all 'sluggish' in promoting women. The unions were especially resistant. Although the Commissariat of Labour tried repeatedly to discuss the recruitment of women, the central committees of the unions refused. 'No matter how many times you call a meeting on female labour', Serina noted, 'the central committees do not show up.'[30]

General disinterest and apathy, however, did not exist only at the local level. As many delegates pointed out, the central leadership offered no plan, no directives, no guidance. Klochkoze, a delegate from the Moscow *oblast'* union council, complained, 'there is no plan of any kind,

beginning with the ACCTU and ending with the factory committee. Up to this time, there has been no plan to use female labour. And if we have no plan, it is clear that there will be sluggishness below.'[31]

In organising the All-Union Meeting for Work among Women, the ACCTU had encouraged women to vent their anger and frustration against men in the party, government and unions. The problems that women outlined were clear, although the solutions were less so. The overwhelming sense of the meeting was that male prejudice against women helped maintain a hierarchy of skill within the factories that systematically deprived women of the opportunity to advance. Women blamed men at every level: fellow workers, foremen, factory committee members, union and labour department officials and party leaders. The delegates, however, were not invited to develop a plan for 'reconstructing the consciousness of the male unionists', as Zhdanov suggested. Although the delegates were encouraged to speak openly and fully, the official list of resolutions, duly approved at the end of the meeting, offered few organisational remedies to the problem of male prejudice.[32] Most importantly, special women's organisers were not reinstated in the factories. Nothing was done to fill the gap left by the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel*. With the exception of designating one of its members to oversee women's work, the ACCTU made no substantive organisational changes. The unions were encouraged to 'reconstruct their work', but offered few concrete guidelines. The resolutions ultimately did not address the myriad of organisational deficiencies that the delegates had so vividly detailed. The problem, as one delegate put it, was that 'everyone recognises that women need to be part of socialist construction, but no one is doing much about it'.[33] It was doubtful that the consciousness, attitudes and practices of men, so powerfully described by the delegates, could be altered without strong new organisational forms that focused on women.

Gender re-segregation and conflict

Throughout 1931, the state attempted to involve women in production by replacing men with women in certain branches and occupations. This far-reaching strategy involved entire groups of men and women, and broadly aimed *to regender the entire work force from above*. In December 1930 and January 1931, the Council of People's Commissars and the Commissariat of Labour issued decrees listing the professions and jobs in which women were primarily or exclusively to replace men. The lists ran to several pages and covered every branch of the

economy. Local unions and other organisations met to discuss implementation of the decree. The ACCTU passed a series of measures at its fifth plenum in February 1931 specifically stressing that all plans for involving women were to follow the regendering strategy: 'Brigades should be set up to replace men by women wherever possible.'[34]

Enthusiastic brigades of women entered the factories to determine which jobs might be reclassified as 'female'. The brigades were given a sweeping task: to study the number, status, wages and working conditions of women in the workplace, and to review every job to determine if it was suitable for female labour. Employing a radical strategy to regender positions traditionally reserved for men, the brigades were backed by the highest level of the party, state and press. The ACCTU explained that women were to replace men where 'male labour was inefficient due to the easiness of the work'. Men were to be transferred in groups from lighter to heavier labour.[35] *Trud* publicised the regendering strategy. Marsheva, a prominent expert on female labour, wrote that the broad use of women's labour depended on a reconfiguration of the workforce: 'We must transfer all workers in order to free positions for women and to use men for those jobs in which female labour is impossible or less efficient.' Marsheva urged every factory and enterprise to organise their own brigades to review each job for the possibility of replacing men by women. The tempo of involving women in production, she exhorted, 'must literally increase tenfold'.[36] A series of studies led to the conclusion that 'mechanisation of entire shops and sectors' would permit 40 to 80 per cent of positions to be filled by women with only one to three months of training.[37] Throughout the spring and summer of 1931, brigades carried out lengthy studies in the chemical factories Red Bogatyr, Promtekhnika, Shinnyi and Regeneratnyi to determine where women could replace men. By summer, they had targeted 36 jobs for the exclusive employment of women.[38] Rapid industrialisation had created thousands of new, semi-skilled positions that did not require lengthy apprenticeships. Women could be rapidly trained and deployed in these positions without challenging the gender prejudices of skilled craftsmen or upsetting men in the older shops. Factory directors were strongly urged to develop and implement plans for women based on these studies.

Managers facing shortages of labour were encouraged to replace men with women using a '*funktsional'naya sistem*' (functional system) through which entire lists of jobs would be transformed from 'male' to 'female'. Implemented successfully in the textile and construction industries, it was also applied throughout 1931 in machine building and metal.[39] Thus, managers reserved jobs, shops and even sectors

exclusively or primarily for women. In the Moscow electrical factory, for example, managers met their shortage of labour by filling positions in certain shops with up to 90 per cent women. In the new Ukrainian machine tractor factory, Bolshevik, only 700 out of 5500 workers were women, but the bolt shop and auxiliary lathe operators were exclusively female.[40] In Magnitogorsk, workers, foremen and managers agreed that positions of groom and coachman would be filled only by women.[41] In some factories, special brigades of women replaced men en masse, as men were transferred to heavier work.[42] By the summer, the process of mobilising women into production had become almost synonymous with regendering the labour force. The strategy of deployment was based on re-segregation of the workforce by the collective replacement, shop by shop, job by job, of men by women. When a union representative from Magnitogorsk complained that nothing was being done to involve women, she noted, 'no one is occupied with replacing male by female labour'.[43]

Managers, however, were largely impervious to the call to hire and promote women unless they were directly confronted by brigades in their own factories. Reports from the factories throughout 1931 indicated that women continued to experience severe discrimination. Many managers were unwilling to accept women, skilled or unskilled, in any position. The administrator of the Podol'skii sewing factory, for example, flatly declared, 'We don't need *babas*. Another proclaimed, '*Babas*? I don't train them and I don't want to train them.'[44] A manager of the mines announced, 'A *baba* can do nothing in mining.' A director of a glass factory explained that he considered 'the arrival of women in a factory as the highest measure of punishment'. Most commonly, managers simply ignored the directives to hire women.[45] In the words of one highly placed union official, several managers 'responded to any attempt to employ women in production with bayonets'.[46]

Foremen, masters and male workers demonstrated even greater resistance to the idea of skilling women. Despite the high quotas for training women adopted by the ACCTU, men simply refused to allow women into skilled positions. Women *rabkory* (worker-journalists) sent horrific stories of discrimination to the labour press. In the instrument shop of Red Putilovets, one of Russia's oldest, largest and most revolutionary metal factories, the woman worker Grivneva spent the better part of a year 'sharpening pencils'. When she requested a transfer to more complex work, the master yelled, 'you women can never be good lathe operators!' When another woman asked to be placed in more skilled work after eight months of removing drill

cones, the master told her, 'nothing can be done here by *babas*, work is a serious business'. Even girls trained outside the factories by the Central Institute of Labour were placed in unskilled positions. When they demanded to be tested and promoted, the foreman only acceded after considerable pressure from the Institute. Testing them on poorly running machines, he then refused to promote them, claiming, 'girls are completely worthless!'[47]

In the spring of 1931, a small group of representatives toured the country, visiting several mines, factories in the North Caucasus and Leningrad, and the rising new iron and steel complex in Magnitogorsk. Their mood upon return was pessimistic. Simonova, delivering the report on Magnitogorsk, spoke with disgust about attitudes toward women on the site. 'In Magnitogorsk', she noted angrily, 'relations toward women workers are absolutely revolting.' Women were placed in the lowest-paid and most physically difficult jobs. 'The least of it is that they don't promote women.' She explained, 'When a woman comes to work they treat her horribly. They give her a 36 pound stone to lift. This is what they call "involving female labour".' The head of the department of cadres, responsible for personnel throughout Magnitogorsk, had publicly announced: 'We are not interested in women, we do not need them, and we do not take them into account.' Although fully half of the unskilled workers at Magnitogorsk were women, nothing was being done to train them. There were no women among metal-workers and only a tiny percentage among construction engineers. The unions were doing absolutely nothing. She added bitterly, 'they have the opinion that "we need workers, not women"'.[48]

Shcherbatyuka described a better situation in an older mechanical factory in a town in the north Caucasus. Almost one third of its workers were women; most were new to the factory. Initially, the shop foremen and masters threatened to leave if women entered the shops. The director, however, took a hard line. He told one master, 'either the woman goes to the work bench or you will not be permitted in the shop'. The woman in question proved herself an excellent worker. In this case, a strong approach by the director forced the masters and foremen to accept skilled women.[49] This situation, however, appeared to be the exception rather than the rule. In the Northern shipyards most women worked as janitors or in back-breaking, unskilled jobs, where they regularly lifted 145 pound loads. Work on machines, skilled and physically less taxing, was done by men, who simply refused to accept women in skilled positions. One master placed five women who had already completed their

apprenticeships back at the apprentice level as he placed several men on drill presses. In another shop, one brigade leader declared, 'what use can come from a *baba*? She should be home cooking cabbage soup, not working in a factory.' He pointedly ignored the one woman placed in his brigade for three months, refusing to let her see drafts and isolating her from his men. When women in the shipyard began to train and dress in pants, they met with widespread derision from male workers. The master refused to train them, arguing that the young would marry and the old were unable to learn.[50]

Unpublished reports from the factories to the ACCTU noted similar patterns of resistance. A report from Serp i Molot, the huge steel plant in Moscow, complained that women were not trained to enter skilled positions and that skilled women were not appropriately placed. When the unskilled woman worker Andreeva received training as a cable machinist, the head of the shop informed her, 'I don't need cable machinists. Why did you study this? Who asked you?' The report added that this was not an isolated incident, 'such examples of repulsive behaviour toward women we can enumerate endlessly'.[51] Many managers openly disavowed the campaign to involve women in production and simply refused to hire them. The director of a ship remodelling factory in Arkhangelsk declared, 'We don't need women. I will countermand these absurd directives. Women cannot prove themselves here, and they work worse than men.' The head of the bottling shop in the Konstantinovsky glass factory announced that he considered himself 'above all measures of punishment'. The manager of the Bereznyakovsky chemical combine curtly declared, 'there will be no fussing with women here'. Often the factory committees supported their directors. In a striking display of male solidarity cutting across class lines, workers in the Lavshchutskii factory in Belorussia, announced, with the full support of their director, that 'the only work for women here is to wash windows and clean out the wagons'. The master of their mechanical shop agreed: 'With *babas*', he explained, 'you have a lot of trouble. It is not worth it to put them at the bench.'[52]

The strategy of replacing men by women created competition, animosity and conflict between workers, especially when women moved in to take men's jobs and men were sent to heavier work. When women were sent into the Shakhtinskii mines, for example, men were forced to vacate a range of jobs for the backbreaking work of extracting coal at the mine face. In the understated words of Tserlina, a former *Zhenotdelka* who visited the mines, 'men do not greet this

move with benevolence'. She noted that neither the union nor the party had bothered to explain to the workers why women were going underground. 'I am not afraid to say it loudly', Tserlina commented with regret, 'I think it's very bad that we no longer have the *Zhenotdel*.'[53] The railroad workers' union in the Moscow region decided to replace 90 per cent of the conductors with women. In Leningrad, the union went even further, planning to replace all conductors as well as streetcar drivers with women. The plans provoked a great deal of anger among male workers, who seized upon the differences between the two cities to protest the decisions. A *Trud* editorial queried, 'who is wrong here, who is right? Who is responsible? Who is in charge?'[54] Job allocation, closely but not exclusively associated with issues of skill, became a fiercely contentious issue between men and women workers.

The issue of heavy physical labour also provoked constant squabbles. Both sexes believed that they performed the dirtiest, heaviest, most unpleasant work. The strategy for regendering the labour force exacerbated perceptions on both sides. Labour legislation set weight limits on how much women could lift or haul; the party redesignated jobs which did not require heavy lifting as 'female'. Men naturally resented being moved to heavier work to make way for women. Women, on the other hand, surveying the sharply gendered hierarchy of skill that existed at every work site, concluded that men held the more skilled, lighter jobs, while women were stuck with the heaviest, dirtiest and least desirable. In Magnitogorsk, for example, 20 housewives were mobilised for unskilled work and sent to the electrical station where they hauled bricks, boards and long, heavy cross ties. One woman, staggering beneath a cumbersome load of cross ties, fell and split her head open. The women were furious. They accused management of providing men with lighter, easier work, and walked off the job.[55] Summing up the campaign to involve women in production, the ACCTU concluded, 'bad relations between men and women arose when women replaced men, and men were given heavier work'.[56]

Not all conflict between men and women in the workplace, however, had such a clear cause. In many cases, men held longstanding prejudices about female labour that defied a simple material explanation. In a Shakhtinskii mine, a man and woman were allegedly discovered having sex in the tunnels, and the mines buzzed with rumours for weeks.[57] The rumours, if nothing else, were evidence of men's extreme discomfort at working closely with women

underground. Men had difficulty conceiving of women as workmates rather than sexual partners and the atmosphere at work was often tense. Men frequently expressed their resentment in a sexualised form, regarding women's very presence in the factory or mine not merely as a challenge to their privileges as male workers, but as a sexual transgression. They consciously subjected women to sexual advancements and obscenities that were designed to force them off the job. In Magnitogorsk, a woman was placed on the night shift, among 500 men, hauling bricks from one spot to another. A report noted, 'first one, then others began to pester her'. She responded with growing anger, the conflict quickly escalated and finally she spat in their faces. The men wanted 'to beat her to death'. One worker said that the woman herself was responsible for the situation. She managed to get through the shift, but in the morning told the foreman, 'transfer me to day work, I cannot work nights'. 'You do not want to work', he retorted, and fired her.[58]

Although women workers did not use the modern term 'sexual harassment', they described situations of 'abuse' (*rugan'*) that clearly fell within its meaning. When a brigade of Komsomol girls arrived to work at Magnitogorsk, the male attendant in the baths refused to leave while they undressed, made obscene comments and reduced them to tears.[59] In Red Putilovets, a mechanic (a party member) and his friend, an instrument calibrator, physically molested every woman who entered their shop and subjected them to a stream of obscenities. When one women protested against such treatment, the instrument calibrator hooted sarcastically, 'a baroness has showed up in the factory! There is no place for her here.' The women retaliated by writing up the incident on the factory wall newspaper, provoking the male workers in turn to attack them as 'intriguers and scandalmongers tied to the *rabkor* (worker-journalists)'. The men yelled, 'we will drive you out of the factory!'[60] Foremen often met women's requests with obscene propositions and insinuations, and when women complained, they were accused of provoking the offensive behaviour. One member of the Workers' Control Commission, responsible for investigating such incidents, coolly observed, 'they themselves are guilty. Where there are women, this always happens.' Using the unassailable logic that where there were no women, there was no sexual harassment, he concluded, 'look, when they were not in the workshop, we never had these squabbles'. If women's presence provoked men to behave uncouthly, women were naturally at fault. Not surprisingly, he refused to act on the complaints.[61]

Male resentment, female anger

Why did men display such virulent opposition to female labour? Although industry was desperately short of labour in the early 1930s, male workers, skilled masters, foremen and directors still resented training, hiring and promoting women. Male prejudice ran deep, predating the Soviet regime and its policies. Views of skill and gender were deeply embedded in the culture of skilled workers. Benefiting directly from the gender hierarchy in the factories, men were anxious to preserve and maintain their exclusive right to skilled work. Male workers understood skill as a 'male' attribute, the workshop and the machine as solely 'male'. The introduction of women upset their view of a 'natural' order. Women were subject to innuendo, obscene comments, derision and physical molestation, *sexual* behaviour consciously designed to maintain the gender hierarchy in the factory, to prevent women from advancing and to bar them from skilled work. Managers frequently shared and even encouraged their workers' cultural prejudices for their own economic motives. Many were reluctant to hire and train women because they feared the loss of their investment if a woman quit to marry or have children. Generous Soviet maternity benefits also discouraged managers from hiring women. The party strategy of employing blocks of women through the creation of exclusively or primarily 'female' lines was guaranteed to provoke animosity between men and women. Male workers resented women who displaced them, especially if they were moved to heavier work. The redefinition of certain jobs as 'female' did little to address male prejudice which was itself rooted in a system of gender segregation.

In the context of a widely popularised state ideology stressing class, women workers demonstrated a remarkable consciousness of gender. Although the party urged women to think of themselves only as 'workers', men did not allow them this luxury. Every obscene proposition, every slight, every inequality continually reminded them that they were women as well. Although women workers lacked a specific language or set of terms to critique male privilege and prerogatives (they did not speak of 'male chauvinism' or 'sexual harassment') they had no trouble describing prejudice or expressing their anger at discrimination, verbal abuse and inequality. Even when women, for lack of a better word, termed men's sexual advances 'wooing' (*ukhazhivanie*) it was clear that they took these propositions as insults, not marriage proposals.[62] Unlike men, they never accepted the gender hierarchy of the factory as 'natural'. Unlike the party, they were not afraid to blame

their fellow workers as fully as local officials and managers. They repeatedly expressed their anger at the party for liquidating the *Zhenotdel*, thereby eliminating the one organisation capable of addressing their concerns and advancing their interests.

Eradicating male prejudice was difficult because it was embedded at every level of the factory hierarchy. The directors, shop bosses, foremen, masters and skilled male workers all shared similar views of women. Prejudice within the factory was reinforced at every level and challenged at none; there was no support within the enterprise for change. Directors did not rebuke foremen who refused to accept women in their shops; foremen did not force masters to train them; masters did not compel skilled workers to cooperate with them. Everyone turned a blind eye to harassment and discrimination. If women could not cope with the ugly treatment meted out by men, then 'women themselves were guilty'. Even after the party changed its approach to women workers, local officials remained sympathetic to the views of skilled male workers, their main constituency throughout the 1920s.

Yet male hostility towards women cannot be understood separately from the massive transformation of Soviet industry in the early 1930s. The widescale introduction of female labour in the Soviet Union, even in the context of an expanding labour market, was accompanied by the same transformations that marked its use under capitalism: falling wages, deskilling, loss of collective bargaining power and control of the work process. Even the policies promulgated from above bore an uncanny resemblance to those promoted by other drives for accumulation. The state's strategy of employing blocks of women through the creation of exclusively or primarily 'female' lines of work echoed the replacement of men by women in whole sectors of capitalist industry. The replacement of men by women provoked animosity under capitalism and socialism alike. In the Soviet case, however, party leaders targeted women as a key reserve of labour and made a strong initial attempt to break the barriers of prejudice. This attempt, however, was short lived. At the end of 1931, the party proclaimed its drive to recruit 1.6 million women a success, and its interest in eradicating prejudice and discrimination faded. Fearing that separate women's organisations such as the *Zhenotdel* would distract women from production, it refused to permit the development of any organisation capable of addressing women's special interests and concerns. Within a short time, all public discussion of sex segregation, gender relations and structural inequalities in the workplace disappeared.

Notes

* *Baba* means woman, and could also carry a derogatory connotation; 'at the bench' refers to skilled machine work.

1 For further discussion of women workers in the 1930s, see W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender, Politics and Planning in Soviet Industrialization* (Cambridge, 2002), and M. Ilic, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: from 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London, 1999).

2 *Trud v SSSR: statisticheskii spravochnik* (Moscow, 1936) pp. 10–11, 25.

3 *Trud*, 6 November 1930.

4 R. Glickman, *Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880–1914* (London, 1984) pp. 156–218. D. Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford, 1995) pp. 85–112.

5 On shop floor relations between women and men in the printing industry, see D. Koenker, 'Men against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Soviet Workplace', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 5, 1995, pp. 1438–64.

6 W. Goldman, 'Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR', *Slavic Review*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, pp. 46–77. Elizabeth Wood offers a detailed description of these organisational struggles in 'Class and Gender at Loggerheads in the Early Soviet State: Who Should Organize the Female Proletariat and How?', in L. Frader and S. Rose (eds), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 1996) pp. 294–310, and *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1997) pp. 123–93.

7 *Trud*, 3 February 1931.

8 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, l. 96.

9 *Trud*, 11 December 1930.

10 *Trud*, 3 February 1931.

11 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 363, l. 166.

12 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, l. 80.

13 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 358, l. 15.

14 Women never used the contemporary term 'male chauvinism', although it describes the attitudes of union officials, male workers, foremen, bosses and local party leaders perfectly.

15 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 357, ll. 49–52.

16 GARF, f. 5515, o. 13, d. 15b:, l. 60; G. Serebrennikov, 'Zhenskii trud v SSSR za 15 let', *Voprosy truda,* nos. 11–12, 1932, p. 61.

17 Managers were reluctant to hire women because of generous maternity leave provisions. See Ilic, op. cit., pp. 55–77.

18 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 357, ll. 38–42.

19 Ibid., ll. 52–3.

20 Ibid., l. 99.

21 Ibid., l. 26.

22 Ibid., l. 35.

23 Ibid., l. 285.

24 Cherevadskaya, 'Trud i byt rabotnits', *Kommunistka*, no. 6, 1928, pp. 60–63.

25 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 357, l. 31.

26 Ibid., l. 63.

27 Ibid., l. 80.
28 Ibid., ll. 103–4. See also Lenau's speech, l. 230.
29 Ibid., l. 36.
30 Ibid., ll. 23–4.
31 Ibid., l. 87.
32 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 359, l. 54, 55–63.
33 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 357, l. 28.
34 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 363, l. 67.
35 Ibid.; and GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, l. 159.
36 *Trud*, 3 March 1931.
37 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, l. 32.
38 Ibid., l. 70.
39 *Trud*, 10 July 1931.
40 Ibid.; and GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, l. 86.
41 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 361, ll. 15–15ob.
42 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, l. 85.
43 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 361, l. 15.
44 Ibid.
45 *Trud,* 10 July 1931.
46 *Trud*, 7 July 1931.
47 *Trud*, 24 March 1931.
48 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 361, ll. 21, 22.
49 Ibid., ll. 25–25ob.
50 Ibid., ll. 34–5.
51 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 362, ll. 3–6.
52 Ibid., ll. 84–5.
53 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 361, l. 1.
54 *Trud*, 10 July 1931.
55 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 361, l. 15ob.
56 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 363, l. 12.
57 GARF, f. 5451, o. 15, d. 361, l. 9.
58 Ibid., l. 15ob.
59 Ibid., l. 21.
60 *Trud*, 24 March 1931.
61 Ibid.
62 See ibid. for example of women's use of this word.

5

'A Mother's Cares': Women Workers and Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia, 1934–41

Sarah Davies

One of the more intriguing things to emerge from the Soviet archives since 1991 is evidence of independent popular opinion in the Soviet Union even at the height of the 'Great Terror' of the 1930s. This evidence, in the form of letters, diaries and confidential Communist Party and NKVD reports on the 'popular mood', establishes that propaganda, censorship and the threat of prosecution for the crime of 'anti-Soviet agitation' could not prevent ordinary people from continuing to express opinions critical of the policies of the Stalin regime. This chapter examines what these sources on popular opinion reveal about the particular concerns and modes of expression of Soviet women workers in the period from the mid-1930s until the war. Did these differ significantly from the concerns of men? Did women employ a gender-specific language to express their concerns? What was the relationship between gender and class in this period?

The study draws heavily on party and NKVD *svodki* (summaries) on the popular mood. These reports, compiled for top party leaders on the basis of information supplied by informants, are not a neutral window on to the thoughts of women workers. Informants were instructed to pay particular attention to certain types of opinion, their reports were coloured by their own preoccupations and priorities, and no doubt some occasionally included fabricated information. Nevertheless, there is enough consistency in the reported opinions to suggest that they are representative of actual trends in popular opinion. Indeed, the comments they report are often replicated in other sources used in this study, such as letters. The *svodki* include both positive and negative opinion. I have chosen to focus on critical and unorthodox views since these have received less attention in the literature. However, it is

clearly not the case that all women workers were dissatisfied with the policies of the Stalin regime.[1]

The analysis will concentrate primarily on the views expressed by women workers in Leningrad. The city had always boasted a high proportion of women workers, and their numbers increased with the onset of Stalin's industrialisation drive. On 1 January 1935 women constituted 44.3 per cent of all workers in all branches of labour, and 44.7 per cent in industry alone (25.7 per cent of the metal and electrical industries, 55 per cent of the chemical industry, 78.5 per cent of the textile industry, 83.8 per cent of the sewing industry and 66.6 per cent of the food industry). Many of these women had entered the labour force during the first five-year plan. For example, the overall proportion of women in the metal and electrical industries expanded from 11.1 per cent in 1930 to 26.6 per cent in 1934. Throughout the decade the numbers of working women continued to rise so that by 1937 49.6 per cent of Leningrad blue-collar workers, 21.4 per cent of engineering-technical workers and 66.1 per cent of white-collar employees were women. By 1940, after the introduction of military conscription for men, women took on men's jobs, particularly in the factories, where they constituted almost 60 per cent of the labour force.[2]

What impact did the expansion in the numbers of working women have upon ideas about gender? As a result of both popular attitudes and the state's own propaganda and policies, the notion of distinct roles for men and women remained strongly in force in the Soviet Union in the 1930s despite the fact that, or perhaps *because*, so many women were now going out to work. Doubtless partly in reaction to the quite sharp disruption to traditional roles, both men and women responded by trying to preserve and indeed reinforce these roles. In most cases, domestic duties were still considered the preserve of women, while to men fell the responsibility of chief breadwinner. Women's wages were often regarded as merely a supplement to the family income. The implication of this was that if women did not need to work, they would not want to.

The Soviet regime itself fostered this understanding, sending out rather contradictory messages: on the one hand continuing theoretically to espouse sexual equality in the workplace and public life, while on the other advocating (from the mid 1930s) a strongly pro-family and pronatalist agenda which contrasted quite markedly with the more radical Soviet visions of the 1920s. Parenthood, and especially motherhood, was extolled. Women were encouraged to be both workers and mothers:

'Every girl must be treasured not only as a textile worker, a bold parachute jumper or an engineer – but as a future mother. The mother of one child must be treasured as the future mother of eight.'[3] The status of non-working 'wives' was also elevated through the *obshchestvennitsa* movement, which promoted the very bourgeois-seeming idea of engineers' and managers' wives doing useful charity work, as well as supporting their husbands and model families.[4]

The prevalence of such ideas at all levels of society meant that in what were traditionally defined as 'male' spheres of work and politics women remained disadvantaged. In the workplace they experienced harassment and discrimination from men, especially in male-dominated industries. Male co-workers felt threatened by women, male managers did little to promote them or encourage them to raise their qualifications.[5] Literacy levels were much lower among women workers. According to one study, in 1935 more than half of all female workers at Leningrad textile factories were only semi-literate. Nor were women as involved in technical education. Of 20 615 women at the Krasnyi Treugol'nik factory, only 598 were taking technical courses. Even those women who had completed the necessary training often earned less than men with equivalent qualifications and experience.[6]

Not surprisingly, few attained high positions: of 328 factory directors in Leningrad in 1935, only 20 were women, 17 of whom worked at the traditionally female textile and sewing factories. In the food industry, where women formed the majority of workers, only one of the 50 directors was female. The situation was similar outside industry: 50–60 per cent of doctors were female, but there were only four women head doctors at hospitals, compared with 55 men.[7] The party appears to have been concerned about this state of affairs, and in the second half of the 1930s it launched prominent, but in many respects symbolic, campaigns to try to promote more women in the workplace.

Politically, women made few advances either. With the abolition of the women's departments, systematic attempts to encourage women into politics evaporated. Few women had the time, energy or inclination to get involved in political study or attend meetings. As one put it at the end of 1939, women at their factory were too busy to attend local soviet election meetings: 'We've no time for studying. There's nothing to eat. The girls queued from six o'clock to nine o'clock last night to get sausage. Our heads are full of how to eat and get hold of meat.'[8] In 1935, of 1400 non-party women workers in the first galoshes shop at the Krasnyi Treugol'nik factory, a mere 51 were engaged in

political study. Only a minority of party members were female and the few female party activists were concentrated in Leningrad's textile factories.[9]

Party investigations attributed women's lack of political progress to structural problems, such as the absence of opportunity for political and general education and difficulties with childcare. Clearly the issue was also related to deeply-engrained cultural stereotypes about gender and politics. Party and NKVD reports on the popular mood did not attach much significance to attitudes on this question, but the few comments which were recorded are indicative of the tenacity of traditional patriarchal notions. For example, the 1936 Constitution was explicit about guaranteeing equal rights to women, which provoked one male worker to comment that 'Soviet power is bad to confirm the Constitution and thereby give women lots of rights. Now you can't do anything at home, the wife drives you out of the flat.' Misogynist feelings also emerged during the 1937 elections when a worker from the Kirov works said that he would not vote for women, since they were 'useless', while another protested against women being allowed to participate in elections: 'In the old days women were not allowed anywhere and that was right because women are beneath men.' A few women also used stereotypical language in relation to female electoral candidates. One, significantly a peasant, agitated against a woman standing in local soviet elections, arguing that she had been chosen as a candidate because 'she is a girl. Previously they chose women so they could go out with them, and now it's the same, not to decide questions, but to go out with them.'[10]

How did all these circumstances affect women's input into popular opinion? It should be remembered that for both men and women opportunities for political discussion were circumscribed in this period. It was far less risky for men and women to discuss relatively 'safe' topics connected with domestic and/or local issues, than to broach more controversial questions about the nature of the political system, ideology, elections, political leaders, foreign policy and so forth. However, party and especially NKVD opinion reports give the impression that on the occasions when such broader political issues were raised, it was usually by men. It is possible that informants were primed to pick up on and take more seriously the views of men. Some party activists certainly believed that women did not hold any serious opinions. At one party meeting it was observed that 'many women are *meshchanskie* (bourgeois, philistine); they love their comfort, are not

interested in public life, don't worry about production'.[11] This stereotype may have influenced the reporting of women's opinions.

However, despite its condescending tone, the observation about women's indifference to 'public life' contained some truth in that women's attention was in fact focused on issues pertaining directly to the home and family. This was hardly the result of a love of 'comfort', however. Women were simply obliged to deal with domestic matters because of the enduring assumption that the wife should take on the bulk of the responsibility for shopping, childcare and housework, despite the fact that she was now often also involved in full-time paid employment. This double burden inevitably meant she had less leisure for reading, political education and discussion than her more carefree husband.[12]

While some men might debate what was meant by socialism or the implications of party congresses, women were more likely to talk about family policy, their children's needs, queues or fluctuating prices,[13] and to protest against policies which threatened the economic well-being of the family. This is, of course, a generalisation. It is frequently difficult to differentiate the opinions of men and women workers. A poor working man and a poor working woman shared very similar concerns. Some women discussed theoretical political questions avidly, many men also talked about prices and the cost of living. However, certain issues do stand out as 'women's issues', and it is these which will be considered in the following discussion. Firstly, the chapter will examine women's concerns about providing for and nurturing their families and how this shaped their perceptions of economic policies. Then it considers reactions to the conservative shift in family policy in the mid-1930s.

Family and food

> The worker-mother has her view of the social regime, and her 'consumer's' criterion, as the functionary … scornfully expresses it, is in the last analysis decisive. (Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 177)

Segodnya den' yasnyi	Today is a clear day
Veselye deti	Merry children
Igraiyut i plashut	Play and dance
Ne znayut zabot	Know no cares

A doma mamasha	But at home mummy
Khlopochet ne znaet	Toils and knows not
Chego na obed	What to cook them
Im svarit'	For dinner
Odet' i obut'	How to clothe and shoe
Svoikh detok rodimykh	Her own children
Ne znaet mamasha	Mummy doesn't know
Gde obuvi vzyat'	Where to get shoes
Im nado pal'tushki	They need coats
Im nado sapozhki	They need boots
Zabotitsia	Worries
Bednaia mat'	Poor mother. [14]

This poem, 'A Mother's Cares', written by schoolchildren in 1935 in their wall newspaper, encapsulates many of the concerns of women in this period. Most women were perceived by themselves and others as providers for and protectors of their families. The identity of 'worker' was still very important to women workers, but this class identity acquired a distinct colouring when it overlapped with the identity of the wife and mother. When women did express critical views on matters of public concern, these were frequently voiced in terms of the needs of children.

At the end of 1934 when people were asked to make suggestions in connection with forthcoming soviet elections, both men and women brought up issues such as improving transport, food supplies and so forth. However, women in particular constantly raised the question of children's welfare. A characteristic suggestion was: 'We must struggle decisively with [the problem of] children who stand and beg at bread shops. We must improve children's food. Children's shoes are too expensive. We must, along with our achievements, eliminate our weaknesses.'[15]

Likewise, at a meeting on 9 December 1934 of a department of the Khalturin textile factory, where women formed the majority of employees, a very lively discussion took place among women workers, who also demanded better food and clothing for their children. Smirnova stated that it was impossible to look after children on their wages: 'a child goes to school hungry and doesn't eat there either. Children do without boots, which are impossible to buy.' The women also requested better accommodation for themselves and their families. Korotkova said 'I have seven people in my family, we live in a small

room, we can't get accommodation.' As their requests were enunciated in fairly critical terms, another worker, Gudkova, retorted:

> It's good that the workers are making suggestions. We ought to speak about our achievements, in particular, about what we have achieved at our factory, for example: the surgery has grown into a strong medical department, and our canteen has also expanded and improved. Wages have gone up recently, supplies for workers have improved, life has become easier.

Other women did not agree with this attempt to gloss over problems and argued that, on the contrary, all was not well. Savel'eva maintained strongly:

> We are in a crisis, and we know it, and it's fine for Gudkova to talk, she has an easy life, but I have a sick child, he's in hospital, they give him porridge without butter, and pay no attention to my comments. There are many injustices, for example, the hospital is supposed to give the children butter, but they don't get it.[16]

The overriding priority throughout this discussion was the welfare of children. This theme coloured interpretations of a whole variety of issues. During the Spanish Civil War, whereas some men discussed the issue of Soviet support for the communists in Spain in ideological terms, women raised the question of children. At the Krasnaya Znamya factory, Seregina protested to other female workers about the policy of sending food to Spain: 'Your children don't see chocolate and butter, but we're sending it to Spanish workers.'[17]

The responsibilities of motherhood made women particularly sensitive to issues which involved feeding and providing for the family. Women's involvement throughout history in action to defend the household economy has been well-documented.[18] Women have long taken advantage of the stereotype of their sex as essentially passive and prone to irrational behaviour, and therefore less vulnerable to repression. In Russia, Barbara Engel has shown how women played a prominent role in peasant resistance in the pre-revolutionary period. When the livelihood of the family and community was at stake, they were at the forefront of often violent confrontation with the authorities. During the disturbances of 1905–7, they also took an active part in seizures of food and property.[19] Famously, the February revolution of 1917 began with women coming out onto the streets to demand bread.

Peasant women were at the forefront of protest against the threat to the traditional family and village economy represented by collectivisation.[20] In the period of particularly severe food shortages in the early 1930s, large strikes over food-related issues occurred in factories dominated by women workers, and women also were involved in violent incidents in queues in this period.[21]

In the mid to late 1930s living standards were low in absolute and relative terms. Wages did not keep pace with price rises, and food, clothes and housing were all in short supply. There were also periodic economic crises, such as the bread shortages of 1936–37. As the scope for political action narrowed, women were less inclined to resort to strikes and violence when these circumstances seemed to jeopardise family well-being. However, they did express themselves in ways that were significant given the context of the Stalinist terror – speaking out and protesting about policies such as the end of bread rationing, price rises, loan campaigns, queues and shortages.

Women had ample opportunities to exchange views and formulate an opinion on these issues in a public way. As well as meeting on the shop floor, they were regularly drawn together when engaged in shopping, particularly in the ubiquitous queues. The queue served as a breeding ground for all sorts of rumours and complaints. It was a relatively anonymous forum, occupied by large numbers of people (usually women), who were often angry and impatient. Indeed, the queue was one of the few arenas in this period where violent disturbances did sometimes occur. For example, during the severe bread shortages of early 1937, NKVD reports and ordinary people's letters relate stories of people being crushed and injured in queues, of doors and windows in bread shops being smashed, and of an upsurge in murders as people were killed for bread. A letter of March 1937 described the dire situation in Belozersk, a town in Leningrad *oblast'*: 'We have terrible bread queues, people queue from nine in the evening and there's a terrible crush. Quite a lot of people were crushed and taken to hospital. One girl was crushed to death, while as for the pregnant women – it goes without saying.'[22] This type of atmosphere was clearly conducive to the spread of opinion critical of state policy.

Rationing, prices and state loans

How did women respond to state economic policies? The policy of rationing bread from the late 1920s until the end of 1934 was an issue of everyday concern for most women. For all its faults, the ration

system did ensure that industrial workers and their families were provided with bread relatively cheaply. Workers with large families were particular beneficiaries of the policy, as rations were allocated according to the number of dependants. At the end of 1934, a decision was taken to end bread rationing from 1 January 1935 and to raise basic bread prices with some (usually insufficient) financial compensation for workers.

The newspapers portrayed the measure as a sign of the country's economic achievements. The public's reaction was mixed. Certainly there were people who welcomed the idea of free trade. Yet there were also many others who were concerned about the initiative, knowing that it was bound to affect the poorer workers and those with large families most severely. Party informants reported that women were particularly anxious, especially those with large families.[23] At the Voroshilov works it was noted that while the men wholeheartedly accepted the policy, among women the mood was 'passive'. Similar responses were encountered at other factories staffed mainly by females. Women often expressed their opposition to the measure in terms of their children's welfare. For example, at a soviet electoral meeting in December 1934 one housewife spoke up: 'Our children don't get any fats, they are hungry and weak, get tuberculosis. My husband earns 150 rubles and we have two children. After the end of rations, poor workers and their children will get neither butter nor bread.' Other women greeted this speech with applause, prevented a woman from rebuking her, and sent up notes to the chair asking why their children were so badly provided for.[24]

Subsequent policies on rationing also elicited concern from women. For example, in September 1935 the rationing of meat and other food was abolished and prices rose. Once again, reports highlighted the dissatisfaction of female workers and housewives in particular. On this occasion, the main concern was that only the highest quality, expensive meat was on sale in Leningrad.[25] Cafeteria prices also went up and it appears that women responded to this quite rationally by boycotting cafeterias and devising their own coping strategies. There was much discussion among women about the advantages of bringing food from home instead: 'Bread and butter have become cheaper, one can do without the cafeterias, bring bread and butter, drink tea, and that'll be fine.'[26]

Throughout this period women were always at the forefront of protest about price rises and calls to reintroduce rations. The logic of the market made little sense to women faced with hungry mouths to feed.

Periodic campaigns to raise revenue through the use of state loans also encountered considerable resistance from women. Although these loans were termed 'voluntary', in practice people were expected to contribute a minimum of one month's salary. Great propaganda campaigns were conducted on the theme of personal sacrifice for the good of the state. Although both men and women were often reluctant to sacrifice what represented quite a significant sum, women seem to have been especially unwilling, and they could demonstrate considerable solidarity during the campaigns. For example, during the 1936 campaign all the women workers on the third floor of a shop at the Veretano textile factory collectively decided to refuse to subscribe more than 50 rubles each.[27]

Women's reluctance was partly attributable to the fact that they tended to be paid less than men, but it was also because they were inclined to place the immediate needs of their families, and in some cases, themselves, above the more abstract needs of the state. During the 1935 loan campaign, party officials noted that many of those who refused to subscribe to the loan were low-paid women workers at textile and sewing factories, especially those whose material circumstances were difficult because they had several children or because their husbands had left them. For example, at the Khalturin factory, a woman earning 128 rubles refused to subscribe. Her husband had died in the civil war and she had a 14-year-old son.[28]

Some women workers without children appear to have resisted the campaign for more selfish reasons. Clearly the interests of childless women were rather different from those of mothers. During the 1935 loan campaign, a few younger girls refused to subscribe, such as a 20-year-old Komsomol member who said 'I'd rather buy another dress, I won't subscribe to the loan.' Two other Komsomol girls refused because they wanted to dress better.[29] During the 1936 campaign Klosova, a worker at the Bol'shevichka factory earning 350 rubles, with a husband and no children, only subscribed 10 rubles, saying that she would not give more because of her 'desire to dress herself'. Another worker refused on the grounds that she would rather plaster her walls.[30] Such statements presumably merely reinforced party stereotypes about women's, especially young women's, 'philistine' nature, their preference for 'comfort' over 'public life'.

Queues, shortages and speculation

As well as being concerned about the cost of living, women were also particularly worried about the queues and shortages which became

increasingly persistent towards the end of the 1930s as the combined effects of the terror and the onset of war made themselves felt. Some women voiced their complaints to leading party figures in letters in which they shielded themselves behind the official rhetoric on the family and motherhood, the leader cult and 'speculation'.

During the bread crisis of early 1937 a woman wrote to Krupskaya (Lenin's widow) trying to elicit sympathy as one woman to another. She claimed that she was writing not only on her own behalf but on behalf of all those with children: 'it's already really hard to survive a bread crisis with children'.[31] This use of the 'mother' discourse is also evident in a women's letter to Leningrad First Secretary Zhdanov which raised the question of the shortage of goods in 1938. It began 'We, all mothers from Udel'ninskii *raion,* appeal to you with a large request. Recently we have not been able to get hold of even one metre of material.'[32]

These letters did not blame party leaders for the shortages. On the contrary, the *vozhd' (*Stalin) was often represented in the terms of the leader cult, as a saviour who would intervene to punish the real culprits. Echoing the official line, the culprits were identified as 'speculators' who were allegedly buying up products and reselling them. In the letter of 1938 cited above, the women wrote:

> Usually there is a queue of 100–200 people, they shove and shout as they stand in the queue and three to four size 44 suits are brought out; the lucky ones seize them, usually speculators, well that's the way it always is. Meanwhile the children are naked and we don't know whom to turn to and we thought of you, comrade Zhdanov.[33]

This theme recurs in a 1938 report on the mood of workers before the November holiday. It noted much complaint about queues and the difficulties of getting hold of things for the holiday, especially at the textile factories dominated by women. At the Rabotnitsa factory women said,

> there are such huge queues that we women workers cannot buy anything for the holiday, the struggle with speculation is very weak. Speculation should be ended; at least introduce a ration system for manufactured goods or open a closed shop for manufactured goods at the factory, so that we factory workers could get something for our needs.[34]

Here the problem was identified as speculation, and the solution as increased state intervention in the form of rationing.

In some cases, the speculators were identified specifically as housewives. The 1938 letter to Zhdanov complained about 'housewives and such like speculators, they don't have anything to do, so from morning to night they stand in queues, buy up everything and then sell it at the market'.[35] Although women workers often used gender identity ('we women', 'we mothers') to create a sense of solidarity with other women workers, this solidarity evidently did not extend to women who were perceived as not needing to work and as profiting from other working women's misfortune.

No doubt this antagonism towards non-working women was partly related to the way the 'wives movement' was represented in public discourse. The bourgeois connotations of the movement were all too obvious to some women workers. Their resentment emerged especially in 1936, when the movement received intense publicity. In May, a party agitator reported that after the award of the order of the Red Banner of Labour and the honour badge to wives of captains of industry, several women workers had complained that 'they're being given medals. What have they done especially?' Likewise, factory women had little sympathy for the rich housewives' practice of keeping servants. In July 1936 workers asked what ought to be done in the case of housewives who had a servant, but no children: 'We don't have non-workers, but why are there wives ... who have a servant and don't themselves work?' Also in July 1936, low-paid housekeepers wrote to the Leningrad soviet to complain about their employers, the wives of engineers, some of whom even kept cooks and maids. According to these women, the wives were worse than the former 'ladies'.[36]

Obviously there was a difference between the well-off wives of engineers and the non-working wives of industrial workers who were forced into 'speculation', but evidently the whole concept of a non-working 'housewife' became tainted in the minds of some women workers desperate to find scapegoats for the dire economic conditions of the late 1930s.

Regulating the family

Another important area of concern for women was the state's policy towards the institution of the family which underwent significant modification in this period. In 1934–35 a propaganda campaign began to promote traditional family values. The new official line was in part a reaction to the demographic havoc wrought by crash industrialisation, manifested in a steep rise in abortion and a decline in the birth rate.

The abolition of the women's departments had not helped, since these had been active in the struggle against terminations. Abortions were relatively cheap – about 28–32 rubles – and in the first half of the 1930s they far outstripped births in Leningrad (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Abortions in Leningrad (per thousand people), 1930–34[37]

Year	Births	Legal abortions	Illegal abortions
1930	21.2	33.7	
1931	20.7	36.3	
1932	19.9	32.0	
1933	17.2	39.4	4.0
1934	15.9	43.2	5.0

Source: TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 2, d. 80, ll. 63–6.

Similarly, after the introduction of 'postcard divorces' (which allowed one partner to divorce the other unilaterally provided their spouse was informed – often by postcard) in 1926, the number of divorces had escalated. In Leningrad in 1926 there were 3.61 divorces per thousand people. In 1927 this almost trebled to 9.84, and numbers reached a peak of 11.48 in 1928. After this the rate declined a little, but was still at a high level in 1934, when there were 5 divorces per thousand people (compared with 15.5 marriages).[38]

Pro-family propaganda on its own was unable to combat these trends and in 1936 more drastic measures were adopted. A draft decree on abortion and divorce was published on 26 May 1936. As well as outlawing abortion in all except potentially life-threatening cases, it envisaged greater maternity and nursery provision, more difficult and expensive divorce, and a crackdown on fathers evading alimony payments. The publication of the draft was followed by a public 'discussion', some of which was printed in the newspapers.[39] This was probably the most genuinely free public discussion in the period 1934–41, since as well as the usual enthusiastic endorsements, the papers also printed negative views, albeit in small numbers.

Divorce and child support

The new draft decree proposed to increase the cost of divorce to 50 rubles for a first divorce, 150 for a second, and 300 for subsequent ones. It also required both partners to appear at the registry for the dissolution of their marriage and laid down strict rules on alimony payments. The proposals seem to have elicited much popular support,

especially among women, who usually suffered most from the breakdown of marriages, since they were left with children to support on a low or non-existent income. One survey of broken marriages from the end of the 1920s indicated that in 70 per cent of cases, divorce proceedings had been initiated by the man, and only 7 per cent by mutual consent.[40]

The reports on the discussion indicate that the clause on alimony was particularly welcomed by women. It required the parent to contribute a third of his/her income for one child, half for two, and 60 per cent for three or more. One woman said that her husband was always threatening to leave her and give 20 rubles for each of their three children. Now he would not go because he would have to pay a considerable sum. She ended, 'Thank you, Stalin, for caring for us and our children.'[41] Stalin, she implied, cared for women and children in ways that husbands and fathers did not. However, many were anxious about how the new system would work in practice. At all the factories similar questions were posed about the specifics of the draft decree: who would pay for the children when a father was imprisoned for two years? What would happen in the case of two or three women supposed to be receiving alimony from the same man? According to the draft, each should get a third to half his salary. Would this proportion have to be reduced? Would those already receiving maintenance have their current levels reviewed? Reflecting the cynicism many Soviet people felt about the implementation of laws in their country, most suggestions focused on the need to make the new law effective – it was one thing to make a law, and quite another to chase up all the errant fathers.[42]

Evidently the discussion had some impact on the drafting of the final version of the law. The proportion of income which had to be paid in alimony was reduced (a quarter rather than a third for one child, a third rather than a half for two and 50 per cent rather than 60 per cent for three or more). As a result of the new regulations, divorce declined in Leningrad, but so too did marriage. By 1939, the rates were not much better than in 1934 – about 3.5 marriages for every divorce.[43] The price of divorce was clearly not a sufficient deterrent. In 1944, new legislation was introduced to make the process more complicated and prohibitively expensive.

Material provisions

The draft decree also contained a package of measures designed to promote larger families, including new maternity leave regulations,

promises to extend childcare and maternity homes provision and increase state aid to mothers. Mothers of seven or more children were to be rewarded with generous allowances. Inevitably, some women workers argued that the provisions did not go far enough. In particular, it was felt that aid should be given to those with four or five children, and not just to those with seven or more (in the final law, the number was actually reduced from seven to six). Others volunteered suggestions: that food prices should be reduced to make things easier for families with many children; that pensions for children whose fathers had died should be increased; that the newborn's layette should be cheaper; and that payment for childcare should vary according to the size of the family.[44]

Hostility towards the new maternity leave regulations was expressed from some quarters. Previous legislation had entitled industrial workers and white-collar employees with physically-demanding jobs (an elastic category) to 16 weeks maternity leave, as opposed to the 12 weeks allotted to ordinary white-collar employees. Throughout the 1920s increasing numbers of white-collar employees had tried to argue that their jobs qualified them for the extra leave, and in practice increasing numbers of them were awarded it. Partly in order to formalise this, and partly because of the new general policy of eliminating affirmative action policies in favour of workers, the decree equalised maternity leave for all women in employment at 16 weeks.[45]

Doubtless this measure would have been welcomed by white-collar employees, but some blue-collar workers appear to have been less enthusiastic. One of them, Mitrofanova, argued that blue-collar workers should continue to be entitled to longer maternity leave in view of the arduous nature of their work: 'There's no point equating their work with ours. You shouldn't even compare them. I'm against giving white-collar employees 56 days maternity leave before the birth.' This reaction echoes many similar complaints about the shift from pro-worker affirmative action policies in this period. The abolition of rationing and of quotas for the children of workers in higher education elicited very similar responses.[46] Once again, class identity proved to be more resilient than that of gender.

Abortion

The most controversial aspect of the draft decree was the criminalisation of abortion. Clearly there were people, including women, who wholeheartedly endorsed the proposals for a variety of reasons. Some women evidently viewed the draft decree as empowering, as a weapon

to be used against their husbands. One worker said that her husband had always reproached her for not having abortions – now she would be able to pressurise him with the law.[47] Others advocated making the regulations even stricter, increasing the punishments for illegal abortion to five years; strengthening state surveillance of underground abortionists and lengthening their imprisonment; and taking legal measures against women who performed abortions on themselves.[48]

Another group of women, while not objecting to the principle of the draft decree, suggested modifications: allowing terminations in certain cases – when there was a risk of the transmission of hereditary diseases; after the fourth child; when a woman conceived again immediately after giving birth; and in the case of insufficient living space or low wages or an alcoholic husband. It was also suggested that girls who were not in registered marriages should also be allowed to have abortions.

Those women who objected to the draft decree usually did so on economic grounds. Women were driven to abortion in ever-increasing numbers mainly because of low wages and inadequate housing. The end of bread rations was an added disincentive to bear large families. One woman worker from Krasnyi Treugol'nik objected to the draft decree saying, 'I have four children and they are hungry. I've had abortions and will carry on having them by some means or other regardless of any bans.' Another, from Bol'shevichka, argued, 'How can you say no to an abortion when your family consists of five people and you have 14 metres living space?' Some denied that abortions were harmful, and argued that the material advantages they brought far outweighed any disadvantages. One said she had had 14 abortions with no ill effects. She was finding it hard to feed the two children she already had, and would not be having any more. Nazarova, from Krasnyi Treugol'nik, said: 'I think abortions even bring some benefit: I've had six abortions, don't have any children, my husband and I earn enough and we live in clover.'[49]

These women workers all approached the question pragmatically, defending their arguments on material grounds. Such an approach contrasted with that of some women members of the intelligentsia, who regarded the matter rather as one of principle. According to one, the draft decree 'enserfed women', for a big family would demand all the woman's time and deny her the chance to work like a man.[50] It is also striking that many of the critical letters published in the newspapers were from female students and members of the intelligentsia, who thought the criminalisation of abortion would prevent women from entering the world of work, and thus impede their liberation.

These opinions seem to be class specific – it is unlikely that working-class women viewed their work as anything more than a source of income.

Despite the criticisms and suggestions, the new legislation was enacted with only minor modifications (the suggestion to allow abortion in the case of a risk of the transmission of hereditary diseases was incorporated, for example). The number of both legal and illegal abortions declined immediately afterwards, but started to rise again later as the situation of women deteriorated, partly because of the shortages and preparations for war, but also because the new labour legislation of the pre-war period curtailed the rights of mothers. The 1938 labour decree specifically reduced maternity leave from 16 weeks to nine, and made it contingent on a prior period of seven consecutive months of employment. This seemed to fly in the face of all the pro-family propaganda and was resented by women workers, some of whom reacted by stating that they would not have any more children. One woman declared that Stalin must have gone mad to issue such a decree. Two female engineers expressed this general astonishment more eloquently: 'How disgraceful it is, after all the fuss that was made about the abortion law. Now thousands of women will mutilate themselves, deform themselves, as they are unwilling to give birth. What will happen now after this decree? Of course, the birth rate will fall sharply and there will be more torture for women.'[51] This prediction proved accurate.

The 1 September 1939 law on mobilisation obliged many women to take over men's places in the factory. However, little extra provision was made for children, and the lack of nursery places caused dissatisfaction. Two workers said, 'before issuing decrees like that, they should have made sure there were crèches for the little children'.[52] The June 1940 labour decree also made few allowances for women with children. Appalling cases were reported of women, who, unable to find places for their babies in crèches, or with sick children, were forced to leave work, were sentenced for doing so and were sometimes even sent to prison together with their children.[53]

In these unfavourable circumstances, abortions continued in the back streets. The figures vary a little from source to source, but provide a general impression of the dynamics of abortion of Leningrad in this period (see Table 5.2). Other statistics give slightly higher figures for the same years. They also show that the number of abortions, including those performed legally (there was a tendency to define the medical criteria necessitating abortion more broadly) continued to rise to 39 598 in 1939, falling slightly to 37 880 in 1940. The number of deaths from illegal abortions also increased, and in 1940 the press began to publicise the problem

Table 5.2 Abortions in Leningrad, 1936–38

	1936	1937	1938
Completed	43 999	1 879	3 728
Incomplete[a]	18 073	23 859	27 902
Died from abortion	114	160	238
Total	62 072	25 738	31 630

Note:
[a] Incomplete abortion refers to one begun outside the hospital, that is, in the majority of cases, an illegal abortion.
Source: TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 3538, l. 107.

of backstreet abortions.[54] From 1938, the birth rate began to fall, and by 1940 it had reached its 1935 level again.[55]

Conclusion

Women workers' attitudes to the policy of criminalising abortion, and to a range of Stalinist policies, were shaped by a recurrent theme: poverty and need. In this respect their attitudes did not differ markedly from those of many male workers in a similar economic position. It would be a mistake to try to differentiate too sharply the views of male and female workers. Both had limited opportunities for the expression of political opinions in the conditions of Stalinist Russia, both tended towards the discussion of relatively 'safe' local and everyday issues, both suffered similar economic privations.

What stands out in women's opinions, however, is the consistent reference to the welfare of the family. For a number of reasons, the family was seen as women's special realm, and women were aroused to comment on state policies when these appeared to have immediate repercussions for their families. They were thus more interested in consumption than production. Their main priorities were always how to feed, clothe and house their families.

Given that the legitimacy of the Stalinist system was based partly on its capacity to satisfy such basic needs, these were intensely political questions. Although women were not interested in politics in the way the regime defined it (they were reluctant to attend meetings, study Marxism-Leninism and so on), they were far from being apolitical. Indeed, their regular contact with the everyday realities of Stalinist

socialism made them particularly aware of and inclined to speak up about its shortcomings.

When addressing these shortcomings publicly, women exploited (consciously or unconsciously) the regime's own rhetoric of motherhood. This doubtless helped protect them against charges of being disloyal or anti-Soviet. Portraying themselves as mothers, they asserted certain responsibilities and rights which increased the legitimacy of their complaints and requests.

The available evidence suggests that when they referred to themselves as 'we women' or 'we mothers' their solidarity was with other women workers, rather than with white-collar employees or non-working women, whom they dismissed as 'speculators' and 'housewives'. In a society where the language of class had such resonance, gender identity reinforced and overlapped with class identity rather than superseding it.

Notes

1 For a discussion of the sources used, see the introduction to S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, 1997). This chapter is a slightly revised version of chapter 3 of that book.
2 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1366, ll. 82–90; *Leningrad v tsifrakh* (Leningrad, 1935, 1936 and 1938)
3 Cited in J. Evans, 'The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: the Case of the 1936 Decree "In Defence of Mother and Child"', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1981, p. 766.
4 S. Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (London, 1992) pp. 231–3. See also Chapter 1 by Carmen Scheide and Chapter 8 by Mary Buckley in this volume.
5 D. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow 1929–1941* (London, 1994) pp. 119–24. See also Chapter 4 in this volume by Wendy Goldman.
6 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1366, ll. 83–4.
7 Ibid., ll. 89–90.
8 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2b, d. 548, l. 34.
9 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1366, ll. 84–5, 87.
10 TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 5, d. 83, l. 7; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2286, l. 77; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2282, l. 66; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 3634, l. 24.
11 TsGAIPD, f. 1200, o. 3, d. 129, l. 98.
12 Hoffmann, op. cit., p. 144.
13 D. Koenker, 'Men against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Soviet Workplace', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 5, 1995, p. 1443, notes that in the 1920s women were also more likely to speak up at factory meetings about questions of everyday life.
14 TsGAIPD, f. K598, o. 1, d. 5407, l. 22.

15 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 5, d. 2286, l. 10.
16 TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 5, d. 46, ll. 62–3.
17 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2064, l. 46.
18 For example, T. Kaplan, 'Female Consciousness and Collective Action: the Case of Barcelona, 1910–18', *Signs*, vol. 7, 1982, pp. 545–66; O. Hufton, 'Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-century France', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, pp. 1–22.
19 B. Engel, 'Women, Men, and the Languages of Peasant Resistance, 1870–1907', in S. Frank and M. Steinberg (eds), *Cultures in Flux* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994) pp. 34–53.
20 L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (New York, 1996) ch. 6.
21 E. Osokina, *Za fasadom 'Stalinskogo izobiliya'* (Moscow, 1998) pp. 81–3; J. Rossman, 'The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike of April 1932: Class, Gender and Identity Politics in Stalin's Russia', *Russian Review*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1997, pp. 44–69.
22 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2487, passim; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2490, passim; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2491, l. 130ob.
23 L. Rimmel, 'Another Kind of Fear: the Kirov Murder and the End of Bread Rationing in Leningrad', *Slavic Review*, vol. 56, no. 3, 1997, pp. 484–5.
24 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 5, d. 2286, ll. 45–6; f. 25, o. 5, d. 48, ll. 52–3; f. 25, o. 5, d. 45, l. 73.
25 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1373, l. 2.
26 Ibid., l. 43.
27 TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 5, d. 83, l. 5.
28 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1366, ll. 27–8.
29 Ibid., l. 8.
30 TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 5, d. 83, l. 6.
31 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 10, d. 255, l. 11.
32 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2g, d. 149, l. 129.
33 Ibid.
34 TsGAIPD, f. 2, o. 2, d. 618, l. 245.
35 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2g, d. 149, l. 129.
36 TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 10, d. 27, l. 42; f. 25, o. 10, d. 35, l. 49; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1607, l. 213; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1748, l. 166–7.
37 Abortion statistics, especially those for illegal abortions, are notoriously unreliable.
38 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1180, l. 54.
39 Evans, op. cit., pp. 757–75.
40 R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1978) pp. 371, 384.
41 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1598, l. 237.
42 Ibid., ll. 243–4. Some men objected to aspects of the draft decree, arguing that women could abuse it by demanding alimony from several 'fathers'. Workers at Pechatnyi dvor also suggested that women should be required by law to stay with their children: 'In the draft decree there is nothing about the mother's responsibility for the fate of her child. Tarasova, the storeman's wife, left him with four children and has disappeared.' Ibid., ll. 242–4.
43 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 2500, l. 94; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 3540, l. 63.
44 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1598, l. 240.

45 See M. Ilic, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy* (London, 1999) ch. 5 for a řeview of the legislative changes.
46 See Davies, *Popular Opinion*, p. 71.
47 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1598, l. 238.
48 Ibid., l. 240.
49 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 1598, l. 246.
50 Ibid., ll. 237–46.
51 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 3721, l. 137; f. 2, o. 2, d. 618, ll. 346–7; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 3547, ll. 117–18.
52 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 3499, ll. 113–14.
53 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 4313, ll. 238–9.
54 TsGAIPD, f. 24, o. 2v, d. 4829, ll. 3–5 (this same report recommended producing more condoms to fight abortion. In 1939, 10 425 condoms were sold in Leningrad, compared with only 2591 in 1940); *Leningradskaya Pravda*, 21 July 1940.
55 TsGAIPD, f. 25, o. 2a, d. 110, l. 3; f. 24, o. 2v, d. 4285, l. 59; W. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution* (Cambridge, 1993) p. 293.

6

Traktoristka: Representations and Realities

Melanie Ilič

On 8 March 1930 the front page of the industrial newspaper, *Za industrializatsiyu*, carried a cartoon picture with the caption 'Dva mira … i dve molodosti' (Two worlds … and two youths). The picture is divided into two. On the left side, a young woman is sitting smoking a cigarette. She appears tired and haggard, and is slumped with her elbows resting on a table on which there is a spilt glass of wine. There is an empty seat next to her, but in the background a well-dressed man, with top hat, monocle and cane, is seen walking away. This is in stark contrast to the picture on the right side, in which we see a joyful young woman, head held high, driving a tractor. On the same day, the front cover of *Izvestiya* also carried a line drawing of a smiling woman seated at the steering wheel of a tractor. In this picture the wheels of the tractor are crushing the vestiges (the pots and pans) of the '*staryi byt*' (old way of life).

These images provide a clear indication of the Soviet government's intention to recruit women to the drive to modernise agricultural production in the 1930s. By the end of the decade, the female tractor driver had become both, in reality, a celebrated shock-worker and Stakhanovite heroine, personified by Pasha Angelina and Mariya Demchenko, and, in cultural representation, a cinematic icon, played by Marina Ladynina in Ivan Pyr'ev's popular film *Traktoristy* (1939).[1]

Representations

The publication of these drawings on 8 March – International Women's Day – was symbolic. This day provided the annual focal point on which women's achievements were recognised and, indeed,

celebrated, as well as providing the Soviet state with the opportunity to reiterate publicly its commitment to women's liberation and sexual equality.[2] However, it is important to remember that such talk about women was not confined to International Women's Day. As one of many examples, the woman tractor driver was also celebrated in June 1930 in the homely *Zhenskii zhurnal* (Women's Journal) with a photo of an Uzbek woman cranking a tractor as part of her training course, and with a poem entitled 'Na traktore'.[3]

The year 1930 is also significant. From an official perspective, by 1930 women's liberation and sexual equality were not some far-off goals towards which the Soviet Union was working. They were now, in fact, declared achievements of the Soviet regime, symbolised and signified by the closure in January 1930 of the Communist Party's Women's Department (the *Zhenotdel*) as having fulfilled its purpose.[4] Soon after, the Soviet government began its well-publicised campaigns to recruit women en masse to the industrialisation drive.

Also important to remember here is the fact that 2 March 1930 had seen the publication in *Pravda* of Stalin's article entitled 'Dizzy with Success: Problems of the Collective Farm Movement'. In this article Stalin berated local officials for their over-zealous actions and attitudes in the first few months of the collectivisation drives, which had met with widespread resistance by the peasantry. As Viola has noted, peasant women had been at the forefront of resistance during the collectivisation campaigns.[5] The article was supposed to mark a new relationship between the state, the peasantry and the collective farms. The tractor, it was later proclaimed, was to play a decisive role in the transition to collective farming. Songs were written about tractors, and tractors, as we have already seen, began to appear in cartoon pictures and on posters, in poems and on film.[6]

The Soviet government now adopted and endorsed the image of the *traktoristka* as the symbol of its self-proclaimed progressive policies in relation to the agricultural sector. Bonnell has traced this transformation in the representations of peasant women in the political posters of the 1930s.[7] She has indicated that,

> Out of 106 political posters relating to agriculture between 1930 and 1934 that include images of women, 37 (35 per cent) depict women behind the wheel of a tractor. An occasional poster in 1929 had incorporated images of female tractor drivers, but the connection between women and tractors was heavily emphasized only from 1930 onward.[8]

Such socialist realist images and the plentiful press reports about the achievements of women tractor drivers, coupled with popular imagination and personal testimony, would have us believe that the Soviet countryside of the 1930s was awash with smiling, kerchiefed peasant women driving tractors. Pasha Angelina declared in her reminiscences, for example, 'how fortunate it was that a woman tractor driver was a rarity in 1931 and not in 1941.'[9]

Yet, despite a number of factors – the rhetoric of equality (which was subsequently reinforced in the 1936 Constitution); the mass mobilisation of female workers into the paid labour force;[10] and the mechanisation of agricultural production in the 1930s[11] – women tractor drivers were little more evident on the Soviet rural landscape by the end of the decade than they had been at the beginning. The image of the woman tractor driver, it could be argued, served less as a mirror, reflecting the reality of women's working lives in the countryside, than as a symbol of Soviet ambitions and achievements. It acted, therefore, as a metaphor for the Soviet Union's commitment not only to women's emancipation (however this was interpreted) but also to economic progress (however this was measured) in the 1930s.

Recruitment

The first campaigns to recruit women as tractor drivers were activated as part of the proposals and responses to the drafting of the first five-year plan in the late 1920s. In the spring of 1930, Pasha Angelina was the first woman on her collective farm to be recruited as a tractor driver. Not all regions of the country, however, were so quick to respond to these new opportunities for women. For example, archival reports (detailing meetings about the deployment of women's labour during the first five-year plan) suggest that in some regions of the Russian republic, it was being argued that women should be recruited as tractor drivers, but only after a significant number of men had been trained for this job.[12] A couple of years later, however, coinciding with a renewed and active recruitment drive, it was argued that although attempts should be made to employ women more widely in animal husbandry, they should also be trained for mechanised work, especially as tractor drivers.[13] Yet progress towards this end remained slow, or even non-existent in some areas. At a meeting about women's employment in January 1933, one of the speakers pointed out that in ten collective

farms recently surveyed there were no women tractor drivers at all, and that women's labour was badly organised on the collective farms.[14]

This was clearly not the case in all regions of the country. In a brief autobiographical sketch printed in the popular women's magazine, *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker), Tolmacheva, from the village of Maslyanino in Novosibirsk *oblast'*, noted how she had started to train as a tractor driver in November 1930. Her family had joined a collective farm during the collectivisation drive in the previous year. She had married, but was soon abandoned by her husband. She had never even thought of becoming a tractor driver before these events. She was barely literate and had to study very hard. Nevertheless, she completed the four-month training course successfully, and worked as a tractor driver for the next few years before moving on to further training.[15]

A more active and organised campaign to recruit women as tractor drivers was initiated from February 1933, after Stalin's much-publicised pronouncement at the First Congress of *Kolkhoz* Shock-workers that peasant women had become a great force on the collective farms (*zhenshchiny v kolkhozakh – bol'shaya sila*).[16]

There appear to be no official statistical data relating to the numbers of women employed as tractor drivers in Soviet agriculture in the early 1930s. Manning, in her study of women in the Soviet rural economy in the late 1930s, has compiled a table to provide estimates of the numbers and relative proportion of women employed as tractor drivers. She includes one set of figures for 1930, but the remainder of her data relates to the period from 1935 to 1948.[17] Further data are available, especially for the early 1930s, but these do not always present a consistent picture. Chirkov states that there were only 14 women tractor drivers in the whole of the Soviet Union in 1926. This number had risen to 18 000 in 1932, and to 57 000 in 1937.[18] Bil'shai states that there were only 7000 women tractor drivers working on the collective farms in 1933,[19] which, as Oja has noted, was the figure announced by Stalin in his report to the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934.[20] A further contemporary report states that 'in the Ukraine at the three-months' preliminary courses for the spring-sowing campaign there were trained 16 893 *kolkhoz* women, including 6 136 tractor-drivers and field cultivators'.[21] The vast majority of women tractor drivers were young women up to 25 years of age.[22]

As can be seen from Table 6.1, these data can be supplemented with statistics for the second half of the 1930s taken from official Soviet sources.

Table 6.1 Number and proportion of women tractor drivers, tractor brigade leaders and combine-harvester drivers, 1935–39

Date	Total number	Number of women	Women (%)
end 1935:[a]			
tractor drivers	482 099	*18 802*	3.9
combine drivers	29 830	*1 164*	3.9
1 January 1936:[b]			
tractor drivers			4.0
tractor brigadiers			0.7
combine drivers			6.3
1937 census:[c]			
tractor drivers	746 970	40 842	*5.5*
tractor brigadiers	57 783	716	*1.2*
combine drivers	90 510	6 831	*7.5*
end 1937:[a]			
tractor drivers	685 016	*46 581*	6.8
combine drivers	82 413	*6 233*	7.6
1939 census:[d]			
tractor drivers	807 859	40 850	5.1
tractor brigadiers	97 691	1 697	1.7
combine drivers	131 226	11 406	8.7

Figures in italics are author's calculations.
Sources:
[a]*MTS vo vtoroi pyatiletke* (Moscow, 1939) pp. 95–8. Data exclude state farms. This source also provides a detailed statistical breakdown according to republic, *krai* and *oblast'*.
[b]I.A. Kraval', *Zhenshchina v SSSR* (2nd edn) (Moscow, 1937) p. 173, 'women in MTS'.
[c]*Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1937 goda: kratkie itogi* (Moscow, 1991) p. 121. This source also provides a statistical breakdown according to urban and rural employment.
[d]*Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1939 goda: osnovnye itogi* (Moscow, 1992) p. 107. This source also provides a statistical breakdown according to urban and rural employment, as well as detailed data for each republic.

In addition to tractor drivers, as can be seen from the table, women also worked as drivers and assistants on combine-harvesters. It has been estimated elsewhere that there were 25 000 women working with combine-harvesters on 1 July 1939, 8000 of whom were drivers.[23]

It is evident also that, despite the directive from Chernov, the People's Commissar for Agriculture, to increase the recruitment of women tractor drivers, many more women trained as tractor drivers than were actually able to take up work in this occupation. For example, the agricultural newspaper, *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*, reported in 1936 that at the Shchuchanskii Machine Tractor Station (MTS) in Chelyabinsk *oblast'*, 34 women had completed training courses to become tractor drivers in 1934, 29 had completed the

courses in 1935, and 28 in 1936. Yet, of the 91 successful trainees, only nine were actually working as tractor drivers in 1936.[24]

In the later 1930s there were deliberate attempts to train women as tractor drivers so that they would be able to take the place of men in the event of war. Yet, by the end of the decade, of the estimated 130 000 women trained as tractor drivers, in the summer of 1940 only 64 000 (fewer than 50 per cent) were actually employed in this task.[25] In Kazakhstan, of 4000 women trained for work as tractor drivers, only 2000 were actually working as such in 1941. Similar situations were reported for other regions, and local agricultural and Komsomol organisations were blamed for not taking sufficient care in the training of female cadres for mechanised work.[26] This situation, as Attwood has pointed out from her analysis of the peasant women's magazine, *Krest'yanka*, persisted during the early stages of the war.[27]

Although the absolute numbers of women employed as tractor drivers increased substantially in the second half of the 1930s, these tens of thousands of *traktoristky* must be viewed in comparative perspective. Firstly, there were hundreds of thousands of men employed in this work, and, secondly, there were many millions of women employed in non-mechanised, labour-intensive tasks in Soviet agriculture.[28] Women were far more likely to be engaged in looking after livestock or as casual workers than in the driving seat of a tractor.

Anecdotal data provide a supplement to these statistics and offer further evidence of the geographical spread of the *traktoristka'*s employment, as well as the existence of women-only tractor brigades. For example, the extensive lists of commendations to *traktoristky* published in the national newspapers in the mid to late 1930s show that women were employed as tractor drivers throughout the Soviet Union. They were employed not only on the many collective farms in the Russian republic, but also on *kolkhozy* in the expansive grain producing regions of the Ukraine and Belorussia, in the Urals and the Central Asian republics.

The *traktoristka'*s commitment not only to her work, but also to her right to work, often in difficult circumstances, is reflected in the formation of women-only tractor brigades in many regions of the country. Pasha Angelina became the brigadier of the first Soviet women's tractor brigade in 1933. While it remains unclear whether the formation of women-only tractor brigades resulted from a genuine desire of women to work in solidarity with each other, or was more simply the inevitable outcome of their marginalisation within this male-dominated sphere of employment, the *traktoristka'*s determination to

prove herself equal to, or better than, her male colleagues can be regarded as a definitive act of feminist defiance.

Tractor production and research

As I have noted elsewhere, the planned recruitment and actual employment of women as tractor drivers in the 1930s attracted the attention of the Soviet scientific research institutes.[29] Before examining the conduct and findings of their experiments in more detail, it is worth noting some of the factors that influenced the research with regard to tractor design and production.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet Union was largely dependent on the import of foreign tractor designs, such as the Fordson from America. Pasha Angelina records that her first tractor was a Fordson. She found it heavy and clumsy to operate; in addition, it consumed great quantities of fuel.[30] The Soviet Union started to manufacture its own tractor designs from the late 1920s, at the Putilov works in Leningrad, for example. Then, from the early 1930s, the Soviet Union embarked on the mass production of tractors at the famous Stalingrad, Khar'kov and Chelyabinsk factories.

In very broad terms, two different types of tractors were available in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. The Stalingrad and Khar'kov works originally specialised in producing tractors supported by wheels (such as the STZ and KhTZ models), of the type illustrated in the newspaper cartoons. At the time, these were the most common type of tractors and were manufactured in large numbers. One renowned early model was called the 'International'. A second type of tractor, like the one photographed for the article in *Zhenskii zhurnal*, ran on caterpillar tracks. In fact, one of these designs was actually named 'Katerpillar'. Presumably, it was this type of tractor, such as the 'wonderful' ChTZ, 'the highest class industrial tractor',[31] manufactured at the Chelyabinsk factory, which was more easily converted to tank production during the second five-year plan in preparation for the Second World War.[32] The different types of tractors operated at a variety of speeds and capacities.

The ongoing plans to mechanise Soviet agriculture resulted by the mid-1930s in wide-ranging debates among enterprise leaders and industrial planners over the best type of tractor to manufacture. Hundreds of thousands of tractors were required. In reality, despite their easier conversion to military operation, caterpillar tractors were heavier and more complex in their design and construction.[33] The

Stalingrad tractor factory began to produce the STZ-3 caterpillar tractor from 1935.[34]

Pasha Angelina welcomed the new Soviet designs for tractors, 'not only because they were our own make, but because they were much more reliable, simpler and more economical than the Fordsons, which were quickly supplanted'.[35] Although the Soviet Union had virtually ceased to import tractors by the early 1930s, it is unlikely that their domestic designs were any less cumbersome than the outdated American and European models they had previously relied on. The Chelyabinsk factory, for example, was equipped to produce caterpillar tractors weighing ten tons, although most Soviet designs weighed either three or five tons. It is unlikely, also, that the foreign models were swiftly supplanted. The production of Soviet tractors was hampered by many of the factors that plagued the industrialisation process during the first and second five-year plans. These can be identified as: competing production goals which resulted in inadequate capital investment and the under-funding of new industrial plants, the supply of poor quality raw materials, labour shortages and turnover, and evident deficiencies in the manufacturing process.[36]

The immediate concerns of the scientific researchers were not the shortcomings of the industrialisation drive, however, but the suitability of the various designs of tractors for female drivers. The most extensive study of the use of female labour as tractor drivers was conducted by I.I. Okuneva and Ye.Ye. Shteinbakh. Okuneva and Shteinbakh worked at the biophysics laboratory of the State Scientific-Research Institute for the Protection of Labour in Moscow during 1930 and 1931.[37] For field trials, scientists in Moscow worked in conjunction with researchers at the Saratov Institute, which conducted research into work-related illnesses. An observational expedition was mounted in several state farms in the lower Volga region during the summer harvest in 1930. This preliminary observation, however, proved too brief and involved too few participants for the researchers to reach any definitive conclusions. In addition to these trials, the Institute for the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood in Moscow conducted separate tests under laboratory conditions, and more extensive observational field trials were planned.

Observational research was conducted with different models of tractors and in a variety of working environments. Further experiments were conducted in a laboratory setting to determine the physiological effect on women of their use. Laboratory experiments were designed to measure the level of vibration caused by the tractor's motion. Special

machines ('vibrographs' and 'cyclographs') were constructed for the experiments. The particular focus of the experiments was on the jolting caused during the ignition process and the constant level of vibration resulting from the seating arrangements of the tractor.

The laboratory experiments looked particularly at the designs of the Soviet-manufactured tractors, the 'International' (15–30 horse power) and the 'Katerpillar' (mostly 25–30 horse power), as well as the 'Oil'-Pul'' (OilPull) and 'Kletrak'. It was found that the 'Katerpillar' tractor ran much more smoothly with a lower level of vibration in all three gears. Both the seat and the body of the tractor were subject to much less motion with this design.

The aim of the research was to investigate the likely physiological impact on women that would result from their use of mechanised equipment and from their promotion to skilled work in agriculture as tractor drivers. The researchers aimed to identify the optimum conditions for the *traktoristka's* employment, without excluding women altogether from this area of work. The particular concern here was with the shaking movement of the tractor on women's bodies, and especially their reproductive organs and menstrual cycle.

It is clear from this (and from similar studies) that the researchers viewed women first and foremost within the broader context of their actual and potential roles as mothers, and as contributors to both the reproductive and productive process. In so far as *traktoristky* were concerned, the research aimed to maximise the potential for women's employment in the mechanised processes of agricultural production without threatening their vital role in the process of reproduction. This is clearly highlighted by the fact that, despite the recognition that women are generally physically smaller than men, there appears to have been no discussion at this stage of the research about the possibility of reducing the overall frame size and dimensions of the tractor to make the machines more easily accessible to women's operation – so that women would be able to reach the starter mechanism and gears without stretching, for example. In reality, few of the *traktoristky* employed in the 1930s were mothers, largely because it was virtually impossible to combine the responsibilities of childcare with the long working days and absences from home required by the job.[38]

Legal restrictions and working conditions

The early findings and recommendations of the scientific research were reflected in the statute books. The People's Commissariat of Labour

introduced a decree 'on the working conditions of women tractor- and lorry-drivers' on 9 May 1931. This decree required women to undergo a medical examination before entering training courses and stated that they should work predominantly with caterpillar tractors if these were available. Women were to be given priority of access to tractors with mechanised ignition. The decree stated that fully trained *traktoristky* were to undergo monthly medical examinations, and that those working on wheeled tractors without soft spring seats were to be transferred to alternative work for three days during menstruation.[39] The proposals by the trade unions in 1935 to extend the duration of menstrual leave to five days and to prohibit altogether the employment of women on wheeled tractors do not appear to have been enshrined in law.

Discussions on the conditions of work for women tractor drivers continued into the mid-1930s. In the summer of 1936, *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie* ran a series of articles on this topic, and offered a voice to women's own concerns. In one article 'on the labour protection of women tractor drivers', the newspaper's special correspondent Pomerantsev reported that Tat'yana V. had petitioned the director of her collective farm for money to buy overalls.[40] She claimed that the traditional style of female peasant dress – a wide skirt, scarf and padded jacket – was not suited to the requirements of driving a tractor. Women also argued that the textiles they were supplied with should protect them from the cold and dust. Pomerantsev sought advice from Sofiya Ivanova Osipova, a well-known Ukrainian researcher into questions of the physiological impact on women of agricultural labour. In terms of the physical design of tractors, Osipova pointed to problems that affected all drivers, not just women. In addition to the problems of seating arrangements, which had been noted by other researchers, Osipova complained that tractor drivers were offered no protection from the sun or rain. Pomerantsev obviously considered these issues to be more important than the peasant women's own complaints over the supply of protective clothing.

Inevitably, the discussion returned to the seating arrangements, especially those on wheeled tractors. Metal seats were generally considered to be too hard and cold. Women found them uncomfortable, but were only laughed at if they complained. *Traktoristka* 'K' complained that the seating arrangements on the 'Universal' tractor made her hands go numb and her spine ache. It was pointed out that the redesign of seats was important not only for working mothers, but also for all women tractor drivers. Pomerantsev complained that Okuneva and Shteinbakh's research had been too limited and had focused too

narrowly on the designs of only two particular tractors. Their recommendations for changes to seating arrangements had not paid sufficient attention to the specific needs of women drivers. In reality, their recommendations for changes to seats had not reduced the impact of the tractor's motion and vibration on the driver.[41]

Pomerantsev highlighted the proposals for alternative seating designs: one by a Ukrainian designer, Rivin, who recommended that a rubber ring and padding should be added to the metal seat; and one by Lazarenko, from the Kiev Institute of Labour Physiology, who recommended the addition of an upholstered cushion to the seat. Pomerantsev argued that such designs could easily and quickly be introduced at little cost, and that they would be of immense benefit to women tractor drivers.

Pomerantsev's concerns were raised again a few weeks later in an article that also reiterated some of the women tractor drivers' own complaints.[42] This article stressed the need for making tractor driving not only more comfortable but also safer for women. The article argued that the failure to implement changes to seating arrangements on tractors was holding up the recruitment of women to training courses.

In the following month, a subsequent article argued that delays in implementing the recommendations for seating arrangements on wheeled tractors were causing problems not only with recruitment, but also with the retention of trained women tractor drivers.[43] Chernov had ordered all MTSs to implement the changes by 1 September 1936. No longer would a *traktoristka* be required to sit on a hard seat! Further changes, the article argued, would also be necessary. A soft seat would not protect the *traktoristka* from the rain, for example – protective covers would have to be supplied. Jacks would need to be provided for lifting heavy loads, and special funnels would need to be fitted to tractors to protect the drivers from potentially harmful fumes. The only detail that remained to be resolved was how these changes were to be paid for.[44]

Efforts to improve the design and construction of tractors, and to make them safer and more comfortable for women to drive, continued into the following year, but, evidently, were not always successful. Despite Chernov's order, not all MTSs enacted the various recommendations. *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie* reported in February 1937 that two MTS directors in the Chelyabinsk *oblast'* 'forgot' about the new requirements when they serviced their tractors ready for the spring, with the result that no suitable tractors were available for women drivers. Seats were not upholstered for women and, furthermore, overalls and

protective footwear were not available either. More progress appears to have been made in the construction of weatherproof hoods for the tractors, and the fitting of 'ejector' pipes to extract the fumes.[45] These latter moves would have been as much benefit to men as they were to women. Complaints about the lack of suitable clothing for women tractor drivers continued into the following year.[46]

Reactions and responses

The sight of a woman driving a tractor was not often welcomed in the Soviet countryside. The type of harassment which urban women workers faced in entering industrial employment was witnessed also in the agricultural sector. Women had to work hard to overcome resistance not only from male colleagues and supervisors, but also, and indeed especially, from other female collective farm workers. Traditional prejudices prevailed and persistent efforts on the part of the *traktoristky* were required to dismantle them.

Pasha Angelina describes in detail the 'maiden voyage' of 'the first woman's tractor team in the Soviet Union':

> All of us were in high spirits … None of us, of course, was sure that everything would run smoothly from the very first, but we would not allow any gloomy thoughts to mar that festive occasion …
>
> Suddenly, something unforeseen and terrible happened. On the outskirts of the village a crowd of angry women met us. They barred our road and shouted in chorus, 'Turn back! We'll allow no female machines on our fields. You'll spoil the crops!'[47]

Angelina was clearly shocked to be met not with male *kulak* resistors, but women whom she worked alongside on the collective farm. These women initially threatened violence, but were won over by the tractor brigade's driving and ploughing skills. Some of the protestors later became tractor drivers themselves. Angelina added that 'when we moved on to the next collective farm the same thing happened. The women nearly beat us up, and two of our girls were locked up in a cellar.'[48] Despite this evident hostility to female tractor drivers, a couple of years later, Pasha Angelina promised Stalin that she would organise ten more women's tractor brigades. She was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1935 for her outstanding work in this area and she became a much-celebrated heroine of labour.[49]

A similar level of hostility faced 20-year-old Anna Prosyanova when she began training to drive a combine-harvester. She reported in

Krest'yanka that she was one of the first to graduate from her course in the spring of 1934. During the next year, however, she worked only nine or ten days as a combine-harvester driver. She was told (by those who were identified only as 'class enemies') that 'this is not women's work. Women should milk cows and raise children, but not work on machines.'[50] Anna soon proved that she was capable of working as well as men in this occupation. She soon began to outdo the men and was declared a *stakhanovka*.

The support of the local collective farm director and MTS officials, as was the case with Pasha Angelina, was crucial to the *traktoristka'*s success. More often, it is likely that local officials and co-workers obstructed the work of the *traktoristky*, by denying them the auxiliary support they needed to go about their work effectively, or more simply by denying them the opportunity to keep their tractors in a good state of repair, or even the fuel to run them in the first place.[51] The prejudice and obstruction faced by women tractor drivers resulted partly from the conditions of their work, which required the *traktoristky* to work for long hours away from home, and even to stay overnight in the fields, sometimes with male colleagues. In many popular perceptions, an air of immorality surrounded the job.[52]

Tractor troubles

In addition to the statutory regulations and the equally restrictive outright prejudice against women driving tractors, in the 1930s there are a number of other possible structural explanations as to why the *traktoristka* experienced difficulty in fulfilling the task for which she had been trained. Despite the ambitious plans for the production of tractors by Soviet industry, there were evident shortfalls and delays in their output, partly resulting from uncertainties and disagreements over tractor designs. Throughout all sectors of the Soviet economy and not only in the 1930s, men were given preferential access to, and priority in, working with mechanised equipment; tractors were no exception. Bridger, for example, has argued that during the 1930s 'where technology was introduced it was placed firmly into the hands of men'.[53]

In some cases, even where tractors were readily available, shortages of fuel and spare parts for their upkeep and repair restricted their operation.[54] Not all of the tractors that were manufactured were maintained in a good state of repair. The numbers of tractors manufactured, therefore, does not necessarily provide an accurate indicator of those that

were actually operational. For example, tractors were not always adequately sheltered during the winter months. The cost of their repair placed a heavy financial burden on the local MTS and required the time and attention of a skilled mechanic.[55] Not all tractors available through the MTS, therefore, were in a fit state of repair to be driven. Women were often called upon to drive tractors only when the numbers of male drivers fell short of immediate requirements.

In contrast to the many tasks undertaken by women on the collective farms, which were considered part of the regular 'labour day' system of payments, tractor driving was more highly remunerated.[56] Anyone employed as a tractor driver was more likely to be officially classified (in the census, for example) as a 'worker' rather than as a 'peasant'. As an example of skilled work in agriculture, tractor driving offered an opportunity for vocational, geographic and social mobility. Peasants who had experience as tractor drivers had an increased likelihood of finding work in the rapidly expanding urban industrial centres.[57] Familial responsibilities and long-standing tradition, however, tied women more closely to the village. The structure of employment in tractor driving, and more broadly in the Soviet agricultural sector, provides further evidence for women's well-documented marginalised and lower status in the Soviet waged economy, as well as the prescriptive and gendered definition of the Soviet working class as masculine.

Role models

In a recent article about Soviet 'civic-minded women', Schrand has employed Straus's phrase of the 'wager on the cultured' to describe the elevation of elite workers by Stalin in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s:

> The wager on the cultured, which eventually led to such developments as the Stakhanovite movement, created a privileged class of skilled workers and technicians. The Stalin regime valued these elite workers and experts not only for their expertise and productivity, but also for their capacity to serve as role models.[58]

As we have seen in the introduction to this chapter, the *traktoristka* served as no less of a role model than the industrial shock-worker, the *obshchestvennitsa* and the Stakhanovite in the 1930s. The *traktoristka* was lauded in the press and honoured with rewards and medals, especially from the mid-1930s. Women were represented in even greater

numbers at the Second Congress of *Kolkhoz* Shock-workers in February 1935. As with the 'heroes of labour' in other sectors of employment, however, women tractor drivers were often derided by their colleagues and were sometimes subject to physical attack.[59]

One of the earliest union-wide campaigns among *traktoristky* was organised in 1935 to encourage women tractor drivers to harvest at least 500 centners (hundredweight) from each hectare of crop. The achievements of the women 'Five Hundreders' were celebrated at the Kremlin in November 1935. Mariya Demchenko, a record-breaking sugar-beet harvester from the Ukraine, as its inspiration, spoke of her part in the campaign. Stalin praised the *traktoristky* as both heroines of labour and markers of equality in agricultural labour.[60]

During 1936 Pasha Angelina organised another union-wide campaign among women tractor drivers, this time of 'socialist competition' to encourage further increases in agricultural production and labour productivity. One thousand two hundred and twenty women's tractor brigades and over 20 000 individual *traktoristky* took part in the campaign. The results of the campaign were celebrated at an all-union meeting of women's tractor brigades in Moscow in February 1937. Fifty-three brigades and 113 individual women were given awards at the meeting. Stalin spoke of the weakening of the old, tsarist patriarchal social order in the countryside as women were now free to work independently of their fathers and husbands. *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie* reported on the successes of various regional women's tractor brigades and celebrated the achievements of individual *traktoristky* in a series of articles.[61] The campaign was hailed a success not only because of its record-breaking economic achievements, but also because it had provided an example and inspiration for other young women.[62]

By the end of the 1930s these role models were appealing to other women to join them. Pasha Angelina initiated another mass recruitment campaign to attract women to tractor driving. As husbands and brothers swapped their tractors for tanks and went off to war, Angelina (now a representative at the USSR Supreme Soviet) spoke at the Eighteenth Party Congress in March 1939 on behalf of her fellow *traktoristky*. She made the patriotic call to young women to begin to study how to drive tractors and to help in the defence of the homeland.[63]

In the Ukraine, plans were made to recruit 53 400 women as tractor drivers, partly by offering encouragement and support to young women already on training courses. Two-month training courses were introduced, women with incomplete training were recalled, and 1280 women were reported to have been recruited to these in the

Dnepropetrovsk region alone. One report went so far as to claim that 'they worked no worse, and now and then even better than male tractor drivers'.[64] In accordance with the recommendations of the research institutes, local officials were called upon to ensure that wheeled tractors were furnished with upholstered seats so that they would be more comfortable and less harmful for women to drive. This, it was stated, could be achieved with little added expense because the materials could be found locally.[65]

War and post-war recovery

The Soviet Union's entry into the Second World War in 1941 had a profound impact on the structure of the labour force, and particularly the employment of women. Having been recruited as a reserve army of labour in the 1930s, women now worked genuinely as such during the war years, taking the places of men in all spheres of work. The agricultural sector was particularly badly hit by labour shortages, as Beatrice King clearly recognised:

> There were collective farms left without any able-bodied males. The women just stepped in. An increasing number took over the responsibilities of chairman of a collective farm. They learnt to drive tractors and over a million of them became skilled at the job. They worked combine-harvesters. They ploughed and sowed.[66]

Further contemporary evidence of the desperate state of Soviet agriculture after the outbreak of the Second World War and of women's eager and easy adaptation to their new-found positions of responsibility on the collective farms is provided by Maurice Hindus. Hindus has pointed out that, as men were called away to the front, 'women found themselves in charge of the new large collective farms. Not enough of them had learned to operate the tractors, combines, and other modern implements.'[67] Throughout the country, young women in particular readily volunteered for training to work mechanised equipment and as specialists in agricultural production. They helped to make the 1942 harvest a much needed success:

> In 1941–42 out of 370,426 tractor drivers that were newly trained, 173,794 were women, mostly girls. The others were chiefly boys below military age. Of the 80,577 combine operators, 42,969 were women. Tens of thousands of women became expert mechanics of farm machinery. And 1942 was a banner year in Russian agriculture.[68]

The early years of the war saw an increased proportion of women employed in mechanised tasks in agriculture. According to one contemporary Soviet source, the proportion of women tractor drivers increased from around only 4 per cent at the beginning of 1940 to 45 per cent in 1942, and the proportion of women working as brigadiers in tractor brigades rose from 1 to 10 per cent. There was an increase also in the proportion of women working as drivers, including on combine-harvesters.[69] It has been estimated in addition that 'by 1943, well over half of the USSR's tractor and combine drivers were women'.[70]

The return of soldiers from the front after the end of the war did not necessarily mean that women immediately lost their wartime jobs, and this was especially the case in the agricultural sector. Men deserted the villages in their thousands to seek work in the newly industrialising urban centres.[71] Women became the mainstay of the agricultural labour force and many began to work with mechanised equipment. King has estimated that in 1946 'there were 254,000 women working as leaders of tractor teams, tractor drivers and harvest-combine operators'.[72] It is also probable that as men did return to the collective farms they would have sought employment in the most lucrative and skilled jobs that offered both status on the *kolkhoz* and the potential to transfer to industrial work. The competition between women and men for such jobs is reflected in the fact that the numbers and proportion of women employed as tractor drivers fell sharply in the period of post-war recovery. Manning has estimated that there were only 36 136 women employed as tractor drivers by 1948, and they constituted just 5.9 per cent of those working in this job.[73] The numbers and proportion of women tractor drivers in the Soviet Union continued to decline after Stalin's death in 1953.

It is important to remember also that the period of post-war reconstruction in both agriculture and industry did not in itself always run smoothly. Pasha Angelina has noted that, on returning to the machine parks at her native village after the war, 'of the tractors nothing but the frames were left, the ploughs had all the bolts knocked off, and all the other implements were broken'.[74] It is left to the reader to imagine how the mechanised equipment on the collective farms had either been destroyed outright or had been dismantled so that the spare parts could be used for repairs and new constructions to aid the war effort. With an air of resignation, Angelina noted 'it would be wrong to say that we started with repairs. In fact, the teams were obliged to organize something in the nature of a tractor assembly plant.'[75]

Conclusions

This study of women tractor drivers has highlighted some of the tensions between Soviet socialist realist representations and women's lived experience in the 1930s. The *traktoristka* was glorified and praised in popular culture and the public sphere. Yet, in reality, the working lives of women tractor drivers were complicated by battles for professional recognition and they were often met with resistance in the course of their training and everyday working lives.

The *traktoristka* was faced with a whole range of prejudices, sometimes articulated by other peasant women, as well as practical obstacles, and these often proved difficult to challenge and dismiss.[76] This prejudice, a characteristic feature of patriarchal cultures, undoubtedly had its foundations in gendered notions of women's social and reproductive roles. Such perceptions of sexual difference persisted in the 1930s despite the findings of scientific research and the examples set by the women tractor drivers themselves of their physical capabilities and physiological capacities. As was witnessed in other sectors of the economy, then, technological innovation in agriculture did not always provide the opportunity for women's promotion in the labour force. Here, too, despite the official endorsement of a wholly different image, women's skills were largely only called upon when male labour was in short supply.

Notes

1 See L. Attwood (ed.), *Red Women on the Silver Screen* (London, 1993).
2 On International Women's Day celebrations, see C. Chatterjee, 'Soviet Heroines and Public Identity, 1930–1939', *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 1402, October 1999.
3 'Chachvan ei bol'she ne nadenet nikto', *Zhenskii zhurnal*, no. 6, June 1930, p. 1.
4 On the closure of the *Zhenotdel* see, W.Z. Goldman, 'Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR', *Slavic Review*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, pp. 46–77.
5 L. Viola, '*Bab'i bunty* and Peasant Women's Protest During Collectivisation', *Russian Review*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1986, pp. 23–42.
6 Ye. Gol'berg, 'Pasha Angelina', *Krest'yanka*, nos. 34–35, 1937, p. 19.
7 V.E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, California, 1997) ch. 3.
8 Ibid., p. 106.
9 P. Angelina, *My Answer to an American Questionnaire* (Moscow, 1951) p. 37.
10 See M. Ilič, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: from 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London, 1999) ch. 3.

11 M.F. Oja, 'From *Krestianka* to *Udarnitsa*: Rural Women in the *Vydvizhenie* Campaign, 1933–1941', *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 1203, 1996, p. 6, points out that 'the tractor itself was a symbol of the wonderful new life that Stalin's wise guidance had brought to the peasants'.
12 GARF, f. A-390, o. 3, d. 1260, l. 17ob: 'Pyatiletnii plan vnedreniya zhenskogo truda v narodnoe khozyaistvo RSFSR'.
13 GARF, f. A-390, o. 3, d. 1655, l. 3: 'Perspektivy zhenskogo truda' (1931).
14 GARF, f. A-390, o. 3, d. 1863, ll. 5ob, 6ob.
15 Tolmacheva, 'Kolkhoznaya zhizn' dala mne schast'e', *Rabotnitsa*, nos. 5–6, 1938, p. 22.
16 See A. Malukhina, 'Zhenshchiny v kolkhozakh – bol'shaya sila', *Sotsialisticheskaya rekonstruktsiya sel'skogo khozyaistva*, no. 3, 1938, pp. 24–36, and Oja, op. cit., pp. 5–6.
17 R.T. Manning, 'Women in the Soviet Countryside on the Eve of World War II', in B. Farnsworth and L. Viola (eds), *Russian Peasant Women* (Oxford, 1992) p. 220.
18 P.M. Chirkov, *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR (1917–1937 gg.)* (Moscow, 1978) p. 144.
19 V. Bil'shai, *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR* (Moscow, 1956) p. 143.
20 Oja, op. cit., pp. 24, 44n41.
21 B. Papernova, 'Woman in Socialist Construction: on Equal Terms with Man', *Soviet Cultural Review*, no. 2, 1933, p. 29.
22 I.A. Kraval', *Zhenshchina v SSSR* (2nd edn) (Moscow, 1937) p. 173. See also Malukhina, op. cit., p. 32.
23 Yu.V. Arutyunyan, *Mekhanizatory sel'skogo khozyaistva SSSR v 1929–1957 gg.* (Moscow, 1960) p. 59.
24 'Zabota o traktoristkakh', *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*, 17 July 1936.
25 Arutyunyan, op. cit., p. 60.
26 I. Kurov, 'Vsem traktoristkam – rabotu po spetsial'nosti!', *Krest'yanka*, no. 2, 1941, p. 4.
27 L. Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity* (London, 1999) p. 95. See also the cover of this book, which reproduces a detail of a Soviet poster depicting a woman tractor driver.
28 Malukhina, op. cit., cites the figure of 18 million women working on collective farms in 1938.
29 Ilič, op. cit., pp. 108–9, 139–42.
30 Angelina, op. cit., pp. 20–1.
31 Gol'berg, op. cit., p. 19.
32 On the conversion of tractors to military use, see R.W. Davies, *Crisis and Progress in the Soviet Economy, 1931–1933* (London, 1996) pp. 170–1.
33 'Kakie gruzoviki stroit' na traktornom zavode?', *Za industrializatsiyu,* 24 December 1935.
34 There were numerous reports about tractor production in the Soviet press during 1935, and in other years. See, for example, 'Podgotovka k vypusku traktora STZ-3', *Za industrializatsiyu*, 22 July 1935.
35 Angelina, op. cit., p. 21.
36 Davies, op. cit., passim. This source also provides statistics for the production of tractors during the first five-year plan, see pp. 524–5.
37 I.I. Okuneva and Ye.Ye. Shteinbakh, 'O primenenii zhenskogo truda na traktorakh', *Gigiena, bezopasnost' i patologiya truda*, no. 7, 1931, pp. 3–15.

38 Manning, op. cit., p. 219.
39 *Ob usloviyakh truda zhenshchin-traktoristok i shoferov na gruzovykh avtomashinakh*, *Izvestiya Narkomtruda*, nos. 14–15, 1931, p. 277.
40 V. Pomerantsev, 'Ob okhrane truda traktoristki', *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*, 27 June 1936.
41 Ibid.
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47 Angelina, op. cit., pp. 25–6.
48 Ibid., p. 28.
49 Gol'berg, op. cit., p. 19. See also Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, pp. 94–5.
50 'Stakhanovka sel'skogo khozyaistva', *Krest'yanka*, no. 25, 1935, p. 5.
51 Manning, op. cit., p. 219.
52 Ibid.
53 S. Bridger, *Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 1987) p. 14.
54 Davies, op. cit., p. 415, states that, 'the oil shortage haunted the Soviet economy throughout 1933 … In Ukraine, kerosene for use as tractor fuel was in such short supply the tractors frequently had to cease operations.' He cites GARF, f. 5446, o. 27, d. 50, ll. 211, 215.
55 See, for example, the various reports in *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*, 6 February 1937 and 8 February 1937.
56 For a brief comment on women's earnings, see I. Asarov, 'Pridanoe', *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*, 9 February 1937.
57 On male peasant out-migration in the 1930s and men's privileged access to mechanised equipment in work on the collective farms, see also Manning, op. cit., p. 211.
58 T. Schrand, 'Soviet "Civic-Minded Women" in the 1930s: Gender, Class, and Industrialization in a Socialist Society', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1999, p. 142. The term is reminiscent of Stolypin's pre-revolutionary agricultural reforms, which placed a 'wager on the sober and the strong'.
59 On 'resistance from below' to 'female agricultural Stakhanovites', and the possible rape of women tractor drivers, see Manning, op. cit., pp. 219–21.
60 'Priem kolkhoznits-udarnits sveklovichnykh polei rukovoditelyami partii i pravitel'stva', *Pravda*, 11 November 1935.
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66 B. King, *Women in Post-war Russia* (London, 1947) p. 12.
67 M. Hindus, *Mother Russia* (London, 1943) p. 386.
68 Ibid., pp. 386–7. Hindus does not cite the source for his statistical data.
69 N. Voznesenskii, *Voennaya ekonomika SSSR v period otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow, 1948) pp. 92–3.
70 Bridger, op. cit., p. 16.
71 See, for example, ibid., p. 17.
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73 Manning, op. cit., p. 220. See also Arutyunyan, op. cit., p. 296.
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76 For a critical assessment of peasant women's resistance to change, see Oja, op. cit., pp. 34–6.

7
Women in the Gulag in the 1930s

Emma Mason[1]

The forced labour camp system in the former Soviet Union has been well researched. However, until now the scale of repression in the Gulag during the 1930s has been documented, by both western and Soviet historians alike, for the most part in numerical terms. More recently, historians have been able to use declassified archival material in their research, but still a cold, numerical approach has tended to overshadow the individual and personal horror of internment. This chapter uses archival reports, published memoirs and the personal testimonies collected by the Russian voluntary organisation Memorial to examine the living conditions and everyday life of women prisoners.[2] From this perspective, a new dimension is added to our knowledge of the camp system.

This chapter is, in part, based on the accounts by women offered in the memoir literature published in the west, including the reminiscences of Margarete Buber-Neumann, Elinor Lipper, Evgenia Ginzburg, Olga Dmitrievna and Zoë Zajdlerowa. It draws on the recently published collection of women's memoirs of the Gulag edited by Vilensky, *Till My Tale is Told*.[3] It also includes women's unpublished memoirs from the Memorial society in Moscow. Accounts of women's camps in the works of Solzhenitsyn and Rossi are similarly included.[4]

German-born Buber-Neumann was arrested in 1938. She spent time in the Karaganda, Burma, Leninskoye and El Marje camps in the Soviet Union. She was transferred to Ravensbrück in Germany in 1940, and was eventually released in 1945. Lipper, also a German, was arrested in 1938 and spent time in the Soviet prison camps of Vladivostock, Mariinsk, El'gen, Balagannoye, Byoryolyakh and Burkhala. She was released in 1948. Ginzburg was a teacher and journalist. She was expelled from the Communist Party in 1937, arrested and falsely

charged with belonging to a secret terrorist organisation. She spent two years in the Butyrki, Lefort and Yaroslavl' prisons before she was deported to Siberia in 1939. She then spent time in Magadan and El'gen before she was released in 1955. Dmitrievna was imprisoned in Solovki in the late 1920s and Zajerowa in Kolyma in the late 1930s. Vilensky's collection includes the memoirs of a number of women who were imprisoned in the Gulag in the 1930s: Tamara Petkevich was in the Djangi-Djir camp during the late 1930s; Nadezhda Grankina was arrested in 1936 and was at Kolyma until 1947; Nadezhda Surovtseva was arrested in 1927 and was sent to a camp in northern Russia before being placed in Kolyma; Khava Volovich was arrested in 1937 and spent time in Kotlas transit camp, Koryazhma and Knyazh-Pogost before her release in 1953.

In view of our past ignorance of the numbers of prisoners in the camps, it is important to consider briefly the figures recently uncovered in the archives. These figures alone show that the position of women prisoners was somewhat desperate. Women were in a clear minority in the camps, and they constituted less than 9 per cent of the penitentiary population between 1934 and 1940. The actual number of female camp prisoners rose from 30 108 (5.9 per cent) in 1934 to a peak of 109 986 (8.4 per cent) in 1939. Table 7.1 outlines the gender imbalance of the camp population from 1934 to 1940.[5]

The 1930s saw many people arrested in the whirlwind of political violence that engulfed all levels of society during Stalin's regime. State

Table 7.1 Number and percentage of women and men in Soviet prison camps, 1934–40

	Women no.	%	Men no.	%	Total
1934	30 108	5.9	480 199	94.1	510 307
1935	44 980	6.2	680 503	93.8	725 483
1936	51 120	6.1	788 286	93.9	839 406
1937	50 320	6.1	770 561	93.9	820 881
1938	68 749	6.9	927 618	93.1	996 367
1939	109 986	8.4	1 207 209	91.6	1 317 195
1940	108 898	8.1	1 235 510	91.4	1 344 408

Figures are for 1 January.
Source: V. N. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennye v 1930–e gody: sotsial'no-demograficheskie problemy', *Otechestvennaya istoriya,* no. 4, 1997, p. 69, citing GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 1155, ll. 9–10.

terror was unleashed after the assassination of Sergei Kirov, the Communist Party first secretary in Leningrad, on 1 December 1934. Following his murder, an appeal was made for class vigilance, vengeance and mercilessness against the 'enemies of the people'. Throughout 1935 and 1936, repression was comparatively light. A major shift is evident, however, after Nikolai Yezhov became People's Commissar of Internal Affairs on 29 September 1936. The period of mass terror initiated by Yezhov, and known as the *Yezhovshchina*, lasted until late 1938, when Beria took over as head of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD).

During the 1930s, many people were arrested and sentenced under Article 58 of the Criminal Code. Article 58 was a special section of the code that dealt with counter-revolutionary and political crimes.[6] Women were frequently charged under articles relating to the wives or relatives of 'enemies of the people', individuals subject to repression or traitors. During the *Yezhovshchina*, when the relationship between prisoner and 'free person' was not blood but marriage, pressure was put on 'free' wives to sever all relations with the 'enemy'. Refusal to do so could lead to wives being charged for 'non-rejection of husbands'.[7] Recently uncovered data indicate that between 1934 and 1938, non-political detainees outnumbered those sentenced on counter-revolutionary charges. A great number of the women in the camps, therefore, were common criminals arrested for general criminal activity.[8]

Unlike male prisoners, women were not generally arrested and interned specifically to do hard labour in the pursuit of the five-year plans. While male prisoners were used on such ambitious projects as the building of the White Sea and Moscow–Volga Canals or the construction of such cities as Magadan and Noril'sk, female prisoners worked mainly in sewing and textile factories, such as at Potma in Mordovia, or on state farms in camp areas such as Sazlag in Central Asia.[9] They usually performed hard labour, such as tree felling and mining, only as a punishment. It is also important to remember here that it was not uncommon for women to be employed in heavy physical labour in free society.

Sometimes, special camps were set up to accommodate female prisoners who had committed criminal offences. One of the first women's forced labour camps, established in the early 1930s, was Yaya in Novosibirsk. Common criminals, who were not sentenced under Article 58, were interned here.[10] The Special Camps for Wives of Traitors to the Motherland, on the other hand, were first introduced in the period from 1937 to 1938 and had become a mass phenomenon by

1940.[11] Aktyubinsk camp on the steppes of Northwest Kazakhstan, established in 1939, was the largest of such camps.[12] As well as confining women to camps that specialised in certain branches of industry or that confined a certain type of prisoner, single sex camps were also used in order to avoid the disruption of production and discipline that resulted from situations where male and female zones were contiguous. The two women's camps described below by Margarete Buber-Neumann and Elinor Lipper provide typical examples of the conditions in which women lived in single sex camps.

Living conditions in the camps

Burma women's camp had no real streets, only tracks made by oxen. There were no fences surrounding the general camp, but prisoners who managed to get further than half a kilometre from the camp boundary were shot without warning in the 'forbidden zone'.[13] The single storey barracks were made of yellow-brown clay and had very low roofs. The walls were rough and were a haven for bedbugs, fleas and other vermin. The windows were tiny and missing panes were replaced with clay. No bedclothes or mattresses were provided by the authorities to make the narrow, rough sleeping shelves more comfortable,[14] although government regulations stated that each prisoner should have at least a blanket.[15] At times, the camp could become so full that prisoners were accommodated in the bathhouse.

The camp did not have a laundry. Instead, during the late 1930s, women washed their clothes while working in the fields, using water from troughs meant for oxen. Women who were being punished spent time in the disciplinary barrack. Surrounded by barbed wire, this barrack was filthy and covered with human excrement because very often prisoners did not make the effort to visit the latrine, itself only a trench within the confined area. The disciplinary barrack was very small, but could accommodate anything from 50 to several hundred prisoners, all trying to sleep on loosely joined planks of wood of various thickness.[16]

El'gen was the women's camp of the Northeast Corrective Labour Camps at Kolyma. It was named after the Yakut word for 'dead'. At the entrance to the El'gen settlement was a wooden arch painted green with a red lettered inscription 'Long live the Great Stalin'. The whole camp was surrounded by a high wooden palisade crowned by barbed wire, with another two rows of barbed wire outside the palisade.

Guards kept watch in wooden watchtowers placed at the corners. The prisoners' barracks were single-storey huts made of planks covered with ragged tar board. Peat was used to fill in the spaces between the boards. The huts measured between 20 and 22 metres long and between 7 and 8 metres wide, and contained approximately 100 inmates. The windows in the barracks were fixed so that they could not be opened, and storm windows were not used, despite the fact that the temperature in winter sometimes dropped to 70 or 80 degrees below zero. The barracks also contained an iron stove with an arrangement of cords over it for hanging wet clothes, shoes and foot wraps. Clothes had to be dried overnight on this contraption. Since it was forbidden to dry them during the day, prisoners on the night shift were unable to dry their garments at all.

Each prisoner had a mattress, usually containing no straw and rarely hay, since there was not even enough hay for the cattle. Instead, the mattress contained wood shavings or extra clothes. However, at El'gen a woollen blanket and a pillow case, without a pillow, were issued to each prisoner. Two sheets were also distributed: one for everyday use and one that could be used to dress up the barracks should any visitors arrive. The barracks also had an overhead electric bulb, but electricity at El'gen was highly capricious and usually just a faint glow was evident. At midnight, the electricity was turned off, except for the floodlights and in the guardroom.

There was a small washroom in the barracks that was partitioned off by a few boards. Water was kept in a tin container and trickled out through three holes. Situated underneath was a narrow tin basin with a drain in the centre. Dirty water flowed into a pail underneath the drain. In order that water flowed out only when required, small iron rods with iron discs at both ends could be moved over the holes. The iron rod was pushed up and water caught in the hand. However, if there was no pail available, prisoners were not allowed to wash. The latrine consisted of a long single lavatory made of planks.[17]

The fact that El'gen was so different to Burma reflects the general situation of the camps. Although instructions were issued from the central Gulag administration on every aspect of camp life, the instructions were not always followed at local level and conditions in all of the camps varied greatly.

El'gen also had a number of small, subsidiary punishment camps, to which women could be sent for crimes ranging from continued failure to fulfil their norms of work to pocketing a potato during the harvest. One of these disciplinary camps was 'Kilometre Seven', situated, as its

name suggests, seven kilometres from El'gen, where four men and one wolfhound guarded 40 women.[18] In 1939, this was considered to be the most terrible punishment camp in the area. Reveille was at five o'clock in the morning. The women were sent to work tree-felling and were not driven back from the forest until eight o'clock in the evening. The penalty isolator in the camp was a long shack resembling a public lavatory. Prisoners were not allowed to go out of the barracks at night to go to the toilet and no latrine bucket was provided. At night, the prisoners in the cell had to take turns sitting on the three logs that served as bunks.[19]

Myalga punishment camp was situated 18 kilometres from El'gen. This camp had its own disciplinary camp, Izvestkovoye, where women worked in gypsum quarries.[20] Women who failed to fulfil their norm of work were accommodated in an unheated tent in the winter, but they were allowed to go outside to run around. During the summer, they lived in an unprotected wattle shack where they were attacked by mosquitoes.[21]

Even in single sex camps, women were not spared the attentions of male guards and trusties. According to official regulations, on entry into a camp, all prisoners had to undergo 'sanitary processing', which consisted of shaving the head, going to the baths and having clothes disinfected to remove lice. Female prisoners had their heads shaved for medical reasons, if the hair was infested with lice, nits or if there was abundant dandruff, for example. Shaving of the pubis was only to be undertaken by an authorised doctor if lice were found in this area. All other sanitary arrangements for women were supposed to be carried out by a female medical officer, or, as a last resort, by a person of either sex who was at least familiar with women's affairs.[22] In 1934 this ruling was altered so that in the absence of a female doctor, a member of either sex from the medical personnel could carry out the procedure.[23] Although, theoretically, women prisoners were supposed to be shaved by female members of staff, in reality, male guards and doctors were always present in the bathhouse and women were not allowed to attend to their personal needs in privacy. Very rarely did a female doctor attend to women. Lipper reports, for example, that there were usually no female barbers in the women's camps at Kolyma in the late 1930s.[24] Grankina, however, reports that at Vladivostok transit camp in 1939 the women produced female hairdressers from their own company and persuaded the administration to be allowed to carry out this procedure themselves.[25] The whole procedure was often

unhygienic. Lipper reports that in Kolyma prisoners shaved with a single dull razor that was neither washed nor disinfected between persons.[26] Official instructions specified that shaving instruments should be disinfected regularly, but this was seldom done.[27]

Despite prophylactic orders from Moscow for the complete segregation of the sexes, women and men were, nevertheless, sometimes interned in mixed camps. They were separated only by a barrier, such as a fence or barbed wire. For example, at Solovki in 1929, women lived in an ancient, run-down, timber hostel outside the kremlin wall. It was in such a state that no shelves or bunks could be put up for fear of the walls collapsing.[28] In the early 1930s, women at Arman in Kolyma were housed in new but very damp barracks that leaked very badly. They had no mattresses, but each woman was given a large bag that could be filled with shavings. They also received a pillowcase, if they had a pillow of their own, and a blanket.[29] Although women and men were housed separately, they had common eating rooms.[30]

In mixed camps, women's experiences at the hands of male guards, trusties and fellow male prisoners were even more harrowing. According to camp legend, during their first sanitary processing virgins could be identified by the jailers. The camp authorities, jailers and prisoners with comfortable jobs pursued the virgins, paying prizes for the rape of the most resistant. Hardened criminals played cards for them, and used the women as bets and prizes.[31]

When the women returned to their barracks after the sanitary processing, the guards and trusties often made their choices. These 'choices' were then invited to visit them. If the women accepted, they were employed in easier jobs: in the medical section, kitchen, bookkeeping office, sewing shop or laundry, for example. Women who refused were sometimes sent to do hard labour. According to Solzhenitsyn's account, if a woman decided to take up one of these opportunities at a later date, she was made to walk naked down the aisles of the men's barracks repeating the utterance 'half a kilo' (of bread).[32] In 1930 at Solovki, women who resisted debauchery were transferred to Anzerskii island punishment camp. From there, they were sent to distant camps where the conditions became steadily worse.[33] In general, obvious old age and ugliness were a woman's only defence. Attractiveness was a curse. On arrival, new prisoners were usually warned by experienced women and soon learnt the rules of survival – keep to the barrack after dark or find a protector among the guards or criminals. Many women, however, took advantage of their

sexuality in order to obtain extra rations, and one of the most successful moves a woman could make to ensure her survival was to become the servant to the camp commander.

The rape and sexual assault of women prisoners were common occurrences. Memoir materials, however, also report that women sometimes raped men. For example, there are reports from the Yaya women's camp in Novosibirsk of instances when male prisoners were sent on official business, such as hauling water, only to be gang raped by the criminal female prisoners.[34]

In general, women lived in squalid conditions, with no proper facilities to keep their bodies or clothes clean. They often lived in fear of their lives, as they were frequently abused and mistreated by guards and other men in the camps. To make matters worse, although many of the camps were in remote areas with hostile climates, clothing for prisoners was far from adequate. All prisoners were supposed to be supplied with clothing appropriate to the weather and working conditions.[35] A decree of 7 April 1930 stated that prisoners in the camps were to be provided with clothing, footwear, linen and bedding as necessary. Prisoners who did not have suitable footwear or clothing could not be accepted for work.[36] Government regulations, therefore, specified the exact clothing norms for prisoners. However, the actual clothing issued depended very much on the camp administration and varied between camps.

For example, according to archival data dated May 1935, which deals with the Svirlag camps situated on the Svir river in the Leningrad region, female prisoners were supposed to receive the following items: a pair of boots, a headscarf, a pair of summer bloomers, a dress, a soldier's shirt, two pairs of summer stockings, a skirt, a pair of woollen mittens, a pair of gloves, paper foot wraps and a padded jacket.[37] It is not known if prisoners actually received these items. Lipper reports that at Kolyma in the late 1930s, prisoners were clothed in a satisfactory manner, thereby indicating that sometimes instructions *were* followed closely. Women in the Kolyma region received a thin linen undershirt, short linen underpants, a cotton print blouse, a cotton summer shirt, long padded winter trousers, a grey checked cotton summer kerchief, a dark flannel winter shawl, a padded jacket, mosquito netting for the summer, wadded winter mittens and a pair of men's shoes made from artificial leather.[38]

However, not all prisoners were so lucky; many received inadequate, poor quality and ill-fitting clothing, if they received any at all. For

example, Tsipora Moiseevna Kozhana reports that at Potma in 1938, she received size 43 boots although she took a size 36, and a size 52 jacket although she was only a size 46. The skirt that she received was made of a coarse, peasant-type material. Kerchiefs for the head were sometimes available, as well as cotton shorts, without elastic. Women were also issued with blouses of a light summer material, grey flannel caps and stockings.[39]

Despite official recommendations, in reality there was frequently little clothing available in the camps. When working outdoors in winter, prisoners protected themselves from the cold through an elaborate system of wrapped rags and strings that were worn in addition to the other items of clothing. Many prisoners did not undress at night for fear that their clothes, put together with difficulty, would simply disintegrate.[40] Bras were not provided; women either had to use the one that they were wearing when arrested for the whole of their time spent in the camp or were compelled somehow to make their own.[41] Some prisoners did not receive any clothes at all and continued to wear the clothes in which they had been arrested, even if these were totally inappropriate for life in the camp. Khava Vladimirova Volovich, for example, states that in 1937 she was wearing bedroom slippers and a light dress.[42] According to other memoir sources, in Solovki in 1929, there was no proper clothing available to distribute among the prisoners when their own clothes had disintegrated, and as a result some of the female prisoners went about naked.[43]

Clothing was sometimes issued in accordance with the amount of the allocated work quota fulfilled, and the most hard-working often received better clothing than other prisoners. For example, Sofya Sergeevna Potresova states that in 1940 at Siblag in the Novosibirsk region of Siberia, female shock-workers were issued with clothes of the correct size. They were given a padded jacket, a flannelette dress, a skirt, a blouse, stockings, male and female underwear, footcloths, leather mining boots with leather soles and bast sandals.[44]

Sexual relations in the camps

Male prisoners, of course, also suffered. Their struggle for existence already demanded much of their energy. Living under such poor conditions, it could be supposed that the idea of sexual relations would be of little interest to many prisoners. However, prisoners in a better state

of health, who were not hungry and who did not have to struggle too hard for existence, were often still sexually active. Sexual relations between male and female prisoners, and between prisoners and free workers, frequently took place, despite the fact that they were strictly prohibited. Officials at the camps welcomed the prohibition as it gave them additional means of control. Transgressions meant enforced separation. However, liaisons were often ignored if one of the couple was a trusty, close to the chiefs or much needed at work. If the prisoners were insignificant or in disfavour, they were cruelly punished.[45] Free citizens often made desirable partners because they could provide the prisoners with bread and food. Many free workers preferred not to take their wives and family into barren, inhospitable areas of the country, such as Kolyma, where cold weather, scurvy and vodka drinking made everyday life extremely unaccommodating. Many young, unmarried, sexually active men were specifically picked to go to such places. Despite the threat of severe punishment, it proved impossible to prevent sexual relationships between free workers and prisoners, or between prisoners themselves.[46]

In 1929, for the purposes of encouraging prisoner efforts, imprisoned men and women who were production record holders were allowed to marry. This privilege was not extended to those prisoners convicted under Article 58 and the practice was short lived.[47] Despite this, it is clear that some prisoners developed loving, lasting ties. Sometimes, 'camp marriages' took place. This simply meant that two people of the opposite sex could be intimately involved with each other, regardless of prohibitions. Occasionally, camp spouses got married officially years later if they were both released.

Many women prisoners became pregnant as a result of sexual liaisons in the camps. Abortion was legal within the camp zones, officially on medical grounds or in the interest of preventing disease. No evidence has yet come to light to indicate whether abortion was prohibited in the prison camps after it was declared illegal in free society from 1936. Archival sources reveal that forced labour camp officials, such as those in Temlag in Mordovia, were criticised by the central Gulag administration when the decision to carry out an abortion was passed to higher authorities. Memoranda dating from the early 1930s indicate that the lower levels of the administration should deal with such matters since the higher authorities had more important issues to deal with.[48] Abortions were often carried out in the camp hospital, sometimes without the consent of the woman involved.[49] However, not all pregnancies were terminated.

Motherhood in the camps

Special concessions were made for pregnant women and nursing mothers in the camps, and these were often comparable to, and sometimes better than, the maternity provisions granted to free women.[50] Archival data suggest that until the beginning of 1939, pregnant women and nursing mothers in agricultural camps were released from work for one month before and one month after the birth. Elsewhere women were released from work for two months either side of the birth. After three months of pregnancy, until she was released from work and also while nursing a child, a woman was permitted to do less strenuous work if she had previously been employed in hard labour.[51] However, this law was changed on 10 January 1939. It was then decreed that women would have 35 days off work before the birth and 28 days after the birth had taken place.[52]

Archival data similarly state that a woman in her last month of pregnancy was supposed to receive supplementary rations in the form of extra white, black or wheat bread, macaroni, semolina, meat, fish, butter, milk, vegetables, potatoes and sugar.[53] Unfortunately, to date I have not been able to locate detailed data for the standard rations to which women prisoners were officially entitled, and there is only patchy information regarding the rations for male inmates. Bread was the basic ration. Men received on average between 300 and 1000 grams daily, depending on the camp, the year, the percentage of the work norm fulfilled and the social status of the prisoner. Archival data also indicate that macaroni, oil, animal fat, confectionery, sugar and various tinned foods were to be distributed to prisoners.[54] Memoir materials indicate that rations were far from adequate. They had a very low calorific value and fat content. Frequently prisoners survived on a diet of poor quality bread, thin and watery camp soup and porridge made of barley, oatmeal, wheat or millet. It is generally acknowledged that women received smaller rations than their male fellow prisoners and, therefore, the possibility of receiving supplementary rations acted as an important incentive to become pregnant.

In 1938, official regulations stated that babies could be breast-fed by their natural mothers for anything up to nine months. So far, no data have been found to indicate precisely the situation prevailing before 1938. The introduction of solid food into the baby's diet began between five and six months. When solid food was introduced into a baby's diet, nursing mothers returned to normal camp rations.[55] However, this rule was changed just one year later in 1939 when it was

announced that women could breast-feed their babies for six months only. Orphan children were fed by wet nurses among the nursing mothers.[56]

Mothers and their newborn babies and children were not usually accommodated together after the first few days. Women were subject to a strict set of rules and regulations concerning the feeding and visiting of their children. A child was taken away from its mother and to a nursery within the camp zone a number of days after the birth. From then on, a nursing mother could enter the nursery only at strictly specified feeding times. Official regulations issued in 1938 stated that until the child was three months old, seven visits per day were allowed. For children aged between three and five months, visits were reduced to six times a day, and from five months old, there were just five visits per day. Babies were usually breast-fed for the first five months of their lives. Then a starchy jelly made of milk and oatmeal was gradually introduced into the diet.[57] From the age of ten months, babies were weaned off breast milk and jelly, with the exception of sick children, who were breast-fed over a longer period. The average rations for children of nursery age (that is, children from the age of one year and two months to four years) usually consisted of white and black bread, macaroni, semolina, buckwheat, rice, meat, eggs, milk, cottage cheese, *smetana* (a type of sour cream), dried and fresh fruit, cakes or biscuits, vegetables, potatoes, tea, condiments, sugar and butter.[58]

In order to obtain access to the feeding room, nursing mothers had to show a pass to the guards, both on entry into and exit from the building. The women were prohibited from entering any other part of the building. Before entering the feeding room, they were instructed to wash their hands, breasts and nipples and to remove their dressing gowns. They were permitted to stay in the feeding room for a maximum of 30 minutes, during which time silence had to be maintained. Talking and squabbling were prohibited and the nursing mothers had to be polite to all members of staff in the home at all times. Coarse language and swearing were also prohibited. Nursing mothers were instructed to carry out any orders given by the doctors and nursing staff and were subjected to a full medical examination once every ten days. A mother who was not breast-feeding her child was permitted to see her baby only on the sixth and twenty-fourth day of each month between the hours of five and six in the evening. Any mother who violated the established order in the home by failing to observe the correct procedures and behaving in an unsatisfactory or

hooliganistic manner towards staff and children could have all rights to visit her baby revoked.[59]

Lipper's reminiscences about the treatment of pregnant women at El'gen during the late 1930s compares favourably with the instructions issued by the central Gulag administration. She states that women were not allowed to chop wood from the sixth month of pregnancy and, in winter, they shovelled snow instead. During spring and summer, women worked in the fields. During the last month of pregnancy they were relieved of work, placed in the highest ration category and received an extra 600 grams of bread daily. After the birth, the mother and child stayed together for one week and then the child was sent to the nursery in the camp. The mother was not obliged to work for one month after the birth. After that, she was sent to work near the nursery so that she could nurse the baby for nine months. The babies were brought into the nursing room or a special visiting room because nursing mothers were not allowed into the children's rooms. After nine months of nursing, the mother had the right to see her child for two hours a month if she remained at El'gen or nearby. However, during the late 1930s the camp commander suspended the visiting entitlements from May to September because she claimed that prisoners could not be released from fieldwork.[60] Incidentally, this is the only reference to a woman camp commander found in the memoir literature used in the preparation of this study. Her name was Valentina Mikhailovna Zimmermann. She was nicknamed 'The Pike' due to her protruding teeth, and was reputed to be a tyrant.

Evgenia Ginzburg, referring to El'gen camp, also reports that several times a day the women were allowed to feed their children in the nursery. She states that after a few weeks, however, the doctor would announce that lactation had ceased and the mother would return to normal labour, very often in a different area of the camp.[61] Buber-Neumann reports that at Burma camp in 1938, women and children were kept together in the barracks for a short period after the birth. There were special rooms in the barracks for nursing mothers where their babies slept in wooden boxes suspended by rope from the ceiling. Women detained under short sentences, usually criminals, could stay with their children until the end of their sentences.[62]

Children were supposedly able to leave the nursery if their parents reached the end of their sentence. However, if children reached the age of four years before their mother was released they were usually sent to NKVD children's homes in the camp zone.[63] Memoir accounts indicate

that in the period from 1936 to 1937 the presence of children in the camps was recognised as deleterious to the discipline and productivity of the imprisoned mothers. Therefore, on reaching one year of age, children were sometimes sent to an NKVD children's home either outside the camp zone or within the zone. Thereafter, the mothers were not allowed to see their children.

Rossi reports that the forced relocation of children in the camps was planned and executed like an actual military operation so that the mothers were taken by surprise. Usually it was done in the middle of the night, but it was rare that the heart-rending scenes, where crazed mothers threw themselves upon the jailers and the barbed wire fences, were avoided. The compound could shudder for a long time with the mothers' howling, while camp discipline and labour productivity dropped noticeably.[64] In contrast, other memoirs indicate that the relocation of children was undertaken in a more peaceful manner. In 1938 at Vorkuta-Rudnik, when the children reached two years of age they were sent to the children's home in the town. Nikolai Glazov describes a scene where the mothers stood on the bank of the river to wave goodbye to their children. The children's departure was accompanied by three musicians playing a balalaika, a guitar and a mandolin.[65] Usually no address for the child was included in the mother's personal file and consequently, following release, a mother rarely succeeded in finding her child.

Life in the camps and Soviet society

In some ways, the forced labour camps can be seen as a microcosm of broader Soviet society, which itself experienced extensive changes in the 1930s. From the end of the 1920s, the Soviet state instigated an economic revolution of unprecedented speed and magnitude. Industrial workers were subject to increasing direction and militarisation of labour during the 1930s, and many different types of incentives were introduced to encourage increases in productivity. Although rapid industrialisation brought workers certain benefits, such as virtually full employment, it also created serious hardships.

The immediate priority for most free workers during the 1930s remained sheer survival. The overcrowded and poor living conditions, as well as the shortages of both food and clothing that were common in the camps, were not unknown in free society. Between 1928 and 1933, the standard of living in the cities, towns and villages of the

Soviet Union declined rapidly. The numbers of people living in the cities and towns shot up, and there was a severe urban housing crisis during the 1930s. There was a sharp decline in the average amount of living space per person. In addition, many cities were not provided with basic services or amenities, such as bathhouses, water and sewage systems.[66]

As Fitzpatrick has recently illustrated, all types of consumer goods, including clothes and shoes, were in short supply in society at large.[67] This was because the state's production priorities were strongly weighted in favour of heavy industry rather than the production of consumer goods. The goods that were available were often of very poor quality. Queues and shortages were the hallmarks of the period.

There was a severe famine in the Soviet Union in 1933 that took millions of lives. In most areas in the early 1930s bread was in short supply, and after the drive for the collectivisation of agriculture, the availability of meat and dairy products in free society fell sharply. In outlining the food situation, Fitzpatrick has indicated that,

> Per capita urban consumption of meat and lard in 1932 was less than a third of what it had been in 1928.
>
> In 1933 … the average married worker in Moscow consumed less than half the amount of bread and flour than his [sic] counterpart in Petersburg had consumed at the beginning of the twentieth century and under two-thirds the amount of sugar. His [sic] diet included virtually no fats, very little milk and fruit, and a mere fifth of the meat and fish consumed at the turn of the century.[68]

It was often difficult to obtain goods, either because there were simply not enough to go round or because the agencies that distributed them did so extremely corruptly.[69]

In many respects, the social conditions in the forced labour camps followed the pattern of free society. The prisoners were regimented and disciplined, and material incentives were used to encourage them to work harder. The main exceptions were the years 1937 and 1938, when civilian conditions improved markedly while conditions within the camp system deteriorated greatly. The camps, in general, followed the pattern of the worst aspects of life under Stalin in the 1930s, such as poor housing, cramped conditions, shortages of essential goods, such as clothing and soap, and inadequate nutrition. The regime's proven willingness to punish was also a part of civilian life. Many people in free society, it could be argued, lived in a constant state of fear.

In other respects, and with few exceptions, conditions in the camps were far worse than those in free society. The mortality rate in the camps was three to four times that of the civilian population for the same age cohorts. According to data collected by Wheatcroft, the level of mortality in the camps was over ten times higher than that of the civilian population in 1933 and 1938.[70] Housing conditions and the supply of food and clothing were far worse for prisoners. In society at large, bread was not rationed after 1934 and different types of housing were available. In the camps, barracks were almost universal.

The closest resemblance to the camps in society at large was at the big construction sites, such as Magnitogorsk, where barracks, tents and sometimes even mud huts were the only accommodation for workers. In the camps, as on the large construction sites, men and women were usually housed in separate barracks, although shared living quarters were sometimes in evidence. Overcrowding, both in the labour camps and on civilian construction sites, was common, with beds often being used in shifts. Unlike the camps, however, even in Magnitogorsk, the work force could, and did, leave.[71]

A significant difference between society at large and camp life was that the camps did not contain families that lived together, except very rarely. Families were usually to be found only in special settlements. In the camps, most of the prisoners were men. The female minority was housed separately and there were few children. Any close bond between mother and child was discouraged and the children were removed from the camp zone. Although camp 'marriages' did take place, they bore no resemblance to the typical family unit to be found in the rest of society.

For women in particular, the social conditions in the camps had both similarities to and differences from the rest of society. For example, the concentration of women in specific industries in the labour camps reflected the distribution of female labour in 'free' society, where women were employed predominantly in light industries, with a trend towards increased employment in the heavy industrial sectors during the 1930s.[72]

In some cases, the labour camps may have afforded women more extensive entitlements than women had in free society. In the example of maternity leave, the legislation and recommendations that were introduced for urban industrial workers, and subsequently extended to the forced labour camps, were not offered to peasant women working on collective farms. *Kolkhoz* women (and female prisoners working on agricultural land) were only entitled to a reduced period of maternity

leave, and this was not introduced until 1935. Although women in the camps did not receive paid maternity leave, the duration of maternity leave was the same as for urban industrial workers. In free society employers often evaded the maternity regulations by failing to transfer pregnant women to easier work or to set aside designated space and hygienic conditions in which nursing mothers could feed their babies, for example.[73] On the basis of this example, it could even be argued that the provisions for female prisoners were sometimes superior to those of free workers.

On the other hand, the subjection to filth and squalor in the camps must have caused many women much anguish. In addition, since women constituted less than 9 per cent of the camp population, their lives were often made more miserable by the constant, often undesired, attention of men, especially the better-fed guards and criminals.

Conclusion

This particularly cruel, harsh and arbitrary penal system did not necessarily provide a one-way ticket to oblivion for all inmates. Although there is no doubt that many prisoners were unable to adapt, some were dynamic and capable of creating mechanisms of self-defence that helped them to fight for their lives. An air of camaraderie was often evident, especially among female prisoners, who willingly shared scarce clothing and food.[74] Some prisoners were capable of hope and of giving at least the appearances of optimism in a hopeless situation. Prisoners who retained a will to survive, both intellectually and mentally, sought different means to improve the quality of their life. The instinct of self-preservation was very strong in many prisoners. The memoir literature illustrates that it was possible to survive, and there is an evident sense of humanity in their desire to tell others about the experience of life in the Soviet concentration camps of the 1930s. Many women, as well as men, felt it their duty and moral obligation to live to tell their first-hand stories of the labour camp regime.[75]

Notes

1. This chapter was prepared with the help of Melanie Ilič.
2. Although physical labour obviously played a major part in camp life, an analysis of the work performed by women is more directly concerned with the economic activity of the camps, and will not be discussed here. The

major concern of this chapter is with everyday life in the camps, outside of working hours. The information discussed here relates only to prison camps and, therefore, does not include special settlements and labour colonies.

3 S. Vilensky (ed.), *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1999). This is a rich source of accounts of women's lives in the labour camps, but, unfortunately, there is not room to detail these memoirs here.

4 A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: 1918–56* (London, 1975), and J. Rossi, *The GULag Handbook* (New York, 1989)

5 These data obviously do not reflect the sex structure of the Soviet Union's free population. In 1937 women constituted the majority, 52.6 per cent, of the population. J. Arch Getty, G.T. Rittersporn and V.N. Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-war Years: a First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence', *American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 4, 1993, p. 1025.

6 For details of Article 58 see, R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London, 1968) appendix G, pp. 741–6.

7 Rossi, op. cit., p. 251.

8 To date, there are no available figures to indicate the breakdown between criminal and political female prisoners. However, it is known that in 1934, 34.5 per cent of the total camp population were 'political' prisoners, in 1935 – 27.3 per cent, in 1936 – 24.4 per cent, in 1937 – 25.4 per cent and in 1938 – 34.7 per cent. In 1939, the 'political' prisoners constituted 56.2 per cent of the camp population, and on 1 April 1940 the figure was 50.3 per cent. Zemskov, 'Zaklyuchennye v 1930–e gody: sotsial'no-demograficheskie problemy', *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, no. 4, 1997, p. 69.

9 The concentration of women in these industries reflects the labour of women in 'free' society.

10 Rossi, op. cit., pp. 515–16.

11 Ibid., p. 263.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 M. Buber-Neumann, *Als Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler* (Munich, 1962) p. 65.

14 Ibid., p. 71.

15 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 1913, l. 9. Dated 13 December 1933.

16 Buber-Neumann, op. cit., pp. 65–75.

17 E. Lipper, *Eleven Years in Soviet Prison Camps* (London, 1950) pp. 124–31.

18 R. Conquest, *Kolyma: the Arctic Death Camps* (London, 1978) p. 192.

19 E. Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind* (London, 1967) pp. 306–9.

20 Lipper, op. cit., p. 132. Date unspecified.

21 Solzhenitsyn, op. cit., p. 128.

22 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2741, l. 29. Dated 5 December 1933. See also: Memorial, f. 2, o. 1, d. 50, l. 20 (1938), Arkardii Grigor'evich Grosman, where the author states that amenorrhoea was a very common complaint amongst women.

23 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2743, l. 3. Dated 16 January 1934.

24 Lipper, op. cit., p. 83. Both memoir literature and archival information indicate that prisoners went to the baths at least two or three times a month.

25 Vilensky, op. cit., pp. 135–6.

26 Lipper, op. cit., p. 83.

27 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2743, l. 3. Dated 16 January 1934.

28 O. Dmitrievna, *Red Gaols: a Woman's Experiences in Russia's Prisons* (London, 1935) p. 41.
29 D.J. Dallin, *The Real Soviet Russia* (London, 1947) p. 156.
30 Z. Zajdlerowa, *The Dark Side of the Moon* (Hemel Hempstead, 1989) p. 122.
31 Rossi, op. cit., p. 171.
32 Solzhenitsyn, op. cit., pp. 230–3.
33 Ibid., p. 57.
34 Rossi, op. cit., p. 516.
35 Ibid., p. 256.
36 A. Pim and E. Bateson, *Report on Russian Timber Camps* (London, 13 May 1931) p. 40.
37 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 9, ll. 105–6. Dated May 1935.
38 Lipper, op. cit., pp. 134–7. Lipper also states that many items of protective clothing were usually unavailable. People, therefore, went to great lengths not to expose the skin. They made long trousers from sacks and tied the trousers around their ankles before they put on their boots. Prisoners were very resourceful in the face of adversity.
39 Memorial, f. 2, o. 1, d. 73, l. 14 (1938): Tsipora Moiseevna Kozhana, Potma (Temlag) 1937.
40 G. Herling, *A World Apart* (London, 1986) p. 34.
41 Rossi, op. cit., p. 257.
42 Memorial, f. 2, o. 1, d. 36, l. 38 (1937): Khava Vladimirova Volovich, camp unspecified.
43 Dmitrievna, op. cit., p. 55.
44 Memorial, f. 2, o. 1, d. 97, ll. 1–2 (1937): Sofya Sergeevna Potresova.
45 Solzhenitsyn, op. cit., pp. 240–1.
46 Lipper, op. cit., pp. 158–9. Date unspecified.
47 Rossi, op. cit., pp. 116–17.
48 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2741, l. 26. Dated 15 June 1933. Document number 551629, point nine. Dated 27 August 1932.
49 Rossi, op. cit., p. 525. Date unspecified.
50 For the concessions granted to pregnant women and nursing mothers in free society, see M. Ilič, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: from 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London, 1999) especially ch. 5.
51 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2753, l. 129. Dated 2 April 1938.
52 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2756, l. 3. Dated 10 January 1939.
53 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2753, l. 131. Dated 2 April 1938.
54 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 1913, l. 5. Date unspecified. See also E. Mason, 'A Social Analysis of the Soviet Prison Camps of the 1930s', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2000, ch. 6.
55 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2753, l. 129. Dated 2 April 1938.
56 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2756, l. 593. Dated 10 November 1939.
57 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2756, l. 191. Date unspecified.
58 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2753, l. 52. Date unspecified.
59 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2756, l. 198. Dated 24 February 1939.
60 Lipper, op. cit., pp. 119–23.
61 Ginzburg, op. cit., pp. 301–3.
62 Buber-Neumann, op. cit., p. 71. See also, Solzhenitsyn, op. cit., p. 245, where the author reports that religious women often wished their children

to be christened. A crucifix could either be sent secretly in a parcel or else received in return for bread. It was also possible to get a ribbon for the cross and to make a fancy child's vest. By saving up sugar from the ration, the women managed to make christening cake. Date unspecified.

63 GARF, f. 9414, o. 1, d. 2756, l. 591. Dated 10 November 1939.

64 Rossi, op. cit., pp. 213–14.

65 Memorial, Nikolai Glazov, l. 110. Dated 1936.

66 On urban expansion and housing conditions, see S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999) pp. 41–2, 46–50.

67 Ibid., pp. 42–5.

68 Ibid., p. 41.

69 On 'speculation', see ibid., pp. 59–62.

70 S. Wheatcroft, 'The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930–45', *Europe–Asia Studies*, vol. 48, no. 8, 1996, pp. 1346–8.

71 On living conditions at Magnitogorsk, see S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (London, 1995) pp. 157–97.

72 On the general trends in women's employment during the 1930s, see Ilič, op. cit., ch. 3, and for the specific distribution of women workers in Leningrad industries in this period see Chapter 5 by Sarah Davies in this volume.

73 On the infringement of maternity entitlements in free society, see Ilič, op. cit., pp. 69–71, 77.

74 See, for example, Memorial, f. 2, o. 1, d. 5, ll. 100–3 (1938), Antsis.

75 See, for example, Vilensky, op. cit.

8

The Untold Story of the *Obshchestvennitsa* in the 1930s[1]

Mary Buckley

If one takes two popular and opposing perspectives on study of the 1930s, one is left with competing claims about the nature of the Communist Party. Totalitarian approaches hold that the party was hierarchical, well organised, everywhere dominant and in control, running state and society 'from above'. Thus, there was no space for initiative or spontaneity 'from below' that was not in some way channelled, directed, monitored and controlled by the party. If initiative developed at all, according to the logic of the system, it was destined to be politically insignificant if not shaped by the party because otherwise it would be quashed. The general picture here is one of homogeneous relationships of power and authority of polity over society across the Soviet land mass. Society is conflated with state, or at strongest dominated by it.[2]

A counter-interpretation coming from what its critics dub 'revisionist history' is that the Communist Party was not necessarily well organised, omnipotent and omnipresent. There was both chaos and heterogeneity in the implementation of policy. Furthermore, although a civil society certainly did not exist, and notwithstanding the fact that a highly authoritarian and coercive one-party state, 'armed with Marxism-Leninism', was attempting to exert 'total control' over society, initiatives, pressures and reactions from society gave rise to local variations in how policy was 'made'.[3]

Study of the *obshchestvennitsa* tends to support the latter perspective. The *obshchestvennitsa* was a 'public spirited woman' or 'female activist', often married to a manager, an engineer, a Stakhanovite or a member of the armed forces. In the 1930s she was most likely to be a member of the *dvizhenie zhen,* or movement of wives, composed of thousands who laboured without pay in hostels, canteens, nurseries,

kindergartens, schools, hospitals, factories, offices and mines. The *obshchestvennitsy* in the *dvizhenie zhen* also committed themselves to supporting husbands in the labour force in a range of ways, to aiding both male and female Stakhanovites and to attracting other workers into Stakhanovism. Their contribution in the 1930s to the *perestroika* of *byt* (reconstruction of daily life), economy and cultural enlightenment was varied and organised through a local council of wives *(sovet zhen),* a council of wife activists *(sovet zhen-obshchestvennits)* or council of women activists *(sovet obshchestvennits)*. Although the terms '*obshchestvennik'* and '*obshchestvennitsa'* refer generally to men and women engaged in socially useful activity, in the late 1930s the use of *obshchestvennitsa* became synonymous with a member of the *dvizhenie zhen*. As an analytical category, however, the concept '*obshchestvennitsa'* was potentially much broader than the *dvizhenie zhen,* but all members of the wives' movement were called *obshchestvennitsy*. This chapter discusses only those *obshchestvennitsy* who were in the wives' movement.

The argument that the activities of the *obshchestvennitsa* in part challenge totalitarian approaches is based on the observation that although this 'public spirited woman' generally behaved in accordance with party priorities, she still found some room for personal initiative. Notwithstanding the fact that the broader *dvizhenie zhen* in which she participated was officially applauded by the regime, the various women's groups within it had latitude to set their own tasks. Attempts by the party to direct the movement did not stop its members from defining their pursuits. Despite common patterns in the *obshchestvennitsa*'s behaviour, especially in Central Russia, Ukraine, the Urals and Western Siberia, where she was especially active, variations were evident. Moreover, the local party often ignored her, failing to give support or encouragement. Thus, a case cannot be made that the party everywhere guided, directed or controlled. Primary sources indicate a range of reactions from supportive local parties to hostile ones. The same applies to trade union organs and to factory committees. One is left with a contrast between the officially desirable behaviour of local parties and what their activists actually did. The regime may have attempted to direct the *obshchestvennitsa* 'from above' and to mobilise the wives' movement around its priorities, but success varied owing to differing levels of enthusiasm for the *obshchestvennitsa* in local party and trade union organisations.

Adherents of the totalitarian approach could legitimately retort that it did not really matter that the party and trade unions often ignored or

ridiculed the *obshchestvennitsa*. She was hardly a threat to the system, neither Menshevik, Trotskyite, right-wing deviationist, fascist lackey nor *kulak*. Her good deeds were not those of an 'enemy of the people' (although some *obshchestvennitsy* inevitably suffered in the purges).

Since, however, according to official ideology, the party and trade unions were supposed to encourage her endeavours in socialist construction, it matters very much for the totalitarian approach that this was not generally the case. Ideology did not guide, when it was meant to be determining. The local party often failed to direct the *obshchestvennitsa,* as instructed 'from above'. Democratic centralism did not operate effectively. Polity did not neatly and uniformly follow the patterns suggested by the totalitarian approach, even if some aspects of that approach were present. Moreover, the *obshchestvennitsa,* as part of society, when neglected but insistent, just got on with the tasks she had decided to perform as best she could. She did not fight against Soviet socialism, but she agitated within the system where, when and how she felt inspired so to do, with mixed results. Paradoxically, she often worked independently from political controls because the controllers, in their 'political blindness', had chosen to ignore her.

Most of the texts which examine the social, economic and political history of the Soviet 1930s ignore the *obshchestvennitsa*. Many wives' groups formed in late 1935 and in 1936, taking their cue from a Conference of Wives of Leaders in Metallurgy of the South, inspired by what became the famous names of Evgeniya Vesnik and Mariya Manaenkova.[4] Large numbers of wives from these different *sovety* came together at district, city and all-union conferences. Prominent examples include: the All-Union Conference of Wives of Leaders and Engineering-Technical Workers of Heavy Industry (May 1936); the All-Union Conference of Wives of Commanders and Leaders of the Red Army (December 1936); the All-Union Conference of Wives of Leaders and Engineering-Technical Workers of Light Industry (May 1937); and at the city level the Leningrad Conference of Wife Activists of the People's Commissariat of Light Industry (1939).[5] All-union conferences of wives were attended by top leaders, such as Stalin, Kalinin, Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze and Lyubimov, and also prominent figures such as Krupskaya. The movement had its own journal, *Obshchestvennitsa,* which gave extensive coverage to the women's activities and goals. It was in print from 1936 to 1941. Other journals, such as *Udarnitsa Urala, Krasnaya Sibiryachka, Rabotnitsa* and *Stakhanovets*, discussed the wives' concerns as well. Archival materials

in *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF) give insight into internal developments in the work of the wives of engineering-technical workers and into their relations with the trade union hierarchy.[6] The wives' movement spread from towns into the country-side, mainly to state farms, thanks to the presence of trade unions. Materials in GARF also provide data on rural areas.[7]

So far I have been unable to locate any all-union tables which show the precise number of the *obshchestvennitsy* in each industry according to republic, *oblast'* or *raion*. Rather, one finds passing references to 'thousands' in the broader movement or indications of the geographical spread of women in a given field, or specific figures for a given industry or particular factory in a specified year.[8] Since, however, the female activists were considered important enough by leaders to merit congresses, conferences, their own journal and some financial backing for their activities, it would be shortsighted to dismiss their relevance to Soviet history on the grounds that exact figures are wanting.

Up to the 1990s, the *obshchestvennitsa* received only passing mention in western literature in relation to other topics such as Stakhanovism or ideology, rather than in terms of the broad significance of the *dvizhenie zhen* to the 1930s or with regard to what the opportunities available to wives meant to them. Lewis Siegelbaum contended that the *obshchestvennitsy* were 'worthy ladies' pursuing philanthropy, and Francesco Benvenuti and Robert Maier, in separate works, viewed them as substitutes for trade unions.[9] In the 1990s, Sheila Fitzpatrick argued that the movement 'connected' the wives with society and inducted them into Soviet rituals, while Rebecca Balmas Neary interpreted the wives' activities as formulating a new and uniquely Soviet culture of daily life – a culture of social mothering.[10] I have assessed these contributions in detail elsewhere.[11] Suffice to say here that in my view the movement was complex, not limited to 'social mothering' or to Soviet rituals, broader than philanthropy and wider than activities pursued by trade unions. The object here is to pose the following introductory questions: how did ideology portray *obshchestvennitsa?* In what range of activities did female activists engage? What forms of resistance did *obshchestvennitsa* encounter? And what was the general significance of the movement for the state and for the activists?

I argue that although the *dvizhenie zhen* was encouraged 'from above' and was readily given a niche by ideologists, evidence suggests that what the women activists did was often decided by them, depending on local needs and perceptions, notwithstanding clear pointers from some party and trade union committees on what needed to be done.

Despite attempts by the regime of the 1930s to direct and shape activism, some women took initiatives without special guidance, sought ways of improving the daily life of others and appeared to enjoy their involvement in society, despite criticisms from other women and lack of encouragement from some in positions of authority.

Indeed, although top leaders called for the movement to be supported by managers, trade unionists and workers, primary sources suggest that its reception was mixed. Some managers and trade unionists encouraged, others ignored, blocked and ridiculed. Findings thus contribute to the conclusions of research in other areas that the way in which party and trade union committees implemented policy was not homogeneous. Variations obtained, suggesting party and trade union hierarchies which were not uniform or united. There was immense scope at the local level for not adhering to official policies. When ignored or insulted by those in positions of authority, some women complained to trade union leaders, to the press and journals. They stood up at conferences identifying the problems that beset them. They did not always passively accept their fate, although there are clear cases of *sovety* shrinking in size owing to local difficulties. The historical coincidence of the wives' movement with the purges inevitably meant that their criticisms fitted in with the prevailing culture of condemnation. They should not thus be automatically interpreted as indicating plucky women activists prepared to take on those who wronged them. Archival sources do not permit neat or definitive conclusions about the relationship between the wives' criticisms and the purge of local managers, trade union leaders and party officials.[12] They do, however, reveal the sorts of criticism that were made, thereby contributing to our understanding of local party and trade union behaviour and to the growing historiography of gender relations.

The *obshchestvennitsa* in ideology

Consistent with the general ideological emphasis of the 1930s on women as a 'great strength' and 'great army of labour',[13] the *obshchestvennitsa,* too, was regularly described at women's conferences as part of an 'army' which was 'great' and enthusiastically committed to its own growth. Wives in light industry declared:

> We want to say to you comrade Stalin: dear father, friend and teacher! The army of wife activists in light industry is great. We are applying all our strength to make it bigger, more united.[14]

Whereas ideology generally emphasised that women and men were building socialism 'side by side' and 'shoulder to shoulder' on an equal basis, performing similar tasks and enjoying equal opportunities,[15] ideology on the wives' movement likewise stressed 'together with our husbands we will push light industry forward'[16] but neglected to state that the *obshchestvennitsy* were unpaid and not enjoying equal opportunities. Instead, wives were cast as 'helpers' of men, which women in paid jobs never were. As one wife of an industrial specialist put it in *Udarnitsa Urala*:

> Specialists' wives recognised the deeply felt necessity of helping husbands on the cultural daily life front. All my dreams are connected with the work of my husband, for whom I want to be the first and best helper.[17]

Party leaders fostered this sentiment, especially in the wives of Stakhanovites. At the First Krai Conference of Stakhanovite Wives of the Northern Krai, held in 1936, krai first secretary D. Kontorin told the women present:

> You, as helpers of your husbands, of Stakhanovites, of honoured people in our country, must show how you surround the Stakhanovite with care and attention and create for him comfortable, cultured and happy leisure time at home.[18]

This coincided with the general encouragement of Ordzhonikidze, Commissar of Heavy Industry. In his speech of 14 December 1936 to wives of leaders of heavy industry 'On the Tasks of Women Activists', Ordzhonikidze noted:

> We demand only one thing from you today – to pay attention to improving more energetically culture, for cleanliness and relaxation in the daily life of the worker and engineer; to creating at home and at work such a situation that would make work and relaxation especially joyful.[19]

Ordzhonikidze gave prominence to the theme of promoting cleanliness, linking it to cultural level. He stressed that alongside excellent machinery and technology in the workplace was dirt. For example, dead rats at work were a sign of *beskul'tur'e* (lack of culture). Technological advance and cleanliness were out of step and women

could help rectify the latter. A similar problem existed in domestic life where 'in the homes of workers and employers there are still a lot of bed bugs'. This indicated *nekul'turnost'* (lack of culture). Wives were expected to do battle against 'uncultured' behaviour at their husbands' place of work and at home.[20]

Related to this, Ordzhonikidze argued that wives had a firm duty to help schools, kindergartens, canteens and restaurants attain 'a neat condition'. He insisted: 'you are obliged in this'. In addition, 'you must help in the instruction of workers' children'. Moreover, it was desirable to approach other women 'not as patrons, but like their own sisters, giving them knowledge to raise their level'.[21] Wives of industrial leaders were implicitly cast as more advanced wives, able to pass on knowledge and expected to do so. Their husbands' advanced status was passed on to them.

Another aspect of promoting 'cultured behaviour' drew on the moral values that wives allegedly had because of their sex. This probably had more to do with traditional Russian cultural values than with Marxist-Leninist ideology, although it nonetheless affected the content of the latter. As well as being upholders of cleanliness, order and neatness, wives were supposed to be moral guides and promoters of decent values.

The *obshchestvennitsa* was there not just to support her husband but to check his behaviour, to ensure he was on the correct path and that he was not tempted into anti-social acts. V.S. Molokov, leader of Aeroflot, put it this way:

> it seems to me that wives must chat with their husbands about their work and influence them so that they are not accident prone, hooligans of the air, shirkers or bad workers.[22]

Good workers were not absent or late and wives had to check this bad practice.[23]

A central tension pervaded ideology on the wives' movement. Wives were to 'help' their men. Yet, in the process, some of their activities brought them more assertive roles, such as setting up kindergartens, learning to shoot a rifle or drive a car. Their mobilisation into 'helping', even though defining them relative to someone else, meant a range of activities and while some of these were indeed 'servicing' another and putting the women's own development in second place, others, as well as drawing wives out of the home into a wider social

setting, offered a challenge to traditional gender roles. It can be argued, in fact, that the roles performed by the *obshchestvennitsa* could be variously interpreted depending upon the activity, its meaning to the actor and the extent to which it altered her life.

Moreover, the regime was encouraging wives out of the home at a time when it was simultaneously emphasising the sanctity of the family; it was mobilising women as *obshchestvennitsy,* making them more active, when it was paradoxically trying to reinforce traditional gender roles, deter divorce and ban abortion; it was encouraging women to become *obshchestvennitsy* in the hope that this would be a first step into full-time employment in the labour force. Many of the *obshchestvennitsa*'s roles fit stereotypes of traditional 'women's work', but the very act of performing them *outside* the home accorded them a social meaning, drawing her out of the family unit. And as already stated, some new roles broke out of traditional moulds.

Another awkward element for ideology was that the 'advanced' status conferred on wives of leaders of heavy industry was acquired from their husbands, not through women's independent self-determination. This was not the emancipation of which Aleksandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand had talked. It could, however, be seen as consistent with the Leninist idea of 'vanguard' in which the more 'advanced' women aid the more backward. This terminology was not used in connection with the wives, but its elitist strain is integral to Leninist thought. In fact, there was a precedent in the 1920s when women were portrayed as more 'backward' than men owing to their lower levels of political activism. This was cited as the only acceptable ground for setting up the *Zhenotdel*, since had women and men been 'equal', then a women's department would have been divisive of working-class unity.[24] There to meet women's special and backward needs, it was justified.

Since women and men were officially 'equal' in 1930, however, and the *Zhenotdel* was closed down, there arises a new ideological knot in which putatively equal wives now 'service' their husbands at work and at home. If they were equal, this 'helping' role from a subservient status would be out of place. Ideology coped with this by adopting two convenient lines: that the *obshchestvennitsa* had a rich variety of tasks to perform; and that husbands could benefit from morally superior female guidance to prevent them from lapsing into degenerate behaviour. Thus, the *obshchestvennitsa* was versatile in her contribution to building socialism and also a moral guide and inspiration.

Obshchestvennitsa's activities

A great variety of wives came together to help their menfolk. Groupings included the movement of engineering-technical workers' wives, the movement of wives of leaders of heavy industry, the brigade of specialists' wives, the council of wives of the management of the air force, wives of railway workers, wives of Aeroflot workers, wives of oil workers, the movement of wives on oil tankers, buoy keepers' wives on the Volga, sailors' wives and councils of miners' wives.

The main focus of the wives' work was around their husbands' workplace, canteen and living accommodation, extending into the broader community to local hospitals, schools and kindergartens. Early editions of *Obshchestvennitsa* carried detailed descriptions of work activities and of the structural breakdown of individual *sovety*. Groups organised themselves rather differently, although an overlap in activities was common. One council generally had several sections, such as '*byt',* 'economy', 'children', 'culture' and 'international work'. Each section had its own general tasks. For example, 'economy' might consist of 'canteen' and 'diet', whereas 'children' included 'nursery', 'kindergarten', 'school' and 'outside school'.[25] Regular pages of 'sharing experience' and 'letters' swapped information about activities and achievements.

Work generally concerned promoting cleanliness, improving living standards, raising cultural levels and indirectly boosting productivity by 'helping' full-time workers. Speeches at conferences and articles in *Obshchestvennitsa* concentrated on these themes. One woman from Ivanovo, for example, told a conference that when wives came to their husbands' workplace they found 'dirt, negligence and slovenliness. This affected work.'[26] Thus, they defined their main task as cleaning. Another factory lacked a club where workers could rest. So the wives decorated a hall and other rooms, acquired furniture, curtains, carpets, a piano and over 6000 books. They then decided which would be the music room, rest room and games room.[27]

Work in the canteen to improve food quality was a common preoccupation. As a wife from Moscow's famous Trekhgornaya manufaktura textile factory put it:

> … thanks to the work of the food section of the council of wives of engineering-technical workers the food in the canteen considerably improved. The wife-activists checked the correctness of the amounts

> of food and the portions. A small detail – the second course was always already cold. The diners were so used to this that they had even stopped complaining. But when, thanks to the endeavours of the wife-activists, they began to serve the second course hot, everyone noticed this.[28]

The wives also changed the appearance of the canteen, replacing long tables with small ones. They added clean table-cloths and flowers.[29]

Wives' priorities varied according to their geographical location. In the far north of Russia wives were concerned about how to obtain scarce vegetables. An army wife regretted that 'where summer lasts only two months, it is difficult to grow vegetables'.[30] So here wives tried to cultivate vegetables themselves to guarantee potatoes, carrots and radishes for the 'fighting men'. In the countryside, preparation for winter was a common yearly concern. On one state pig farm the wives gave priority to checking that housing and sheds were prepared for winter. They decided what needed repairing first and concentrated on the 'struggle' for sanitary conditions.[31]

Many of the wives' projects required financial help to reach fruition. So wives were active in writing to the head of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (ACCTU), Shvernik, asking for funds to cover costs. For example, in 1936 wives from the Rostsel'mash factory sent a detailed letter itemising their work to date, which included asphalting roads around the village and up to the school to 'prevent children swimming in mud', and then set out their next plans: 'Nikolai Mikhailovich, we decided to approach you with a request for help in our work. It is now necessary for us to organise winter sport for the children of school and pre-school age.'[32] Among other things, the wives wanted to buy skis, skates and sledges. They requested '10,000 rubles as necessary for providing for 3,750 children of school age and around 5,000 of pre-school age'.[33] They had also organised a ballet school for 150 children. To expand this, they asked for another 10, 000 rubles.[34]

Another typical request was for 'means' to award prizes to women's councils and to particular *obshchestvennitsy* for their performance in socialist competitions between the wives. They informed Shvernik that wives of metallurgists had already written to Ordzhonikidze to request socialist competition between *obshchestvennitsy* 'in order to help plan fulfilment in 1937'. Since Ordzhonikidze had consented, the wives now needed prizes and help in organising a jury.[35]

Apart from cleaning the factory and hostels, improving canteen food and paying attention to the recreation of workers and their children, the wives' activities extended to labouring alongside other workers on factory floors. This, too, was cast as 'help'. Both men and women workers benefited. For example, in a mine in Voroshilovgradskaya *oblast',* where 155 wives were engaged in various activities, 30 actually worked in the mine.[36] In another mine, women 'day and night' cleared snow away.[37] Here,

> In December the leaders of the factory again came to us for help. The mine was breaking down, the country was not receiving coal. 25 housewives came to work in the mine. In one month they despatched all the old supply of coal (about 10 thousand tonnes) and cleaned the store of dust. Our mine began to fulfil the plan.[38]

In branches of light industry, wives also worked alongside female Stakhanovites. As a consequence, one Stakhanovite commented: 'Things became much easier for us.'[39] It is impossible to calculate the value of the wives' labour, but it clearly made a contribution to production, hitherto ignored.

As well as working alongside Stakhanovites, the wives guided them in spending their higher salaries. As one wife put it,

> Our stakhanovites earn well now and they need to dress well, furnish their room. But they cannot all do this. So here the wife-activists came to help. We go round the shops with them, choose clothes and other things. We also help the workers to develop their artistic taste.[40]

The wives took the question of cultural improvement seriously too. One priority was the promotion of literacy. The magazine *Udarnitsa Urala* reported that wives of engineering-technical workers 'immediately undertook to get the liquidation of illiteracy going and started to work themselves as teachers'.[41] One director's wife 'organised a circle for learning the German language'. Along with other members of the council, she also undertook to read literature to factory workers during their lunch hour.[42] Another boss's wife 'organised a choir of 30 people'. In July 1936 they performed two concerts and donated the takings of 500 rubles to the organisation of a children's summer playground which the wives set up in the factory garden.[43]

As well as helping others, the wives sought to improve their own skills. They went on courses with a view to obtaining a specialism. One wife wrote in 1939 to *Obshchestvennitsa* that in the field of transport 'we already have over 1,000 housewives who have finished courses of various specialisms. Among these, 300 work as helpers of machine operators.'[44] And after 'enemies of the people' had been purged from Aeroflot, women in Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk and Khabarovsk were offered courses to train as radio operators. On the agenda were courses on how to pack parachutes. By 1939 Aeroflot had 187 wives' councils, involving 4000 activists, over 3000 of whom studied defence, including how to shoot.[45]

In sum, the range of activities engaged in by the *dvizhenie zhen* was broad. Their successful pursuit, however, often required resources which were increasingly unavailable to the wives as trade unions cut back their financial support. As the movement petered out, wives either returned to the home or took advantage of the courses they had followed to enter the labour force. With war imminent, their prior activity outside the home was a useful preparation. Indeed, during 1939 *Obshchestvennitsa* carried articles with the title: 'If war breaks out', which discussed preparation for war, often highlighting the role of female snipers.[46] The question of whether or not women could replace men as pilots, engineers and miners while the men were at the front was already being raised.[47] In fact, articles on female snipers had begun in l937.[48]

Limits to the *obshchestvennitsa's* activities and forms of resistance

Archives, journals and conferences indicate that the *obshchestvennitsa* was not universally popular among workers, factory committees, trade unionists or factory directors. According to an engineer's wife: 'At first it was very difficult for me to work since several workers in the factory looked upon the housewives as people who "out of nothing to do" interfered in others' affairs.'[49] Attitudes apparently only changed when 'the results of our work became obvious'.[50] Similarly, the wife of a director of a cloth factory regretted that: 'When we started to work some comrades said: the wives of engineering-technical workers have got nothing to do. They walk about the shop floor and watch.'[51] The sentiment from workers that the wives were interfering busybodies looking for ways of filling their time appears to have been widespread

(and, of course, in some cases may well have been a fitting charge). They were negatively viewed as snoopers who pried into other people's business.

Workers in canteens were especially suspicious when the wives arrived to help them. This was viewed as 'meddling'. Determined wives, however, declared:

> But this did not bother us. We knew that without labour nothing is achieved. At first, we demanded that the potatoes be peeled not the night before, as had been the case, but on the day they were to be cooked. We demanded that fish that had gone off not be served, and so on. People had not been used to such control and insistence and consequently in the first visits treated us like enemies.[52]

Negative reaction to wives in the kitchen could lead to violence. In one school, an engineer's wife was thrown onto the hotplate by a cook whom she stopped stealing butter meant for the children.[53] The wife defined the general problem here as nepotism. The food for the children was 'foul because the butter, sugar and other products were divided up' and taken home by kitchen workers.[54] Resistance to help from the wives in these cases amounted to a defence of theft. Corrupt patterns of abuse benefited kitchen staff who colluded with each other. The appearance of the *obshchestvennitsa* upset cosy guarantees of free food.

Workers, then, generally disliked the wives for challenging patterns of behaviour which were advantageous to the workers. By contrast, factory committees, trade union organisations and managers often questioned whether women had the ability to perform the tasks they set themselves. After one group of wives had decided to take over the work of organising a children's playground that the factory committee had neglected, they drew up a full estimate of the necessary expenses. They announced that they would take over from the paid workers who were not making the necessary arrangements and suggested that the money not spent on salaries be sent to the children of Spanish workers. The chairman of the factory committee 'did not hide his disbelief', querying whether the women had the necessary knowledge. The women then took matters into their own hands and learned how to run a playground, what games to play, how much protein and fat to put in the children's food and which vitamins.[55]

Whereas many factory committees discouraged women, others were slow to realise their potential. In a minority of cases wives had become *obshchestvennitsy* in the late 1920s. The wives of engineering-technical

workers at the Balashikhinsk factory in Moscow *oblast'* had come together as early as 1927. Despite lots of projects, especially in their children's school, the factory organisation where their husbands worked only noticed nine years later that the wives' 'cultural strength' existed.[56] One member of the wives' committee here said:

> The factory director supports us, but this cannot be said about the factory committee. It is true they invite us to meetings, sometimes they give us instructions, but there it ends. We have not once given an account of our work, neither at the workers' meeting nor even at the plenum of the factory committee.[57]

Here the women felt that the factory committee was not really interested in hearing about the wives' work or in listening to their needs.

This was not a fixed pattern across factories. Sometimes the opposite occurred where factory committees were supportive but directors were not. This obtained in the Krasnaya Krutil'shchitsa factory. The wife of a technical director said: 'They relate to us in the factory like this: If you want to work – work; if you don't, you need not. Both the director and the party committee have an indifferent attitude to our work. Only the factory committee supports us.'[58]One difficulty with the director was that whenever the wives requested something, he would not say yes or no. He did not refuse, but never helped. They formed the view that: 'It is better when the director openly refuses, then we can persistently use energy and obtain the necessary at various organisations. When they promise, procrastinate and in the end do nothing, then all energy is wasted.'[59] Had the wives been denied a request at the outset, then they would have sought alternative channels rather than aimlessly wait. Similar negative reactions occurred on state farms. As one woman put it, 'What help have the workers' committee and directorate shown us? Absolutely none. They have not even shown any interest in us and we generally worked independently.'[60]

Numerous references cite managers and trade unionists who ignored women or failed to encourage them appropriately. Those who held traditional attitudes about what wives should and should not be doing frequently encouraged the women to return to the domestic sphere. In one factory the trade union did not challenge the director's refusal of the wives' request to set up a kindergarten. This, in fact, would have been possible to do since 45 000 rubles had been made available for the kindergarten.[61] In the Moscow factory 'Dinamo', the chairman of

the factory committee learned with amazement that women had organised a room for nursing mothers. Around 24 mothers and their children used the room. However, he then disregarded the question of whether to give the nursing mothers milk and bread and refused to let the wives speak at a Stakhanovite rally in the factory. As a consequence, the number of women activists fell to 18. Similarly, in another Moscow factory, not receiving any support, women activists fell in number from 80 at the beginning of l936 to four or five.[62]

A recurring theme in trade union documents was that numbers in the wives' movement unfortunately fell whenever trade union organs failed to check lack of support for the women from factory directors. Inaction from unions could have disastrous consequences. Documents also repeatedly stated that the movement could be much more active with more positive backing.[63] The general conclusion about the state of trade union work among wives was a bleak one.[64] In many cases where women were illiterate or in need of help to improve their level of literacy, 'no work' among them was organised.[65]

Journals echoed the messages of trade union documents on the wives' being ignored or badly treated. *Obshchestvennitsa* reported that 'the hostile leadership of Aeroflot consciously ignored this remarkable initiative of advanced women'.[66] As a consequence, the wives' movement developed haphazardly because 'no one helped the activists, no one led their activity'. Only after 'enemies of the people' had been removed from top administrative posts in Aeroflot was serious attention paid to the wives' movement. Previously, 'enemies' had prevented women from being hired or from being trained in summer schools.[67]

Wives generally turned to the ACCTU when funds in their husbands' factories were not forthcoming. However, financial support from the ACCTU for the *obshchestvennitsa* was short lived. Archives show that the ACCTU agreed in 1936 to make available one million rubles for the wives' activities if the central committees of trade unions allocated a similar amount.[68] Yet according to a letter from Shvernik at the ACCTU to Ul'rikh at the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, 'in 1937 the ACCTU is not able to take on this expenditure'.[69]

The *obshchestvennitsa,* then, endured a variety of negative attitudes in the workplace. Problems, however, sometimes began at home. Not all husbands would permit their wives to join the *dvizhenie zhen*. One wife from the Red Trade Union International factory regretted:

> I will not name names but I will say that among engineering-technical workers of the factory there are people who do not let wives participate in activist work. There are people who

> themselves are developing and studying, but who are not giving opportunities to grow to their wives.[70]

Traditional attitudes in the home about appropriate gender roles kept some wives out of the movement. Moreover, such attitudes may well have been behind the indifference and neglect shown to women in the factories. Resistance to changing roles for women and to challenges to deeply-rooted gender hierarchies may have been the driving motivation among those who ignored or hindered the women. Those who queried women's abilities may indeed have subscribed to notions of female inferiority. Yet, definitive conclusions about the coincidence of misogyny and indifference to the wives cannot be drawn. Apathy, inertia and reluctance to act without specific party approval concerning particular wives' requests could be among other explanatory factors. Preference for not upsetting the status quo, for not altering factory routines and for not provoking the annoyance of factory workers may have been relevant as well.

What was the significance of the *dvizhenie zhen*?

It is clear that the *obshchestvennitsa* mobilised in ways useful to the economy and social infrastructure. She engaged in 'storming' alongside male workers in factories and mines to help fulfil plans; she called for socialist competitions among the *obshchestvennitsy,* allegedly to help plan fulfilment; she helped to develop the social infrastructure of housing, dining, childcare and medicine without pay. In sum, she was free labour for an economy and society in need of 'help'.

The aim here is not to measure her contribution in terms of productivity or salaries saved, but to note that it existed, was functional to the system and was generally free. Moreover, when she was not directly participating herself, she was indirectly easing the workload of her husband, supporting him in various ways, or encouraging others to become Stakhanovites. Given the disruptiveness of Stakhanovism, this latter pursuit may not have been especially functional for the economy. It was, however, in keeping with the regime's priorities and thus officially appropriate behaviour.

Was then the *obshchestvennitsa* merely used or exploited by the system's leaders to suit their own ends? The state needed all the labour it could get to perform a variety of tasks, and if labour were free, then so much the better. Or did the *obshchestvennitsa,* too, benefit from her

contribution? What was in it for her? Despite constituting unpaid labour, the *obshchestvennitsa* became involved in pursuits outside the home, some of which brought her new skills. As a member of a group, she could potentially develop a sense of belonging. Since ideology praised her efforts, she may have developed a sense of purpose and status. Some evidence indicates enthusiasm for her work, too, and an anger when left out of events that she felt rightly concerned her.[71]

Social involvement, however, is not always altruistic. Benvenuti suggests that, in fact, the wives had initially come together owing to the *esprit de corps* that had developed among engineering-technical workers and managers. He contends that the wives showed 'unmistakable signs' of 'selfish and "bourgeois" aspirations', which included securing rare consumer goods in remoter parts of the Union and ensuring the provision of social amenities.[72] One consequence of their activities was the appropriation for the wives' movement of many functions of the factory committees at a time when trade unions were becoming weaker.[73]

Whether all the women involved were so calculating and selfish remains to be backed up by the sources. While improvement in the wives' own daily lives may certainly have been one consideration behind their initiatives and mobilisation, a complex of factors seems more likely to have driven the women, including the desire to engage in social activity outside the home.

Conclusion

It is the height of banality to state that the gender dimension in historiography has often been neglected. Nonetheless, this frequently remains the case. When the first Soviet dissertation on the *obshchestvennitsa* (defended in 1988 at Moscow University) noted that this 'mass women's movement' was 'almost forgotten', the observation merely echoed the central, dull claim of much recent historiography, which many of its writers are tired of making, hoping for more exciting starting points.[74]

Yet much historiography is pursued owing to past neglect or oversight. Gender, and women's role in particular, has tended to be systematically overlooked in much mainstream scholarship. By now, most academics must concede this point.

Once, however, gender is incorporated into analyses as one factor among others, one must carefully locate its meaning within social and

historical context and not automatically graft on western assumptions about male/female relations. In the case of the *obshchestvennitsa* there is one serious danger of misinterpretation. Although women of the 1930s recorded their regret that trade unions, party committees and directors often ignored their movement, forcing them to act independently, or not at all, we should not infer that the women always wanted to be left to their own devices.

Although many women may have developed a sense of themselves as actors in society with increased levels of personal confidence, they also admitted that they needed and wanted guidance from official organisations. The very nature of the political system left the wives anxious about what they should be doing. As one put it: 'we generally worked independently, not knowing what we should have been interested in'.[75] Another commented that 'work went badly because nobody nudged us, nobody could say how we should be working'. She went on: 'in one word we had no leadership. Comrades came from the raikom. For example, there was Fedotov. I said to him: ''Comrade Fedotov, give us instructions, help us to work''.'[76] Although such pleas fit official rhetoric, they also indicate that backing from local party organisations was often deficient or lukewarm and that some women wanted support, guidance and feedback. The fact that in many cases where official support was lacking, the number of women activists fell and eventually the movement petered out, suggests that women often did not work independently for long, whether because they chose not to or because the system made that difficult. If, for example, no financial backing was forthcoming for setting up a kindergarten or decorating a canteen, then the wives could not pursue the tasks.

All social movements need resources, organisation and commitment to persist. The *dvizhenie zhen* may have had a high level of commitment from some of its women, but resources varied according to yearly allocations (which fell after 1937) and also according to markedly different levels of support from local officials. The reactions of women within the movement to resistance no doubt varied according to the number of the local activists, individual personalities and the precise nature of the resistance. Gender relations within the home also influenced the level of the wives' commitment to social activity. Yet, in order to sustain itself, the broader organisation required regular funding.

Study of the *dvizhenie zhen* opens up a range of questions for further reflection. When 'help' was not forthcoming, how much was achieved in its absence? And how varied were women's experiences within the movement? And what precisely could independence entail in the 1930s?

Citizens used the concept, although often pejoratively and twinned with a search for guidance and instructions from those in authority, as befitting democratic centralism and Russian political culture.

Given local variations and different initiatives, the movement was not a strictly homogeneous one, notwithstanding certain common characteristics. The same applied to the *zhenotdely* (women's departments) and *zhenskie kluby* (women's clubs) of the 1920s, the *zhensovety* (women's councils) of the late 1950s and 1960s encouraged by Khrushchev and also to the more streamlined *zhensovety* of the late 1980s which Gorbachev put under the hierarchical umbrella of the Soviet Women's Committee. By the 1980s, scholars came to expect more variations in the Soviet social fabric. Evidence, however, suggests that in the 1930s social patterns were not rigid, everywhere identical or uniform. The *dvizhenie zhen* is one more example of a complexity hitherto frequently underplayed.

Notes

1 Reprinted, in edited and updated form, from a longer version in *Europe–Asia Studies*, vol. 48, no. 4, 1996, pp. 569–86.

2 See C.J. Friedrich and Z.K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy,* 2nd edn (New York, 1965).

3 See, for example, J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: the Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–38,* (Cambridge, 1985), and L.H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–41* (Cambridge, 1988).

4 *Obshchestvennitsa,* nos. 9–10, 1936, p. 12. Large conferences and the content of speeches delivered at them were indicators in a one-party state of what was politically 'appropriate'. Directives must have been issued, ordering the conferences to be organised, although these have not been found. A resolution, however, issued in February 1936 by the ACCTU specified all sorts of activities that the *obshchestvennitsy* should be pursuing. See 'O rabote sredi zhen inzhenerno-tekhnicheskikh rabotnikov', postanovlenie prezidiuma VMBIT VTsSPS ot 3 fevralya 1936g., and also 'Postanovlenie prezidiuma ZapsibkraiMBIT'a', in *Obshchestvennitsy: opyt inzhenerno-tekhnicheskikh rabotnikov Zapadnoi Sibiri* (Novosibirsk, 1936) pp. 62–8.

5 *Soveshchanie zhen khozyaistvennikov i inzhenerno-tekhnicheskikh rabotnikov tyazheloi promyshlennosti: stenograficheskii otchet, 10–12 maya 1936 goda* (Moscow, 1936); *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu zhen khozyaistvennikov i inzhenerno-tekhnicheskikh rabotnikov legkoi promyshlennosti*, vypusk 1, yanvar' 1937 (Izdanie gazety Legkaya Promyshlennost', 1937); Ibid., vypusk 2, fevral' 1937 (Izdanie gazety Legkaya Promyshlennost', 1937). *Vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie zhen komandnogo i nachal'stvuyushchego sostava RKKA: stenograficheskii otchet, 20–23 dekabrya 1936* (Moscow, 1937); *Kul'turnyi*

rezerv: zheny ITR Yaroslavskogo rezinkombinata k pervomu vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu (Yaroslavl', 1936).

6 GARF, f. 5548, o. 16, dd. 63–6. These mainly cover the years 1936 and 1937.

7 See, for example, GARF, f. 7689, o. 7, d. 146, with materials for 1939.

8 For example, by September 1937, *obshchestvennitsy* were working in executive committees 'in 200 to 300 districts of the Union'. Among other activities, they were involved in dealing with citizens' complaints to the soviets. See GARF, f. 3316, o. 30, d. 916, ll. 1–3. More specific figures are given for Aeroflot, which in 1939 had 4000 *obshchestvennitsy*. See *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 2, 1939, p. 17. Other numerical references on numbers in specific factories are provided, where relevant, in the text.

9 See Siegelbaum, op. cit., pp. 238–9; F. Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabotatori! Stachanovismo e organizazzione industriale in URSS 1934–38* (Rome, 1988) pp. 135–8; Benvenuti, 'Stakhanovism and Stalinism, 1934–38', SIPS no. 30, (unpublished discussion paper, CREES, University of Birmingham) pp. 20–1. M. Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Hemel Hempstead, 1989) pp. 115–17; R. Maier, '*Sovety zhen* as a Surrogate Trade Union: Comments on the History of the Movement of Activist Women in the 1930s', in K. McDermott and J. Morison (eds), *Politics and Society under the Bolsheviks* (London, 1999) pp. 189–98.

10 S. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999) pp. 156–63; R.B. Neary, 'Mothering Socialist Society: the ''Wife-Activists'' Movement and the Soviet Culture of Daily Life, 1934–41', *Russian Review*, vol. 56, no. 3, 1999, pp. 396–412.

11 M. Buckley, 'The *Obshchestvennitsa* down on the Farm', unpublished paper presented to the VI World Congress of ICCEES, Tampere, Finland, 31 July–4 August 2000.

12 Evidence suggests that early leaders of the wives' movement were themselves subject to purge as their names suddenly dropped out of reporting in *Obshchestvennitsa,* replaced by new ones.

13 Buckley, *Women and Ideology,* p. 113.

14 K vsesoyuznomu *soveshchaniyu,* vypusk 1, p. 14.

15 Buckley, *Women and Ideology,* p. 117.

16 *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu,* vypusk 1, p. 14.

17 *Udarnitsa Urala,* no. 1, 1936, p. 8.

18 *Zhenshchina-bol'shaya sila: pervoe kraevoe soveshchanie zhen stakhanovtsev severnogo kraya, 15–17 aprelya 1936 goda: stenograficheskii otchet* (Sevkraigiz, 1936) p. 7.

19 RGASPI, f. 85, o. 29, d. 151, l. 4.

20 Ibid., l. 5

21 Ibid.

22 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 2, 1939, p. 18.

23 Ibid.

24 Buckley, *Women and Ideology,* pp. 63–4.

25 *Obshchestvennitsa,* nos. 9–10, 1936, p. 14.

26 *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu,* vypusk 1, p. 18.

27 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 1, 1936, p. 10.

28 *K vsesoyuwomu soveshchaniyu,* vypusk 1, p. 22

29 Ibid.
30 *Vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie zhen komandnogo i nachal'stvuyushchego sostava RKKA,* p. 15.
31 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 8, 1939, p. 20.
32 GARF, f. 5548, o. 16, d. 63, l. 22. Dated 16 November 1936.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., l. 2. Dated 20 November 1937. See also l. 1, 3 December 1937.
36 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 7, 1939, p. 6.
37 Ibid., p. 7.
38 Ibid. In cases like this, where *obshchestvennitsy* performed heavy manual work, no mention is made in primary sources of whether or not they received payment. Intuitively one feels they should have had remuneration but consistency with other tasks performed by the wives would require the contrary. Maier (see n. 9 above), in conversation in Warsaw, suspected that in some cases payment was made, but at rates lower than normally given. Further research is needed to clarify this point.
39 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 11, 1939, p. 13.
40 *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu,* vypusk 1, p. 27.
41 *Udarnitsa Urala,* no. 7, 1936, p. 18.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 8, 1939, p. 21.
45 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 2, 1939, p. 17.
46 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 8, 1939, pp. 24-5.
47 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 11, 1939, pp. 10-12.
48 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 4, 1937, pp. 21-3.
49 *Udarnitsa Urala,* no. 7, 1937, p. 10.
50 Ibid.
51 *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu,* vypusk 1, p. 28.
52 Ibid., p. 29.
53 *Udarnitsa Urala,* no. 7, 1937, p. 10.
54 Ibid.
55 *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu, vypusk 2, p. 20.*
56 Ibid., p. 28.
57 Ibid., p. 30.
58 Ibid., p. 50.
59 Ibid.
60 GARF, f. 7689, o. 7, d. 146, 1. 7ob. This is from TsK svinovodcheskikh sovkhozov, *Stenogramma soveshchaniya zhen inzhenemo-tekhnicheskikh rabotnikov ot 14 yanvarya 1939.*
61 GARF, f. 5548, o. 16, d. 63, l. 102. Dated October 1937.
62 Ibid., l. 127. Not dated but almost certainly 1937.
63 Ibid., l. 132. Not dated but almost certainly 1937.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., l. 133. Not dated but almost certainly 1937.
66 *Obshchestvennitsa,* no. 2, 1939, p. 17.
67 Ibid.

68 GARF, f. 5548, o. 16, d. 63, l. 85. For information about distribution of the one million rubles, see f. 5548, o. 16, d. 66, which covers correspondence from 14 July to 25 December l936.
69 Ibid., l. 7.
70 *K vsesoyuznomu soveshchaniyu*, vypusk 2, p. 51.
71 See the concerns noted in GARF, f. 5548, o. 16, d. 64, ll. 61–2. Dated 16 April 1936.
72 Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabotatori!*, p. 135; Benvenuti, 'Stakhanovism and Stalinism, 1934–38', p. 20.
73 Ibid. See also Maier, 'Sovety *zhen*'.
74 I.V. Kashkina, 'Dvizhenie zhen-obshchestvennits, 1934–42 gody' (candidate degree dissertation abstract, Moscow State University, 1988).
75 GARF, f. 7689, o. 7, d. 146, l. 7ob. Dated 1939. In the 1920s, women's departments organised within the party also sought guidance. See also E. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1997) ch. 3.
76 GARF, f. 7689, o. 7, d. 146, l. 16ob.

9
Women Writers of the 1930s: Conformity or Subversion?

Rosalind Marsh

Little has hitherto been written on women writers of the 1930s. Most works referring to this subject have been either general surveys of women's writing or of the image of women in Soviet literature, encompassing texts of different periods,[1] or studies of individual female authors who continued writing during the Stalin era.[2] In surveys of twentieth-century women's writing, as in critical studies of individual writers, there is a tendency to pass swiftly over a decade which witnessed a palpable decline in the quantity, quality and individuality of both men's and women's writing in Russia. It is also noteworthy that in some important works which treat the image of women in Stalinist fiction as either a major or a subsidiary theme,[3] relatively few female writers are mentioned, since there is a comparative absence of women writers from the socialist realist canon (that is those works officially regarded as important and exemplary).[4]

It is likely that scholarly neglect of Soviet women writers officially published in the 1930s will continue in both Russia and the west, since in the perestroika and post-perestroika periods socialist realism, long in disrepute in the west, has come to be scorned and repudiated openly within Russia too. If it is mentioned at all, it is now usually examined simply as a fascinating cultural and political phenomenon, mercilessly parodied in 'sotsart' and postmodernist literature, or examined by social historians as a source of ideological constructs, values and factual information about the Stalin era. As far as underground writing by women in the 1930s is concerned, it is only since glasnost that the full extent of this phenomenon is beginning to emerge.

Some interesting questions about women's writing in the 1930s remain unexplored. It is worth asking why there are so few women writers in the socialist realist canon, and whether, in officially pub-

lished literature, there were any distinctively feminine approaches to the obligatory themes of the 1930s. An attempt will be made to ascertain whether women socialist realists deviate in any way from what Katerina Clark has called the 'master plot' of socialist realism, or whether they accentuate themes of interest to women, or depict female characters in a more convincing manner than their male contemporaries. Another issue worthy of consideration is whether the 1930s can be regarded as a uniform period in women's writing, or whether the decade can be divided into distinctive shorter periods when different themes were emphasised. An attempt will also be made to investigate what light underground and émigré literature by women sheds on the real concerns of women in the 1930s, the validity of Stalinist ideological constructs of womanhood, and the way in which Russian women's writing might have developed under other circumstances.

It is hoped that this chapter will go some way towards providing an introduction to a neglected subject, exploring the changes brought about in Russian women's literature in the 1930s after the limited artistic experimentation and ambiguous thinking about gender permitted in Russian culture of the 1920s. The principal sources used will be fiction – especially prose fiction – by women writers officially published in the Soviet Union viewed in the general context of socialist realist literature, and 'underground' writing by women living in Russia in the 1930s which often achieved publication only many decades later. For purposes of comparison, reference will also be made to works by Russian writers living in exile.

Women writers' strategies

The fate of all Soviet writers in the 1930s is a dispiriting subject, and the experiences of women writers are no exception. As in the case of male writers, some prominent female authors had already emigrated immediately after the Bolshevik revolution, others had fallen silent or been persecuted in the 1920s, another group had abandoned fiction writing altogether, seeking other means of survival, while a brave few remained writing in the underground. Those who continued to take an active part in the cultural activities of the Stalinist state included writers of peasant or proletarian background (Lidiya Seifullina, Anna Karavaeva, Antonina Koptyaeva), some of whom had played an active part in the revolutionary movement against tsarism, idealists of the younger generation (Ol'ga Berggol'ts, Vera Panova, Vera Ketlinskaya),

and some pre-revolutionary intellectuals who had come to espouse Bolshevism out of personal conviction (Vera Inber, Ol'ga Forsh, Marietta Shaginyan). Collaboration with the Soviet authorities was either undertaken enthusiastically (as in the case of Karavaeva, Ketlinskaya, Koptyaeva, Shaginyan and Mariya Shkapskaya) or with a certain amount of reluctance and difficulty (as in the case of Lidiya Seifullina, who had been a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1917–19).

Among the well-known women writers who could not accept the Bolshevik revolution and joined the 'first wave' of emigration, continuing writing abroad in the 1930s, were Nina Berberova, Zinaida Gippius, 'Teffi' (the pseudonym of Nadezhda Lokhvitskaya), Zinaida Vengerova and Marina Tsvetaeva. Of these, the most unusual choice was made by Tsvetaeva, who decided to return to the Soviet Union from Paris in 1939 after the sudden disappearance of her husband Sergei Efron, an exposed Soviet agent, who was recalled to Moscow. However, Tsvetaeva soon discovered that she could not deal either with the constraints shackling Soviet writers or with her own personal tragedies (the arrest of her husband, daughter and sister), and committed suicide in 1941.[5]

Others, such as Anna Akhmatova and Vera Inber, had decisively rejected emigration as an option, but not all had, by the 1930s, found a place for themselves in the new Soviet literature, which expected the writer to be a political activist and to use literature to enlighten the masses. Some prominent writers of the pre-revolutionary period had already been subjected to persecution and largely silenced in the first decade after the Bolshevik Revolution. A tacit ban of 1925 on Anna Akhmatova's work precluded the publication of any of her new poems throughout the 1930s.[6] The openly lesbian poet Sofiya Parnok had also been forced into silence by Soviet censorship in 1928, subsequently writing only for 'the drawer', since lesbianism was taboo in the Soviet Union. Her last two passionate cycles, *Ursa Major* and *Nenuzhnoe dobro* (written in 1932–33), were totally unacceptable in Stalinist Russia and indeed proved to be so during the whole of the Soviet period.[7] By the 1930s she had come to describe her poems as 'useless goods' and to perceive herself as an 'invisible woman' in Russian poetry.[8]

During the 1930s, a number of prominent representatives of previous generations of Russian women writers gradually faded from the literary scene. Some interesting pre-revolutionary women writers had by the 1930s long sunk into oblivion, often into dire poverty, and little is known about their later life: one example was the talented realist

writer 'N. Ol'nem' (Varvara Tsekhovskaya), who did not die until 1941.[9] The suppression of Silver Age women prose writers and their work by the Stalin regime probably had even more adverse artistic consequences than the persecution of male writers, because women's prose was still a relatively new, fragile development in the pre-revolutionary period and the 1920s.

Other women writers who had risen to prominence before the revolution attempted, with difficulty, to adapt to the new regime. Some eventually became respected figures in Soviet literature and publishing, but this was often at the cost of abandoning fiction writing altogether. Ekaterina Letkova (died 1937), for example, worked as an editor, translator and reviewer for the World Literature Press, and later for the State Publishing House; while Lyubov' Gurevich (died 1940), editor and publisher of the leading journal *Severnyi vestnik* between 1891 and 1898, who had written fiction up to 1904, became a well-known theatre historian in the 1930s.[10] Valentina Dmitrieva, a prominent populist realist writer before the revolution, who lost her husband, mother and three brothers during the civil war and almost starved to death, subsequently became involved in editorial work and educational and propaganda activities among the peasantry until she was rediscovered and allowed to publish an autobiography of her life before 1917 – *Tak bylo (The Way it Was,* 1930).

While a few writers of the pre-revolutionary generation managed to secure the publication or republication of some of their writings during the 1930s, this course was open only to those former populists and radicals who had written about the repression of the tsarist regime and could, therefore, be presented as having some sympathy for the Bolshevik revolution. For many women, writing memoirs about their experience of the pre-revolutionary radical movement, or changing direction to treat historical themes was a much safer option than attempting to write about contemporary Russia. Nevertheless, some historical novels by women in the 1930s also trespassed on forbidden territory and were subjected to criticism or censorship.[11] Even among those fortunate few women of the older generation who did still continue to publish, some who died in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Gurevich and Letkova, left unfinished historical manuscripts which did not correspond to the spirit of the age and which they probably knew were unlikely to be published.

Writers less congenial to the Soviet regime either fell silent or diverted their energies into criticism and translation in order to survive

in, and escape from, Stalinist society. Those who became talented translators included Mariya Petrovykh, who produced less original work after 1932–33 and instead devoted herself to translation; Tat'yana Shchepkina-Kupernik, who in her lifetime translated 59 plays from six different languages; Elizaveta Polonskaya, the most prominent woman writer to belong to the 'Serapion Brotherhood' of experimental writers in the 1920s, who made a living during the 1930s by translating European classics and German anti-fascist literature; Anna Radlova, who translated Shakespeare; and Marina Tsvetaeva, whose only option was to resort to commissioned translation after her return to Russia. Some women managed to use translation as an Aesopian device: for example, Polonskaya's translation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (staged in 1939) was a bold choice, since it depicted a cruel tyrant and a sexual plot. Another strategy adopted by some women writers, such as Polonskaya and Inber, was to divert their talents into writing poetry and stories for children.

Some genres traditionally favoured by Russian women writers, such as lyric poetry and intimate autobiography, were largely closed to them in the 1930s. Socialist realism granted more prestige to prose than poetry, and, in particular, promoted larger genres dealing with socio-political issues, such as the novel in prose and the epic in poetry. While this development affected all Soviet writers, it was especially damaging to women, who had often selected the genres of poetry and autobiography because of their very focus on the private emotions of the individual. Such personal themes, which had long been disparaged as typical of 'women's writing' in Russia and had, since the 1920s, been criticised by prominent political and literary figures as 'backward' and divorced from the social concerns of the collective, became completely unacceptable in the 1930s. There was intense official disapproval of the very word *lirika* (lyric poetry), and many memoirs written by women in the 1930s or about the 1930s did not achieve publication until decades later. 'Fellow travellers' (intellectuals sympathetic to Bolshevism) such as Marietta Shaginyan, Ol'ga Forsh, Vera Inber and Mariya Shkapskaya (who had previously dallied with symbolism and written experimental prose or poetry in the 1920s) had, by the 1930s, largely changed direction to engage in journalism and documentary writing in an effort to achieve the ideological reconstruction the government demanded of them. Shkapskaya, for example, gave up writing poetry in 1928 – in 1934 she dismissed her own earlier poetry as 'socially uninformed' – and in the years 1932–36 worked assiduously

on Gorky's *History of Factories and Enterprises*. A number of women writers espoused the new Soviet genre of the *ocherk* ('sketch', or documentary reportage in quasi-literary form, usually on a topical subject).[12]

Other women opted for the same genres as before, but attempted to adapt to the climate of the times by treating new themes. Polonskaya, for example, had to tone down the bold sexuality expressed in some of her lyrics of the 1920s, shifting her emphasis to civic verse about female parachutists and Komsomol workers.[13] Some writers, such as Shkapskaya and Ketlinskaya, who had been criticised in the 1920s for works focusing on gender, motherhood and sexuality, largely abandoned women's themes in the 1930s to write on socio-political subjects such as industrialisation.[14] In general, however, neither the civic verse nor the documentary sketches produced by women writers in the 1930s are of as high a standard as their work of the 1920s.

In the 1930s, particularly towards the end of the decade, a small minority of courageous women writers (most notably Akhmatova, Petrovykh and Lidiya Chukovskaya) were driven to writing secretly in the underground, never expecting to be published in their lifetime. All these writers experienced Stalin's purges at first hand, suffering the arrest or execution of their husband, daughter or son. While some of the most prominent women writers were berated by critics in the 1930s and a handful were arrested, relatively few female authors suffered arrest themselves compared with their male contemporaries, and few are known actually to have been shot or to have been given long prison sentences, perhaps because Stalin regarded women as less important and influential than men. Of course, prison camp memoirs are written only by the survivors, and it is impossible to know whether other diaries or manuscripts were destroyed in the 1930s by Stalin's security services, or later during the war. Whereas Chukovskaya's novel *Sofiya Petrovna,* preserved in an exercise book in only one copy, survived the siege of Leningrad by a miracle, other manuscripts perhaps did not.

Those who were arrested in the 1930s included Lidiya Ginzburg, who was detained in the Lubyanka prison in 1933 because of her association with the literary scholar Viktor Zhirmunskii; Anna Barkova, who was first arrested in 1934 'for her poems' and suffered more than 20 years of imprisonment and exile; and O'lga Berggol'ts, who was arrested for alleged political dissidence in 1937, spent two years in prison and miscarried her third child as a result of the brutal beatings she received.

Some Russian women who suffered in the purges conquered the Stalinist regime's desire to suppress their voices by continuing to write in very difficult circumstances – in Barkova's case, inside a prison camp – both for personal therapy and to bear witness to their times.[15] Stalin's terror also proved counter-productive in that it had the paradoxical effect of making writers out of Russian women who might otherwise not have written, as is strikingly demonstrated by the volume of women's prison memoirs *Dodnes' tyagoteet* (first published in Russia in 1989, and translated as *Till my Tale is Told)*. In many cases, women memoirists died long before their works could be brought to the Russian public in the post-glasnost era, but their testimony now makes a valuable contribution to the literature of the prison camps.

Literature published in the Soviet Union

The literary doctrine of socialist realism, developed in 1934, imposed a monolithic, male-dominated ideology on writers. It is noteworthy that in 'thick journals' of the 1930s, relatively few women writers and critics are represented, while even fewer attained editorial status or became officials of the Writers' Union (one prominent exception is Anna Karavaeva, elected to the Presidium of the Union of Writers from 1934). When women's novels were published, they initially often appeared in small print-runs and received little recognition.[16]

Yet although there were relatively few prominent women socialist realists, there is no real evidence that established Soviet women writers were less likely than men to conform to the dictates of socialist realism. It may simply be the case that in the 1930s there were far fewer female than male writers in Russia. However, as the number of women writers had been increasing significantly in the two decades before the revolution, it could be argued that the emigration, persecution and silencing of some of the most prominent women writers after 1917 left a relatively smaller proportion of female than male authors who were both able and willing to contribute to the culture of the new Soviet state. It is, therefore, tempting to conclude – though impossible to prove – that the comparative absence of women writers from the socialist realist canon may well be due to the masculinist nature of Stalinist society and of the ideological constructs of women it propagated.

In the 1930s, women writers were subject to dual constraints: they were shackled both by the harsh political controls imposed on all Soviet writers and by Stalin's continuing anti-feminist revolution. As in the 1920s, party policy, tacitly accepted by most pro-communist

women writers, was that women's emancipation should be subordinated to the greater goal of transforming an entire society. The abolition of the *Zhenotdel* (the Communist Party's Women's Department) in 1930 on the pretext that the 'woman question' had been 'resolved' finally spelt the end of independent feminist thinking and writing in Russia. This situation was intensified by Stalin's laws of 1936 limiting abortion and divorce. It is also probable that in the 1930s women writers were additionally disadvantaged by the obligatory focus on socio-political themes rather than on private, personal concerns which have traditionally played a significant role in Russian women's writing.

Nevertheless, some women writers (notably Seifullina, Inber, Forsh and Shkapskaya) welcomed socialist realism at the First Writers' Congress of 1934 and proceeded to collaborate with the Soviet authorities. Such conformist writers as Ketlinskaya and Karavaeva were as ready as their male contemporaries to treat typical Stalinist themes, such as industrial construction, the worthy activities of Komsomol volunteers and the alleged intrigues of spies and 'wreckers' held responsible for undermining Stalin's utopian project of building communism. Women socialist realists were perfectly prepared to adapt to the conditions of Stalinism: Koptyaeva's *Kolymskoe zoloto* (*Kolyma Gold*, 1936), for example, describes gold-prospecting in the far east (the location of the worst camps in the Gulag system) without making any reference to prison labour. Many female-authored socialist realist texts of the 1930s also conform to prevailing norms by depicting male heroes. A typical example is Karavaeva's novella *Zdravstvui, zhizn'!* (*I Greet You, Life!,* 1932), written from the point of view of a Komsomol worker, who writes an account of his factory collective in order that 'the working class should obtain at least some tiny amount of benefit from my life'.[17]

Despite the officially proclaimed equality of women in Stalinist society and literature, the Stalinist heroine in male-authored fiction, unlike the 'new woman' of the 1920s, was no longer allowed to be assertive: her chief virtue was supposed to be modesty (*skromnost'*). Taya, the modest, quiet bride of Pavel Korchagin in Nikolai Ostrovsky's *Kak zakalyalas' stal'* (*How the Steel was Tempered*, 1932–34) is an embodiment of the 1930s Stalinist ideal. At the same time, the disturbing, misogynistic view of sexual relations characteristic of the 1920s still persisted in some male-authored fiction: Ostrovsky implies that women who did not live up to the ideal were likely to be punished by rape.[18]

Although works written by male and female socialist realists in the 1930s treat similar themes, espouse the same values and are largely

interchangeable, some female-authored texts display certain distinctive features. In much fiction produced by Russian men in the 1930s, woman is principally seen as man's politically conscious helpmeet and is rarely endowed with any independent, intellectual attributes. Negative female characters are those who do not live up to this ideal of Stalinist womanhood. Women authors, by contrast, do sometimes portray female characters as the central focus of their texts (as in Gerasimova's *Zhalost'* (*Pity*, written 1933–35) and Karavaeva's *Lena iz Zhuravlinoi roshchi* (1938), even if their heroines usually require a male mentor to initiate them onto the path of 'consciousness'. Women socialist realists generally took longer then their male counterparts to abandon the attractive image of the assertive 'new woman' constructed by Soviet ideology in the 1920s, and frequently made a point of championing women's achievements in the 1930s or of emphasising the intense physical effort they invested in socialist construction.[19] The depiction of a professional or intellectual woman, almost non-existent in male-authored fiction, is not unknown in women's writings either: one example is Kseniya Mironina in Ketlinskaya's *Rost* (*Growth*, 1934). Women socialist realists also sometimes portrayed female characters in a rather more realistic manner than male authors, as in the case of the variety of women construction workers depicted in Ketlinskaya's *Muzhestvo* (*Courage*, 1938).

Moreover, even in officially published literature by Russian women, some of the authors' personal concerns emerge. Margarita Aliger, for example, expresses her hatred of domesticity in the short lyric 'Zhena' ('Wife', 1934), while her later poem 'Zima etogo goda' ('The Winter of that Year', 1938) is a semi-autobiographical evocation of a mother who bravely suffered the death of one of her children. Some of Inber's poems of the early 1930s, such as 'Vpolgolosa' ('Sotto Voce', 1932) reflect her feelings of unworthiness as a Soviet writer because of her petty bourgeois background, while a later poem, 'Bessonnitsa' ('Insomnia', 1938) expresses her sadness and inability to write.

Another characteristic of women's writing is the inclusion of *byt* – the ordinary details of everyday life. This enables us to use even socialist realist fiction by Russian women as a source of some information about the realities of women's lives or about Soviet society in general. Valeriya Gerasimova's 'Dal'naya rodstvennitsa' ('The Distant Relative', written in 1926, republished in 1931) provides some insight into the poor treatment of single mothers and illegitimate children in the countryside. S. Vinogradskaya's sketch 'Udarniki' ('The Shock Brigade', 1930) exposes the terrible working and living conditions for women

labouring on construction sites during the first five-year plan, describing workers who insert panes into iron frames at the Stalingrad tractor factory in frost, rain and snow, leaving bloody traces of their cuts on the glass. Through her portrait of the tobacco girl Mariya Vladimirova, Vinogradskaya also suggests the dislike of female Stakhanovites harboured by ordinary women workers. Koptyaeva, who travelled with her husband, an official in the gold mines, to Kolyma, hints in *Kolymskoe zoloto* at the difficult conditions for both male and female pioneers working in the far east.

Socialist realist fiction is also a rich source of information about Stalinist attitudes to women and gender. While virtuous wives and mothers were eulogised, sexually free women were censured and presented as 'mannish'. Karavaeva, for example, contrasts her virtuous, feminine heroine Lena with a promiscuous camp follower during the civil war, who is described in deliberately masculine terms: 'Everyone paws her, she is treated with disrespect, and she has a bass voice like a man … it's as if she isn't a woman at all.'[20] This disparaging description affords an interesting contrast with Babel's more ambiguous portrayal in his diary of the 1920s of a similar type of woman as 'whores, but comrades, whores because they're comrades … heroines, and at the same time despised'.[21] Although both of these depictions are uncomplimentary, Babel nevertheless also highlights the courage and comradeship of those women prepared to share their sexual favours with Red Army soldiers. Karavaeva's totally negative description demonstrates how attitudes to women had changed by the late 1930s towards an emphasis on conventional femininity and a condemnation of the sexual licence allowed in the 1920s.

Typical themes of 'production novels' by women are the joy of collective work and the need for vigilance to conquer harmful 'enemies'. However, the character of the 'enemies' changed throughout the decade according to the party line. Whereas in literature of the early and mid-1930s negative characters were generally non-party bourgeois specialists (Gerasimova's *Dal'nyaya rodstvennitsa*; Koptyaeva's *Kolymskoe zoloto*), after the intensification of the terror in the late 1930s they tended to become traitors financed by hostile foreign powers (as in Ketlinskaya's *Muzhestvo*).

There were several other distinct differences between the literature created by women writers before 1934 and after 1934. Firstly, whereas the 'new Soviet woman', a feisty heroine of proletarian or peasant origin fighting for equal rights, still featured prominently in the early 1930s, the more demure 'Stalinist heroine' became increasingly promi-

nent in the mid and late 1930s when attitudes towards women had become more conservative. Secondly, while women's liberation and the role of the *Zhenotdel* was still sometimes given a favourable mention in texts published in the early 1930s, such as Gerasimova's *Dal'nyaya rodstvennitsa*, this trend largely disappeared in the mid to late 1930s, as an excessive emphasis on women's liberation threatened to conflict with Stalinist orthodoxy.

Thirdly, in the early 1930s some quite vivid, realistic documentary sketches about women's working lives continued to be produced. Vinogradskaya's 'Udarniki', for example, toes the ideologically correct line, describing committed young women Komsomol workers labouring alongside men and subordinating love to duty, but nevertheless provides frank portraits of working women with their individual points of view. In the late 1930s, however, novels by women writers became progressively paler and more formulaic. Greater emphasis was placed on the cult of Stalin's personality, the campaign against 'enemies of the people' and the encouragement to women to prepare for imminent war.[22]

It is perhaps surprising that women socialist realists, such as Ketlinskaya and Karavaeva, who treated themes similar to those of their male contemporaries did not find a place in the socialist realist canon. It is significant in this connection that Anna Karavaeva, who acted as a friend and mentor to Nikolai Ostrovsky, was much less celebrated than he was, perhaps because of the general misogyny of Stalinist society. There is, however, evidence that some novels by women socialist realists, albeit not enjoying critical acclaim, won considerable popularity among readers. Even Karavaeva's much-criticised novel *Lena iz Zhuravlinoi roshchi* seems to have inspired naive young readers to espouse patriotic sentiments and dream of heroic deeds. Fifteen-year-old Zina Demus, for example, wrote in the name of her whole class: 'I want to read and read and not let this wonderful book out of my hands. It infects the reader with heroism.'[23] Similarly, Ketlinskaya's novel *Muzhestvo*, featuring a group of Komsomol workers building a factory in Siberia, which had been written in response to Stalin's policy of summoning young volunteers to contribute to industrial construction in remote areas, was initially published in a small print-run, but eventually proved very popular. Ketlinskaya received over 4000 letters, demonstrating that her novel had provided an inspiration to young people, especially to young women readers, perhaps because it did not present overly idealised female characters.[24] The novel was subsequently republished in many editions, the last appearing in 1989, in 300 000 copies.

One new theme which emerged in the works of some women writers in the mid-1930s was a growing emphasis on maternity, as fiction was used to contribute to the party's intensifying anti-abortion campaign of 1935–36. The most striking example of such didactic literature is Tat'yana Tess's story 'Materinstvo' ('Maternity', 1935) which piles on horrific details about abortion before it was officially declared illegal in 1936. Tess's story emphasises the pain and emotional suffering experienced by women in an abortion clinic. Before the operation the women are artificially cheerful, but 'a blueish shadow played around their eyes, betraying their nervous shivering and indisposition'. Afterwards, 'the ward was full of groaning women', and when she is discharged the protagonist feels as though 'the world is full of other people's children'. Tess also manages to imply that abortion is entirely women's business – the father of her protagonist's child is notable by his absence.[25]

Most women's writings published in the Soviet Union in the 1930s also follow the officially proclaimed values of Stalinist society by demonstrating extreme prudery in their treatment of sexuality. Love takes second place to duty, and the woman partner must always be politically conscious and morally pure. The Stalinist heroine, such as Karavaeva's Lena, overcomes unworthy 'feminine' emotions in order to devote herself to a higher cause. The nearest that Karavaeva comes to a love scene is a depiction of the heroine gazing from afar at her mentor, a political commissar, and worrying about his health: 'Lena remembered the commissar with a cold and painfully bit her lip.'[26] In this case, the perfect heroine in a Stalinist mould was projected back into the more dramatic (and safer) 1920s, thus diminishing the verisimilitude of the recreation of the period. It is hardly surprising that such idealised female characters in the works of women novelists were criticised as unbelievable.[27]

Some émigré writing of the 1930s affords a striking contrast with Soviet literature in its treatment of love and sexuality, demonstrating the radically different directions in which Russian women's literature might have developed if it had not been constrained by the revolution and Stalinism. Ekaterina Voronina's erotic texts *Telo* (*The Body*, 1933) and *Lyubov' k shesterym* (*Love for Six*, 1935) emphasise women's need for sexual and emotional fulfilment, explore the pleasures and difficulties of heterosexual love, and, in contrast to much Soviet literature, praise the desirability of older women: 'Age lends feminine features, whereas girls are like men.'[28] The unbridled sexuality of

Voronina's heroines suggests that the innocence and restrained emotion attributed to young Soviet women in the 1930s may largely have been a male-sponsored myth. It is also instructive to compare the emphasis on uncomplaining maternity in much Stalinist fiction with Voronina's view of maternity as a waste of valuable female energy. Her works help to explode the Russian and Soviet myth of the self-sacrificing woman.

The themes of unhappy marriage, adultery and divorce leading to a tragic ending were still permitted in socialist realist fiction of the early and mid-1930s, as opposed to the greater puritanism and optimism demanded of much Soviet literature of the late 1930s and the post-war period. In A. Koptyaeva's *Kolymskoe zoloto*, for example, Irina, the pretty but shallow young wife of Ivan Kovalev, a hard-working doctor, who has chosen to work in the far east, is depicted as weak because she is afraid of wild animals, complains about the difficult conditions, flirts and demands attention from her husband and eventually leaves her husband for a more romantic younger man. Both the adulterous wife and her lover are presented as negative characters, non-party individualists more concerned with their own selfish happiness than with the larger cause served by the altruistic, patriotic doctor. Irina evidently incurs the author's disapproval for her unwillingness to share the discomforts and hardships of a man working in a remote area. Her husband's unhappiness is not disguised, but the implication is that personal happiness is not essential and that good party members can obtain compensation through work. The depiction of a woman's unhappiness with a workaholic husband displays some truth to life, but the didactic moral is clear: she is bored because she has no child or work of her own.

By the mid and late 1930s, even some writers apparently totally committed to Stalinist ideology began to abandon fiction for documentary writing, or to escape from the contemplation of contemporary society into historical themes. The civil war continued to be a popular subject, perhaps because it offered the opportunity to depict real enemies rather than the imagined enemies of Stalinism. Gerasimova and Karavaeva, for example, both wrote historical novels about women working for the security services during the civil war.[29] This was a politically safer topic than Stalin's purges, although it could still be regarded as a patriotic contribution to the campaign against 'wreckers' and spies and to the defence of the motherland.[30] Another favourite device, adopted by such writers as Inber, Panova and Aliger, was to write about

developments in foreign countries, notably the rise of fascism in Germany or the Spanish Civil War – subjects on which they could write sincerely.

In the 1930s, official criticism of certain female-authored texts or women writers' own self-criticism provides some valuable insights into what the male authorities regarded as the deviation of certain women writers from the accepted Stalinist norm. In 1934, Lidiya Seifullina, for example, felt the need to explain why she had not published any fiction since 1929 and, in particular, why she had found it very difficult to treat the theme of industrial construction: 'I don't feel comfortable with this material … the greater part of my work and life were spent in the country, and it is not easy for me to turn to the new topic of industrial urban life.'[31] Seifullina's earlier novella *Virineya* (1924) was also attacked in the 1930s – largely, one suspects, because of its portrayal of an assertive, independent, sexually active woman who differed significantly from the Stalinist ideal.

Even a 'production novel' as apparently orthodox as Shaginyan's *Gidrotsentral'* (*Hydrocentral*, 1931) was subjected to criticism for allegedly focusing on passive characters, not on the active builders of socialism.[32] Interestingly, however, this very novel received praise at the end of the decade from two women writers – Lidiya Seifullina and Zoya Kedrina[33] – who compared its more realistic portrayal of women characters very favourably with the pallid, schematic depiction of female characters in male-authored novels such as Gladkov's *Energiya* (*Energy*, 1938), which Kedrina condemned as a mere 'encyclopaedia of female characters' based on newspaper slogans (for example, 'the wives' movement', 'Komsomols in industrial construction' or 'women in the kolkhoz movement').[34]

Such comments by women writers suggest that the portrayal of women in the late 1930s as one-dimensional exemplars of the official ideology did not prove entirely satisfying. In 1939 Lidiya Seifullina made a plea for more satire in the treatment of women characters, and both she and Kedrina launched a scathing attack on the stereotyped portrayal of female characters in many Stalinist novels, criticising, in particular, writers' failure to present women as intellectuals or professional workers.[35] The two women writers who aroused Kedrina's particular scorn were Anna Karavaeva, for her portrayal of the eponymous Lena as a beautiful ingénue with her face 'like a living, pale flower' and her 'huge, blue-grey … enigmatic eyes' – a type corresponding more to the Stalinist ideal of the late 1930s rather than to a tough secret agent of the 1920s – and the famous pilot Marina Raskova for her

conventional autobiographical memoir 'Zapiski shturmana' (1939), which deliberately avoids 'everything intimate and personal, everything "sentimental"'.[36]

Underground writing

It is revealing to compare the sanitised, romanticised image of women in socialist realist fiction with the reality of women's lives in the 1930s, as portrayed in underground writing. It is only prison camp poems and memoirs and major works written in secret, most notably Akhmatova's *Requiem* (largely written in the 1930s but not published in full in Russia until 1987) and Lidiya Chukovskaya's *Sofiya Petrovna* (written in 1939–40; first published in Russia in 1988) that tell some truths about the real position of many Soviet women in the 1930s, when many were arrested or had to cope with the arrests of their loved ones. Both Akhmatova and Chukovskaya convey the experience of millions of women in Stalin's purges through the fate of an individual woman. Some of Akhmatova's poems are based on her own experience of her son's arrest, and she also evokes the suffering of another individual woman in a prison queue (possibly a reference to her friend Chukovskaya), but she also expands these personal tragedies to encompass the many Soviet women whose 'faces had turned to bone' standing in queues by the 'blind red wall' of Stalinist prisons in order to discover news of their loved ones or hand in parcels for them. Chukovskaya's novel is less autobiographical; she conveys the experience of an ordinary Soviet woman, a mother and worker who totally accepts the values of Stalinist society until the arrest of her son overturns her entire world and drives her mad. Her Sofiya Petrovna is a representative of the 'little woman' persecuted by the Stalinist state as Solzhenitsyn's better known Ivan Denisovich is of the 'little man'.

Less well known, but also worthy of attention, is the work of other women poets who suffered in the purges, such as Anna Barkova, imprisoned from 1934–39, whose poetry written in the camps is remarkable for its direct expression of forbidden political themes. In her poem 'In the Prison-Camp Barracks', written in 1935 in the Karaganda prison camp, Barkova asks bitterly:

> So I am a woman, a poet:
> Now, tell me: what purpose has that?
> Angry and sad as a she-wolf
> I gaze at the years that are past.[37]

Ol'ga Berggol'ts, with her poetic cycles 'Ispytanie' ('The Ordeal') and 'Vozvrashchenie' ('The Return'), dated 1938–39, also emerged as a more significant poet in response to her personal tragedies. Mariya Petrovykh, whose poetry from the archives was not published until 1987, also spoke for many of her contemporaries, bitterly condemning Stalinist oppression and all those who remained silent in the 1930s, while also expressing her own fear and guilt at having survived such terrible times.[38]

Autobiographies and memoirs by Russian women document in minute detail the reality of women's lives in Stalin's camps and prisons, where they were subjected to rape, torture, illness, humiliation and injustice, and where children born in the camps were neglected and frequently died. Some of the most characteristic features of such memoirs, in contrast to masculine autobiographies in Russia and other cultures, are the great interest their protagonists take in others, in women, children and relationships. While women who have been arrested focus initially on the fate of their own families and friends, eventually they survive by expressing compassion for other women's suffering and helping their fellow prisoners.

Even Vera Panova, a writer who rose to prominence in the post-war period and is usually regarded as a fairly conventional socialist realist, did actually keep a record of her bitter experiences in the 1930s. Ruth Kreutzer has recently upbraided Panova for her failure to write a story, novel or play about the loss of her second husband Boris Vakhtin, who was arrested in 1935 and died soon after his release. It is now clear, however, that Panova did in fact write an affecting account of her meeting with Vakhtin on the prison island of Solovki.[39] This chapter is included in the most recent edition of her memoirs published in 1989, in which she refers to him as the man 'without whom home was not home and she was not herself and life was not life'.[40] This suggests that she must have suppressed her true feelings for many years in order to write and publish according to the dictates of socialist realism.

Some works by women writers in the 1930s extend the range of genres and themes conventionally considered 'feminine' in Russia. One striking example is the prison poetry of Anna Barkova, remarkable for its rage, bitterness and open denunciation of the Stalinist terror. Another is the majestic epic tone of some poems of Akhmatova's *Requiem* cycle, since the epic is not generally considered to be typical of women writers. The poet expresses, if not reconciliation, then at least a hope of peace for her troubled country torn apart by Stalin's purges.

Whereas, for the most part, even Russian women writing in the underground during the 1930s chose not to confront the problematic nature of women's role in Russian society, preferring the more established options of service to a cause or of bearing witness to their times, a more rebellious note was struck in some émigré literature. For example, the works of Marina Tsvetaeva transgress conventional Russian and Soviet views of gender.[41]

Another issue which could only be treated in underground writing in the 1930s was lesbianism, a theme which had previously been explored in fiction published in the decade before the revolution by Lidiya Zinov'eva-Annibal and Anna Mar, or in émigré works such as Tsvetaeva's poetic cycle 'Podruga' (1916) dedicated to Sofiya Parnok, and her *Povest' o Sonechke* (*Tale of Sonechka,* 1937), which recounts her infatuation with the actress Sonia Holliday. Lesbianism was such a taboo subject in Stalin's Soviet Union that it was not even included in the ban on homosexuality introduced in 1934. However, lesbian themes were occasionally touched upon in little-known Russian underground writings of the 1930s, notably the poems of Sofiya Parnok and Anna Barkova and the diaries of Lidiya Ginzburg, which remained unpublished until the late 1980s and 1990s.

Conclusion

Overall, literary production by women writers fell significantly during the 1930s, perhaps reflecting their inability to conform publicly to Stalinist images of womanhood. In this decade also a variety of different survival strategies were adopted by Russian women writers. Beneath the officially imposed unanimity was concealed a multiplicity of individual female voices, reflecting women writers' very different temperaments, attitudes and experiences.

There was a distinct change of emphasis in women's writing published in the Soviet Union after the introduction of socialist realism in 1934. In the early 1930s women writers were more likely to depict female characters possessing a certain individuality. They were able to continue developing, to a limited degree, some of the more interesting themes treated by women writers in the 1920s (such as women's struggle for equality with men, problems of sexuality, relationships and the family, the value of art, and a certain measure of truth about the hardships faced by women workers on the 'great construction works of communism'). Yet, by the late 1930s more conservative attitudes to

women, sex, marriage and the family prevailed. With the advantage of hindsight, the turning point can be perceived in about 1935, with Tat'yana Tess's anti-abortion story 'Materinstvo'.

While in the 1930s men continued to play the major role in constructing the ideal of Russian womanhood, in this decade women were less inclined than before to elevate their own counter-examples or to portray images which differed from the prevailing norm. Nevertheless, throughout the 1930s, women writers were still more likely than men to depict female protagonists, some of whom displayed more realistic traits than the pallid, perfect Stalinist heroines of male-authored literature, and to offer sensitive evocations of childhood. Relationships and ethical concerns also appear central to many women writers, as opposed to the social and political issues that dominate male-authored fiction.

As in other periods of Russian women's writing, few female authors of the 1930s, whether official or unofficial, consciously regarded themselves as feminists, or even specifically as 'women writers'. Shaginyan, for example, rarely wrote in a woman's voice; and Forsh harboured an uneasy attitude to female identity: while welcoming the ideal of the 'new woman' in her novel *Sumasshedshii korabl'* (*The Crazy Ship*, 1931), Forsh nevertheless satirises the 'feminist' aspirations of her autobiographical heroine Polina. As she later admitted, she had avoided women's issues because she had been unduly influenced by the critic V. Uspensky's comment about the monotony of 'feminine writing', although the theme of women was one that she had 'long and deeply considered'.[42] Despite their protestations to the contrary, however, some Russian women writers of the 1930s treated themes and wrote in a style which today in the west would be seen as distinctively 'feminine'. Even the fierce poet Anna Barkova insisted on the importance of her sex: 'All my life, each hour, I was a *she*.'[43]

Many of the best women writers either colluded with the regime, fell silent, or wrote in the underground. A comparison between the earlier or later works by writers officially published in the Soviet Union, such as Forsh, Seifullina, Shaginyan and Ketlinskaya, and their writings of the 1930s suggests that many female talents were stifled by socialist realism. Since there had always been far fewer female than male authors in twentieth-century Russia, the censorship and self-censorship of some of the most prominent women writers in the 1930s could be seen in retrospect as even more damaging to the development of Russian literature than the persecution of their male contemporaries. Towards the end of the 1930s, the persecution, censorship and self-censorship affecting some of the most prominent women writers and

the increasing repression and conservatism of Stalinist society meant that both Russian women themselves as writers and women depicted in the works of Soviet authors were retreating from any kind of positive identity independent of Stalinist ideology.

Notes

1 See, for example, C. Kelly, *History of Russian Women's Writing* (Oxford, 1994) pp. 227–84, and X. Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Literature, 1917–64* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1968).
2 See, for example, B. Holmgren, *Women's Works in Stalin's Time: on Lidiia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1993); T.W. Clyman and D. Greene (eds), *Women Writers in Russian Literature* (Westport, Connecticut, 1994); and C. Tomei (ed.), *Russian Women Writers* (New York, 1999) vol. 2.
3 Gasiorowska, op. cit.; K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 2nd edn (London, 1985).
4 See, for example, Clark, op. cit., p. 4; N. Luker, 'Introduction', in N. Luker (ed.), *From Furmanov to Sholokhov: an Anthology of the Classics of Socialist Realism* (Ann Arbor, 1988) pp. 23–4.
5 The last poetry collection to be published in Tsvetaeva's lifetime was *Posle Rossii* (Paris, 1928).
6 Anna Akhmatova, *Iz shesti knig* (Leningrad, 1940).
7 These poems were first published in the USA in Sofiia Parnok, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Ann Arbor, 1979); the majority appear in English in D. Burgin, *Sophia Parnok: the Life and Work of Russia's Sappho* (New York, 1994).
8 D. Burgin, 'Sofiia Parnok', in Tomei, op. cit., p. 189.
9 As early as 29 June 1921, Ol'nem sent a letter to the Society for Aid to Needy Writers begging for food, since she was receiving no rations, either at her place of work or as a Russian writer. See RGALI, f. 591, o. 1, ed. khr. 25. Marina Tsvetaeva, after her return to Russia was also practically destitute in the years 1939–41.
10 Gurevich's 'Istoriya russkogo teatral'nogo byta' ('History of Russian Theatrical Life', 1939) remained unfinished at her death.
11 Shaginyan, for example, was criticised for her novel on Lenin, *Bilet po Rossii* (1938) and did not try to publish the rest of this work until the 1950s *(Sem'ya Ulanovykh*, 1958); and Forsh's 1934 play on the Georgian revolutionary Kamo was withdrawn from the programme of the Leningrad State Theatre, probably because it excited Stalin's disapproval.
12 Inber contributed to Gorky's 1934 volume celebrating the construction of the White Sea Canal by prison labour; see also, for example, M. Shaginyan, *Nagorno-Karabakh* (Moscow, 1930); O. Berggol'ts, *Gody shturma* (Leningrad, 1933); E. Polonskaya, *Lyudi sovetskikh budnei* (Leningrad, 1934).
13 On parachutists, see Polonskaya's poems 'Pesnya yunost' (1936) and 'Sokolenek' (1936); on Komsomols, see 'Sestra iz vostoka' (1932) and 'Yangi-kishlyak' (1932).

14 For criticism of Shkapskaya's poems about maternity, see B. Heldt, 'Motherhood in a Cold Climate: the Poetry and Career of Maria Shkapskaia', in J.T. Costlow, S. Sandler and J. Vowles (eds), *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture* (Stanford, California, 1993) p. 241.
15 Lidiya Chukovskaya, who had a strong sense of writing as testimony, was forced to escape from Moscow after her husband's arrest and go into hiding twice.
16 See L. Toom's review of Anna Karavaeva's, *Lena iz Zhuravlinoi roshchi*, *Krasnaya nov'*, no. 7–8, 1940, pp. 303–4; V. P. Khoroshkin, *Tvorchestvo V. Ketlinskoi 30–kh i 40–kh godov* (Moscow, 1961) p. 3.
17 Anna Karavaeva, *Zdravstvui, zhizn'!* (Moscow, 1932) p. 7.
18 For further discussion, see R. Marsh, 'An Image of their Own?: Feminism, Revisionism and Russian Culture', in R. Marsh (ed.), *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions* (Oxford, 1998) p. 19.
19 See, for example, Inber's poems 'Rodonachal'nitsa' (1931), 'Vpolgolosa' (1932), 'Tikhaya Natasha' and 'Prestuplenie Nor-Bibi' (1934); and Forsh's play *Stodvadtsat' vtoraya* (1937).
20 Anna Karavaeva, *Lena iz Zhuravlinoi roshchi* (Moscow, 1938) p. 153.
21 Isaac Babel, *1920 Diary*, ed. C.J. Avins, trans. H.T. Willetts (London, 1995) p. 69.
22 On the Stalin cult, see Anna Karavaeva, *Voskhozhdenie* (Moscow, 1938) p. 6; N. Chertova, *Razryv-trava* (Moscow, 1939) pp. 218–19, describes the elderly Avdot'ya who wants to learn to read in order to read Stalin's famous article on collectivisation, 'Dizzy with Success' (1930).
23 Toom, op. cit., p. 303.
24 M. I. Chernushchenko, *Tvorchestvo Very Ketlinskoi* (Lvov, 1962) p. 5, n. 18.
25 T. Tess, 'Materinstvo', *Krasnaya nov'*, no. 8, 1935, pp. 157, 160.
26 Karavaeva, *Lena iz Zhuravlinoi roshchi*, p. 159.
27 Z. Kedrina, 'Zhenshchina', *Oktyabr'*, no. 8–9, 1939, p. 259.
28 E. Voronina, 'Lyubov' k shesterym', in A. Mar, *Zhenshchina na kreste* (Moscow, 1994) p. 107.
29 Karavaeva's *Lena iz Zhuravlinoi roshchi*; Gerasimova's *Zhalost'* (Moscow, 1934).
30 See the interpretation in Toom, op. cit., p. 305.
31 L. Seifullina, *O literature: stat'i, zametki, vospominaniya* (Moscow, 1958) p. 94, cited in Tomei, op. cit., p. 773.
32 V. Rossolevskaya, 'Stroiteli Gidrotsentrali', *Krasnaya nov'*, no. 12, 1931, p. 142.
33 Kedrina, 'Zhenshchina', p. 268; L. Seifullina, 'O zhenskom obraze', *Oktyabr'*, no. 8–9, 1939, p. 374.
34 Kedrina, 'Zhenshchina', p. 262; she also attacks the last part of Panferov's *Bruski* (1928–37), in which the formerly assertive Stesha Ogneva had been turned into a more colourless, docile character.
35 Kedrina, 'Zhenshchina', pp. 244–72; Seifullina, 'O zhenskom obraze', pp. 273–4.
36 Kedrina, 'Zhenshchina', p. 255.
37 A. Barkova, 'V barake', in S. Vilenskii (ed.), *Dodnes' tyagoteet* (Moscow, 1989), p. 341, translated by C. Kelly in S. Vilensky (ed.), *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1999) pp. 215–16.
38 M. Petrovykh, 'Stikhi iz arkhivov', *Znamya,* no. 1, 1989, pp. 90–5.
39 R. Kreutzer, 'Vera Panova', in Tomei, op. cit., p. 1019.

40 V. Panova, 'O moei zhizni, knigakh i chitatelyakh', in *Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh (*Leningrad, 1989) vol. 5, pp. 401–9.
41 For further discussion, see Kelly, op. cit., pp. 311–17.
42 O.D. Forsh, 'Avtobiografiya', in *Sovetskie pisateli: avtobiografii,* vol. 2 (Moscow, 1959) p. 585.
43 A. Barkova, 'Nechto avtobiograficheskoe', in Barkova, 'Stikhi raznykh let', *Lazur*' no. 1, 1989, pp. 343–5.

10
The New Soviet Woman and the Leader Cult in Soviet Art[1]

Susan E. Reid

This chapter examines the representation of the 'new Soviet woman' in socialist realist art during the second and third five-year plans in relation to the shifting priorities and contradictions of Stalinist policy and propaganda regarding women. Focusing on works of art produced between 1935 and 1939, it argues that even as they proclaimed the new public roles and opportunities available to women under socialism, they articulated relationships of domination and subordination in Stalinist society. Painting and sculpture used female characters to stand for 'the people' as a whole, drawing on conventional gender codes and hierarchy to naturalise the subjection of society to the Stalinist state and legitimate the sacrifice of women's needs to those of industrialisation.[2] The prevalence of female protagonists and the ideal of womanhood they embodied were closely connected with the escalation of the Stalin cult at this time: they modelled the ideal attitude of 'love, honour and obedience'.

If we are to draw any conclusions about how visual representations functioned in Soviet society, it is essential to establish the conditions in which they were produced and made public. My examples come primarily from work commissioned for two complementary exhibitions: *Industry of Socialism,* which was sponsored by Sergo Ordzhonikidze and his Commissariat for Heavy Industry; and its pendant, *Food Industry,* sponsored by Mikoyan, Commissar of Food Industries. Planning for *Industry of Socialism* began in 1935.[3] The exhibition was due to open in November 1937 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the revolution and the successful completion of the second five-year plan. The doors remained closed until March 1939, however, most probably because many works celebrated erstwhile heroes who, having been unmasked as 'enemies of the people'

during the purges, had to be erased. The commissioning, final selection and hanging of *Industry of Socialism* established the iconographic and stylistic canons of socialist realism, which remained in place until at least the mid-1950s. The exhibition also introduced the bureaucratic procedures of planned production into the once individualistic and unaccountable matter of artistic creation: artists no longer conceived work independently but were commissioned in advance to make paintings and sculptures according to an 80-page *Thematic Plan* compiled by a committee.

The exhibition's core theme was socialist industrialisation. In the course of preparations it also took on additional and apparently incompatible agendas: it was co-opted into promoting the new Constitution of 1936 as the 'most democratic in the world'; at the same time, it fuelled the cult of Stalin and legitimated the ongoing restoration of hierarchical relations of power and privilege along with conservative notions of gender difference, subsequently dubbed the 'Great Retreat'.[4] The exhibition served to resolve the contradictions that pertained particularly to the position of women. The Constitution claimed to guarantee women equal rights to vote, work and rest, as well as to provide for maternity leave and childcare. Moreover, women's labour remained just as vital to efforts to increase productivity during the second and third five-year plans as it had been to the rapid industrialisation drive of the first, and the central authorities launched repeated campaigns to encourage women to take up traditionally male occupations and swell the industrial labour force.[5] Yet the regime had already reneged on its commitment to tackle the obstacles to women's advancement when it closed the *Zhenotdel* in 1930 and curtailed further discussion of the 'woman question', declaring that women were already equal in Soviet society. As state provision of childcare and communal dining fell short of promises, women were expected to take responsibility for the traditionally feminine domain of the home, and legislation and propaganda reinforced the nuclear family. Women's 'double burden' locked them into secondary status. As Gail Lapidus argued,

> Economic policies resting on the under-development of the service sector and social policies designed to strengthen the family as a reproductive and socializing institution assigned a set of functions and roles to women that in some respects intensified the sexual division of labor both in public arenas and within the family itself.[6]

The Great Retreat did not simply remove women from public representation. On the contrary, precisely because they were a problem and because the smooth functioning of the state depended on their acquiescence, women and the opportunities socialism afforded them remained an important theme for fine art and mass media throughout the 1930s. In posters it was from around 1930 that the female form came to the fore. Women figured prominently in visual propaganda promoting collectivisation, not because they were its staunchest supporters in practice, but because they were among the most resistant to the disruption of traditional patterns of life.[7] As mothers (or grandmothers) and educators, they were the pillars of the new Soviet order based on the family. At the same time, the economic imperative to encourage women to swell the labour force made them a prime target for persuasion. Even during 1936 when new legislation emphasised women's reproductive role, *Pravda* still printed more images of women engaged in non-traditional pursuits than of women as wives and mothers.[8] It was the role of visual rhetoric to compensate where reality failed to match promises; to persuade women of their important contribution to building socialism, while at the same time shaping and containing their aspirations within bounds that reinstated traditional gender prescriptions.

When *Industry of Socialism* opened in 1939, a striking proportion of the paintings and sculptures that were singled out in press reports and guided tours presented women as central protagonists, seeming to confirm their emancipation and access to public activity. Such images were not about women alone, but represented Soviet society as a whole. The transformation of women's lives through socialist industrialisation was already an established trope for progress. Because the Bolsheviks considered women to have been the most backward and oppressed element of pre-revolutionary society, female figures could most vividly demonstrate the contrast between the 'old and the new'. In painting, the new woman had figured prominently since the mid-1920s, especially in the work of Yurii Pimenov and Aleksandr Deineka, both members of the Society of Easel Painters (OST). In the second five-year plan, the figure of the new Soviet woman continued to stand for the emancipation and rising living standards of the working people.

The *Thematic Plan* for *Industry of Socialism* proposed such titles as 'Woman Miner at the Controls' and 'Cossack Woman Driver!'. Listed under the rubric 'The Country Transformed', these themes dramatised progress by representing the formerly benighted and invisible sex

newly 'mastering' technology, thus identifying the emancipation of women with industrialisation and modernisation.[9] In this vein, Pimenov painted *New Moscow* in 1937 for *Industry of Socialism*. The cinematic immediacy of the composition locates us, the spectators, in the rear seat of a large car. At the wheel, facing into the painting, a fashionable young woman conducts us along a broad boulevard lined with high-rises into the shimmering mirage of the modernised metropolis promised by the 1935 'General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow'. A special newspaper issued to publicise the exhibition printed a satirical verse chastising Pimenov for 'obscuring the whole of Moscow behind the back of a woman driver'.[10] However, the tour guide spoke enthusiastically of the confident young woman as a personification of the rejuvenation and progress of the country as a whole.[11] Of course, Pimenov's vision of the new Soviet woman enjoying the freedom of the city from the driver's seat was as much a case of 'reality in its revolutionary development' as was the representation of female tractor drivers so common in the iconography of the first five-year plan.

One might expect that an exhibition dedicated to 'the Industry of Socialism' would be dominated by paintings and sculptures about industrial labour, and that, given the urgency of recruiting women into the workforce, positive images of female workers would be highlighted. Sure enough, viewers taking the conducted tour of the exhibition would pause before Petr Kotov's painting *Red Sormovo*, which, they would learn, was a group portrait of Stakhanovite shipbuilders at the Sormovo dockyards.[12] A male worker is placed in the foreground, but since he is cast in shadow and does not meet the spectator's gaze his visual function is primarily to direct attention toward the interaction between two muscular women shipbuilders in the middle ground. Yet, while Kotov clearly indicates that the man is welding, he avoids specifying the precise nature of the women's tasks. Other artists showed figures of individual labourers of either sex, notably Sarra Lebedeva's bare-chested, male *Miner* and Aleksandr Samokhvalov's Michelangelesque superwoman, *Metro Constructor with Drill*. The latter is unusual for the power of her physique, her semi-nudity, and for the fact that she is identified as an underground worker handling heavy machinery. Even so, both Samokhvalov and Lebedeva have chosen to depict their workers in a moment of rest. Evasiveness concerning the exertions and processes involved in industrial production was characteristic of the exhibition in general, at least as it was mediated in the press and guided tours.

The increasing reluctance to depict work itself particularly affected the representation of female industrial workers. As a rule, if they were depicted at all in *Industry of Socialism,* it was as a passive spectacle, at rest or between shifts. The bias against showing women doing what was traditionally considered men's work was predetermined by the 1935 *Thematic Plan*. Admittedly, a few of the titles it proposed specifically called for the representation of women in non-traditional roles, but on the whole the plan assumed that industrial workers were generically male, even though women had long constituted a significant proportion of the industrial workforce. Even where women workers were to be depicted, the plan's detailed instructions to artists perpetuated the patriarchal conception of woman as passive object of the male gaze. Thus, they emphasised attractive physical appearance, rather than actions and abilities: they specified, for example, that a painting of female metalworkers should show their strong white teeth smiling out of work-smeared faces, but they said nothing about how their labour should be represented.[13] Painter Nina Korotkova exemplified this treatment of women workers in her *In the Lunch Break, Chirchikstroi*. This painting depicted a convivial, sunlit group of youthful women workers enjoying their break against the optimistic backdrop of cranes constructing the Chirchik hydroelectric complex, 'the industrial heart of Central Asia'. Although the excursion guide spoke of the painting in terms that identified women's emancipation with industrialisation and urbanisation, an editorial in the authoritative journal *Iskusstvo* (*Art*) commented only on the decorative and exotic spectacle Korotkova's Uzbek girls presented in their mixture of boiler suits with colourful traditional dress.[14]

The representation of women in heavy industry was fraught with problems that appear to have been particularly hard for the traditional, fine art media to resolve. While graphic artists had successfully produced a number of models of the female proletarian in the early 1930s, and press photographers continued to provide them,[15] for painters and sculptors the inertia of aesthetic conventions combined inextricably with social anxieties and prejudices to render problematic the conjunction of the female image with heavy industrial labour and physical strength. The difficulty was partly one of finding suitable art-historical prototypes for representing active women. Even in posters, the apparent ease with which artists invented an iconography of male labour immediately after the revolution contrasts with the rarity of images of women workers until 1920, and even then their heroic status depended on contiguity with a male: only in the first five-year plan did

female workers, industrial or agricultural, become central and self-sufficient.[16] In fine art, the attempts to invent an iconography of women's industrial labour, such as Tat'yana Smotrova's sculpture *Women for the Industrialisation of the USSR* – a massive, ungainly figure of a woman worker, legs braced as she pours molten steel – bore little fruit. It took more than a rhetoric of equality to wean artists, selectors and viewers from the entrenched expectations that women should be objectified as a passive, physically attractive spectacle.[17] The insertion of female features into traditionally male poses and iconography signifying strength and action was largely avoided, seemingly because it was perceived as unnatural, ridiculous or awkward on account of its incompatibility with conventional models of femininity.[18] Until tenacious gender stereotypes and prejudices against women's labour could be subjected to the necessary critique, no amount of rhetoric would conjure women's equality.

In addition, artists attempting to represent women's contribution to the economy had to negotiate the controversies surrounding women's employment in heavy and dangerous jobs in the 1930s. Klavdiya Kozlova, a rare artist who specialised in the representation of women workers, appears to have been the only participant in the 1939 exhibition to represent women's employment in underground mining. Apparently in response to the theme 'Woman Miner at the Controls' proposed in the 1935 plan, Kozlova painted *The New Shift of Machine Operators* (1937), in which kerchiefed women prepare to descend the mine shaft.[19] Yet Kozlova, too, avoided showing her female miners at work. Her title alone identifies the job they are to do, carefully allaying any possible fears lest it be heavy or dangerous, and emphasising the impeccably progressive point that women could now work machines. Women's work in underground mining was a contested issue at this time. The 1922 Labour Code had barred women from employment in a list of heavy and dangerous jobs, and the ban was reinforced in subsequent decrees.[20] However, there were mixed feelings about whether women's equality implied that they should simply undertake any job a man could do. Some women resented protective legislation because they perceived it as a way of containing women's advancement, ensuring their continued inequality by confining them to the lower-paid jobs. Besides, the prohibition was frequently ignored and women were increasingly employed in underground work, especially from 1931. By 1939 when *Industry of Socialism* opened to the public, the labour shortage and problems of turnover and industrial discipline were such that it was found necessary actively to recruit women to work in mines,

especially for temporary, seasonal work. A woman miner in the Donbass reported in June 1939 that 'two months have passed since *housewives* … responded to L.M. Kaganovich's summons to women miners to *help their husbands* in the fight for coal'.[21] Incongruous though it may seem, it is characteristic of the time that she refers throughout to women working in mines as 'housewives' or 'wives of miners' assisting their husbands. 'Miners' wives' were to see themselves as a reserve workforce to be called up when needed.

More effort could surely have been made to co-opt paintings like Kozlova's to promote a positive image of women in heavy industry and prepare public opinion for the removal of restrictions on their employment. However, the emphasis of *Industry of Socialism* appears to have shifted significantly in the four years from its conception to its opening in 1939. The hanging and reception were dominated not by images of foundries, machines and industrial processes, as the title would suggest, but by works that celebrated the fruits of labour, agricultural as well as industrial.[22] Contemporary reviewers paid most attention to such works as Sergei Gerasimov's *Collective Farm Festival* and Arkadii Plastov's painting of the same title. These were hung together under Stalin's slogan 'life has got happier', thus directly harnessing the celebration of the benefits of socialist development to the promotion of the Stalin cult. The reasons for the critics' preference were not purely ideological: they also appear to have found this section of the exhibition the most aesthetically satisfying. It included some of the more talented artists, and its subject matter was more traditionally picturesque than images of factories and mines, allowing for indulgence in colour harmonies which the critics could legitimate as expressions of joy.

While women figured least of all in works on the exhibition's titular theme of heavy industrial labour, the categories of painting on which the reviewers concentrated in 1939 – those vaunting the benefits of socialist industrialisation in everyday life – were precisely the ones in which women featured most prominently. Meanwhile, the art exhibition *Food Industry,* which opened as a branch of *Industry of Socialism* in Gorky Park on 25 July 1939, was entirely dedicated to the celebration of abundance and consumption. The viewer (perhaps taking a break from standing in queues for scarce commodities) might feast her eyes on the wonders of Soviet food processing and manufacturing. The theme of food and consumer industries, entailing a greater emphasis on everyday life and agriculture, allowed for the lesser genres of landscape, genre painting and still life to predominate.[23]

As Commissar of Food Industries since 1934, the sponsor of this vision of cornucopia, Anastas Mikoyan, had dedicated himself both to the urgent task of modernising food-processing methods and to pioneering ways of advertising the benefits this would eventually bring. The use of fine art to legitimate discerning consumerism began hard on the heels of the famine, with the end of rationing, the restoration of trade and the second five-year plan, which promised to improve living standards.[24] The exhibition *Food Industry* opened in the wake of the endorsement by the Eighteenth Party Congress of the third five-year plan in which Mikoyan's Commissariat emphasised quality and variety.[25] As if shortages were a thing of the past, press reports sanctioned consumerism and a taste for luxury.[26] Mikoyan's exhibition, likewise, celebrated epicureanism rather than subsistence. True to the tenets of socialist realism, still lives such as Boris Yakovlev's *Soviet Wines* and *Soviet Conserves* and Petr Konchalovskii's *Game and Vegetables in a Window* (1937–38) advertised the abundance, variety and quality promised by the economic plan as if these were accomplished fact.

Where *Industry of Socialism* suppressed women's contribution to heavy industry, a number of works at *Food Industry* did represent women as producers, albeit in the 'lesser' realm of consumer goods and food processing. Perhaps because consumption and food provision were traditionally women's domain, artists could be more specific about the precise tasks undertaken by women. Konstantin Dorokhov's *In the Stalin Canning Factory* showed the preparation of fresh produce for conserving as an entirely female occupation. However, the responsible job of quality control was represented as man's business, worthy even of the (male) leaders' close attention.[27] Thus, in Vladimir Odintsov's *In the Struggle for Quality* a junior woman worker in the Dukat tobacco factory presents a box of cigars to her senior, male colleagues for inspection. The same division of labour can be seen in Vera Orlova's *Ball-Bearing Factory*.[28] Meanwhile, in a painting by Nikolai Denisovskii, *Comrades Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and Mikoyan Inspect New Products of TEZHE,* the omniscient Stalin passes his unerring judgement on the quality of toiletries provided for Soviet women by *Tualetnoe zhenskoe* (Women's Toiletries), the Commissariat of Food Industry's 'Chief Parfumier'. A gendered division of labour operates also in Ol'ga Yanovskaya's *Master Confectioners* (Figure 10.1), one of the most impressive tributes to Mikoyan's concern to 'let the people eat cake'. Inevitably, the 'master confectioner' is a man; while his female assistant carries a tray of lowly buns, he tools the monumental phallus

Figure 10.1 Ol'ga Yanovskaya, *Master Confectioners*, 1939. Oil on canvas.

of a gateau, transubstantiating food from animal necessity into cultural artefact.

Other works shown at *Food Industry* invariably represented the primary beneficiaries of improvements in the standard of living as women. Pimenov's *In the Store,* a rare painting on the theme of shopping, figures women as consumers in circumstances reminiscent of prerevolutionary elegance. Pimenov may have been inspired by the Eliseev grocery on Gorky Street which had reopened as a luxury food store in 1934, along with the refurbished Moscow department store Mostorg, as part of a campaign to make shopping a more cultured experience. The press welcomed the new shopping opportunities as portents of the abundance and cultured lifestyle on the horizon.[29] Nevertheless, there was still much ambivalence about the ideological legitimacy of consumerism. Pimenov's painting troubled prominent critic Osip Beskin for what he characterised as 'Central European prettiness or modishness', by which he appears to have meant its somewhat bourgeois, cosmopolitan urbanity.[30]

Mikoyan's name became synonymous with good housekeeping, traditionally the female domain in the Russian household. However, in the unequal marriage of food production and industry, Mikoyan's *Food Industry* played the subordinate, 'feminine' partner to Ordzhonikidze's 'masculine' *Industry of Socialism*. Regardless of the promises of the second

and third five-year plans, the Soviet economy continued to sacrifice the citizens' needs to the interests of heavy industry and defence. For all but the elite, the 'representation of reality in its revolutionary development' in socialist realist painting served, literally, as window dressing, taking the place of actual products available for purchase.

Not only the individual exhibits of *Food Industry,* but also the relationship the exhibition as a whole bore to *Industry of Socialism* demonstrate that Stalinist visual art was structured by conventionally gendered associations and oppositions which aligned 'woman' with a series of ideologically subordinate terms implying a lower level of consciousness. Notwithstanding the Stalin regime's protestations of its unfailing commitment to sexual equality, artistic images identified man with culture, woman with nature; man with consciousness and rationality, woman with spontaneity and emotion; man with heavy industrial production, and woman with agriculture, food preparation, consumption and reproduction. Thus, Sergei Gerasimov's *Collective Farm Festival,* for example, closely associates women with the fecundity of the sun-washed, agrarian landscape. They figure as the providers of an abundant feast harvested from the land, while men make speeches that articulate the ideological significance of this joyous event for the world beyond the collective farm. To take another well-known example from this period, Vera Mukhina's famous sculpture *Worker and Collective Farmer* allegorised the unequal bond between the industrial proletariat and the collectivised peasantry in the coupling of a man and a woman. While powerfully built, the female figure representing farm workers is slightly smaller and lags behind the male representative of the 'leading class'. A Soviet account from the 1960s contrasted the man's powerful gesture to the 'more feminine' stance of the woman.[31] In the 1920s artists had consistently used a male figure to symbolise the peasantry; but with the collectivisation campaign, the image of the female *kolkhoz* worker became prominent. Mukhina's return to the classical tradition of female allegory was a matter of conscious choice. Elizabeth Waters has suggested that she used a female figure to personify agriculture because collectivisation had disempowered or 'feminised' the peasantry both literally and metaphorically.[32] Mukhina drew on still prevalent assumptions about the 'natural' and time-honoured inequality of the sexes to legitimate the subordination of agriculture to the needs of industry.

The theme of socially active women retained its prominence from the first five-year plan through the second and third, with mass media and high culture continuing to proffer role models of outstanding

women delegates, Stakhanovites or aviators. A marked change took place in the way they were represented, however. This can be demonstrated by comparing Georgii Ryazhskii's *Kolkhoz Brigade Leader* of 1932 with two works painted in 1937 for *Industry of Socialism*: Pimenov's *Woman Delegate* (Figure 10.2); and Grigorii Shegal''s *Leader, Teacher, Friend* (Figure 10.3).

Figure 10.2 Yurii Pimenov, *Woman Delegate*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 300 × 260 cm.

Figure 10.3 Grigorii Shegal', *Leader, Teacher, Friend,* 1937. Oil on canvas, 340 × 259 cm.

In Ryazhskii's painting from the end of the first five-year plan, the female administrator is self-assured and authoritative in her own right. She confidently faces the viewer and possesses the central vertical axis of the composition where she conducts her business with a woman

comrade, framed by collective farmers who labour in harmony with modern machines to bring in the harvest. While dedicated to her work for the party, whose red kerchief she wears, she is subordinate to no individual, male or female.

The two later works also concern the opportunities socialism offered women to realise their potential in responsible public roles. Indeed, in the mid-1930s the woman delegate, attending conferences to celebrate various achievements in the construction of socialism, became one of the most common 'positive heroes' of painting, while, conversely, the genre of 'delegates' was peopled almost entirely by women. Thus, the female figures supplanted the traditional male universal as representatives of the Soviet people as a whole. On one level, such images as Pimenov's *Woman Delegate* corroborated the Constitution's claims that women in the Soviet Union already enjoyed equality. At the same time, however, a variety of narrative and compositional devices reproduced their subjection to patriarchal authority, both specifically as women, and as representatives of 'the people'.

Rhetorical claims for sexual equality denied the discursive as well as material factors that ensured women's continued subordination. The 'critical assimilation' of artistic models from the past, on which socialist realism was to be based, was less than critical from the point of view of gender. Female as well as male artists perpetuated the art historical tradition of displaying women as a spectacle to delight the eye. Painted in a loose, impressionist brushwork to convey vitality and spontaneity, Pimenov's glamorous, fashionably groomed young women delegates were clearly indebted to the French Impressionist, Auguste Renoir. While inserting women into a new role at the level of theme, Pimenov's *Woman Delegate* still, like Renoir's paintings, defined female identity in terms of masculine desire, reassuring the viewer that emancipation need not preclude 'feminine' allure. On the contrary, as the working women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* informed its readership – and as Denisovskii's portrayal of the leadership inspecting face creams and powders confirmed – the party and government were 'daily concerned with the physical development of the person'. This meant that 'Soviet woman, while engaged in multifaceted social activity, must learn to preserve her feminine countenance and to look after herself … she should pay attention to her appearance.'[33] Deineka also took a community of fashionable women delegates as the subject of his painting shown in the same section, *At a Women's Meeting*. One 'woman worker' commented ascerbically, 'Is this really a women's meeting rather than a women's fashion atelier?'[34]

Shegal′′s painting *Leader, Teacher, Friend* concerns, on the face of it, the public recognition of women's outstanding contribution to Soviet agriculture. Displayed for emulation, these politically conscious and socially active women represent the vanguard of female agricultural workers, attending the Second Congress of *Kolkhoz* Stakhanovites. Typically for its time, the narrative concerns a named individual, Fedotova. Her image was familiar from the press reports which had provided the artist's inspiration. These told how comrade Stalin instructed her in the art of chairing a meeting. As a simple peasant woman who has been rocketed into a leading role, she personifies the opportunities for advancement which the Soviet order provided and Stalin's Constitution allegedly guaranteed. This, ostensibly, is *her* occasion: her face, in the centre, catches the light; Stalin's head, meanwhile, is shaded and barely raised above the others to indicate that he is first among equals.[35] Yet every other aspect of the composition belies the leader's self-effacing comportment and reconfirms his ultimate, and apparently inevitable authority, even as he delegates. Where Ryazhskii's canvas was 'democratically' articulated into vertical columns by the female figures in the foreground, Shegal′′s composition is hierarchically stratified to figure ascent. He uses the motif of the podium to confine the action within the lower third of the composition, leaving the upper register empty apart from the ghostly statue of Lenin. The viewer, located in the stalls, finds her eye drawn upward by the intent gaze of those on the podium and the baroque contortions of the Uzbek woman in the foreground, arriving not at Fedotova, as one might expect, but directly at Stalin, before proceeding upwards to Lenin. A series of diagonals confirms the angle of Stalin's head, stooping to instruct her, as the real crux of the composition. The title, too, *Leader, Teacher, Friend*, indicates that Fedotova's is no more than a supporting role. She is there to be taught and led, malleable clay with which Stalin can demonstrate how, as Shegal′ allegedly conceived it, 'reforging people, he leads them to the new life'.[36] The painting is concerned less with the empowerment of women than with Stalin's wisdom and paternal concern to lend the inexperienced female peasant the confidence to chair the proceedings. Shown in relation to the male leader, she functions as a sign of his authority. 'Stalin is offered as the ultimate referent for their effort and accomplishment', as Margarita Tupitsyn has argued with regard to posters from the same period.[37] As the 1936 Constitution had done, the painting asserts the new public roles available to women only to circumscribe them within the reconfirmed patriarchal order.

From the mid-1930s, 'wives' stepped into the limelight. The 1939 call to 'wives of miners' to assist their husbands was typical of many public statements from the time of the Constitution. Even women identified as socially active were frequently referred to as 'wives' and offered only a vicarious route to social recognition as supporters of their husbands' and sons' public activities. Thus, when honouring a Soviet hero, the press would also praise his exemplary wife, for even 'the modest work of the housewife is … necessary and useful to the whole country'.[38] Similarly, the plan for *Industry of Socialism* called for a painting of a Red Army soldier in the home of a (male) worker whose wife was to be depicted mending their guest's overcoat.[39] The birth of the *obshchestvennitsa,* or 'housewife-activist', movement at this time was both symptomatic of, and contributed to, the reaffirmation of gender and class hierarchies. Sponsored by Ordzhonikidze's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, *obshchestvennitsa* consolidated *wives* of higher-ranking managers, professionals and bureaucrats as a distinct social force. A similar organisation united wives of Red Army Commanders.[40] This social stratum was distinguished by the fact that the man's earnings were sufficient to free his wife from the need for gainful employment. The Soviet housewife-activist was expected to exemplify those same *domestic* virtues which nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology identified with middle-class femininity. Yet, paradoxically, *obshchestvennitsa* was a way of transforming the 'angel in the house' into a public figure. The good wife (liberated from housework, not by communal facilities as promised in the 1920s, but by domestic servants) was to place her traditionally 'feminine' skills as carer, educator, housekeeper and homemaker at the service of Soviet society as a whole. She was to devote herself – unpaid – to supporting her husband's work by overseeing standards of hygiene, decency and *kul'turnost'* (culturedness) in the workplace.[41]

The honourable status of the good wife in Soviet society was the theme of Vasilii Efanov's *An Unforgettable Meeting* (Figure 10.4), which he painted for *Industry of Socialism.* Depicting the 1936 All-Union Conference of Wives of Managers and Engineers of Heavy Industry, the painting demonstrated the highest distinction to which the model wife, or *obshchestvennitsa*, might aspire.[42] The conference was also the subject of a sketch by graphic artist Petr Staronosov, *Comrade Stalin at the All-Union Conference of Obshchestvennitsy of Heavy Industry*. The propaganda purpose of such meetings, and of the publicity surrounding them, was to emphasise the emotional bond between the leaders and the people and to arouse fanaticism among those sectors of the

Figure 10.4 Vasilii Efanov, *An Unforgettable Meeting*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 270 × 391 cm.

population considered most prone to irrational enthusiasms: women and young people.[43] Although both these works represented the endorsement of the *obshchestvennitsa* movement and made a spectacle of its female members, their social activities were apparently considered unworthy of depiction. The guided tour of the exhibition contextualised Efanov's painting by referring to the emancipation of women, emphasising the equality guaranteed them by Article 122 of the Stalin Constitution, and highlighting their active role in the construction of socialism.[44] The 'active role' this painting offered to women was, however, a limited and subordinate one.

The representation of social hierarchies through gender difference was reinforced by composition and spatial metaphor in Stalinist painting. In Staronosov's sketch a swarming throng of fanatic women surges upwards, while the charismatic male leaders, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, condescend to them. Similarly, in a large painting predating *Industry of Socialism,* Aleksandr Samokhvalov's *Kirov Greeting a Sport Parade*, young women break ranks as if in a spontaneous burst of exuberant love, to leap up towards Kirov high above them on the podium. Efanov's *An Unforgettable Meeting* is structured, albeit obliquely, by a similar set of oppositions that identify woman with a

lower stage in the dialectical ascent of consciousness: aspiring female to condescending male, unnamed masses to individual leaders, emotion and spontaneity to order and authority.

Witnessed by the applauding Politburo, amidst abundant flowers, the respectably fashionable representative of wives, Klavdiya Surovtseva, has stepped into a pool of light in the centre to receive, on behalf of all her sister *obshchestvennitsy*, Stalin's thanks for their support work. It was allegedly Surovtseva's initiative of growing flowers in a factory yard that inspired Ordzhonikidze to launch the *obshchestvennitsa* movement.[45] The 'wife's side' on the left is relatively volatile and consists primarily of women, with the exception of the patron Ordzhonikidze, who is depicted in profile to convey at once the humility of a donor and his aspiration to a place in heaven. Stalin's side on the right, occupied primarily by portraits of the all-male Politburo, is visually more stable, anchored in the seated figures of President Kalinin and Nadezhda Krupskaya. Krupskaya's presence as the sole woman on this side owes more to her vicarious status as Lenin's widow than to her own work in championing women's emancipation.

The topos of a transformative encounter with the Father of the People, in which the subject is first reduced to infantile helplessness before rising to a state of grace in Stalin's presence, was not unique to women. It appeared routinely in the memoirs of Stakhanovites.[46] Surovtseva's speech, as quoted by the guide, follows the stock pattern. She had been nervous about meeting Stalin, she confessed, 'but when I came onto the stage, when I saw You, so simple, kind and dear … I calmed down'.[47] These accounts, premised on the unequal relationship between child and patriarch, bear out Katerina Clark's observation that the horizontal, fraternal kinship model of the first five-year plan gave way in the mid-1930s to a vertical one: the well-ordered state was envisaged as a disciplined and hierarchical family, with the people as Stalin's dutiful and loving children.[48] Thus, as Hubertus Gassner and Eckhart Gillen have noted, in *An Unforgettable Meeting,* 'The depth of their [Stalin and Surovtseva's] gaze contrasts with the excited interest of the "people" and reminds one of the relationship between father and daughter.'[49] The tour guide identified Efanov's Stalin with the 'Father of the People', pointing out how the leader presses Surovtseva's little hand in both of his '*with paternal fondness*'.[50]

By choosing a female figure to represent the people, Efanov could reinforce the generational authority of father over child by simultaneously alluding to the gendered power relationship of husband and wife. Thus, Surovtseva is characterised in relation to Stalin the patriarch in

two subordinate roles at once: child and blushing bride. As the guide's account made clear, her infantilisation in the leader's presence takes on the stereotypically feminine form of becoming modesty and willing submission. Suffused by the intoxicating scent of lilac, the exchange of gazes is not only that between father and daughter but the communion of lovers. The image is even constructed as a kind of wedding portrait: Molotov, as head of government, presides over the union, which is marked by the libidinal burst of crimson blooms in the centre. Aleksandr Balashov has argued that the clasped hands raised above the bride echo the figure of ascension *(voskhozhdenie)* in the ancient Byzantine iconography of the *Bogomater' Oranty,* the protector of newlyweds. Perhaps inadvertently, the artist has even made a pun that points to the nuptial subtext: the arched hands 'crown' her Stalin's consort (the Russian *'venchat''* means both 'to crown' and 'to marry'*).*[51] Efanov recalls the tradition of representing the relationship between heaven and earth as the marriage between Christ and his Church. As Tupitsyn notes in regard to posters at this time, 'women's place vis-à-vis the leader took on a similarity to the position, in the Christian tradition, of women as Christ's brides'.[52] The conjoining of Stalin with the *obshchestvennitsa* or exemplary wife at the centre of this bifurcated composition may be read, then, as a symbolic marriage between two unequal partners, party leadership and the feminised masses.

I want to end by raising some questions about the gendered nature of spectatorship and the imagined public for Stalinist art. Two works by Ol'ga Yanovskaya are concerned precisely with spectatorship. The painting she showed at *Industry of Socialism*, *In the Shock Workers' Box at the Bolshoi Theatre* (1937), paralleled contemporary mass media reports in representing women as the exemplary audience and chief beneficiaries of expanded access to education and high culture. The guided tour of the exhibition used Yanovskaya's painting to illustrate Stalin's recent proclamation that 'Culture and prosperity (*dovol'stvo*) have entered the life of the working family', while the artist herself spoke of her wish to represent the new Soviet spectator, 'full of deep understanding and love for art'.[53] The theatre audience is mixed, but the composition focuses on a group of three women, their rapt faces lit by reflected light from the stage. As the headscarf of the older woman indicates, and the title confirms, these are no ladies of leisure but upwardly mobile shock-workers using their well-earned free time to cultivate themselves. At an *Exhibition of Women Artists* held in March 1938, Yanovskaya showed a 1937 study which bears a close relation to, and may have been a preparatory work for, her painting of the new

theatre audience. The study was exhibited, however, under the title *Listening to Comrade Stalin's Speech* and was hung so that the women appeared to look directly towards a portrait of Stalin placed above them to the left.[54] Thus, the attentive women were transposed from the theatre to the forum of political power. It is no longer a play that enthrals them, but the figure of Stalin, located beyond the canvas. Yanovskaya has inverted the gendered power relations of observer and observed that are conventional in the western artistic tradition. Far from spectatorship being an exercise of control, here it is represented as willing submission, a conventionally feminine stance with which the viewer of the painting – whether female or male – is invited to identify.

I would propose, then, that the mass audience for images directly promoting the Stalin cult was imagined as female. The personification of the power and beneficence of the Soviet state in the charismatic male leader aimed ultimately to cast the entire Soviet people in the conventionally female role of devoted obedience, both as they figured in painting and as its viewers. Yet, in the first instance, it courted the loyalty and love of women, stereotyped as low in political consciousness yet most susceptible to persuasion, and most given to unquestioning, fanatic thraldom. To test this hypothesis requires further research on the popularisation and reception of the art of the Stalin cult among different social groups. The elite women's magazine *Obshchestvennitsa* (published by the Commissariat of Heavy Industry from 1936), for example, was active in disseminating work produced for *Industry of Socialism*. *Rabotnitsa* also urged its working women readers to visit the exhibition, but its coverage of contemporary art was very limited. Are any systematic distinctions to be found in the iconography, style and display of art according to the gender and social status of specific intended publics? Were there exhibition tours that expressly targeted women viewers? In the end, notwithstanding their important differences, did Stalin's propagandists share the view attributed to Hitler, that: 'In politics one must have the support of women, men will follow by themselves'?[55]

Notes

1 Revised and abridged from S. E. Reid, 'All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s', *Slavic Review,* vol. 57, no. 1, 1998, pp. 133–73.

2 The representation of women in Soviet visual culture has been the subject of several studies including E. Waters, 'The Female Form in Soviet Political

Iconography, 1917–32', in B.E. Clements, B.A. Engel and C.D. Worobec (eds), *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Oxford, 1991) pp. 225–42; V.E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (London, 1997); M. Tupitsyn, *After Perestroika: Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen* (New York, 1993); and A. Hilton, 'Feminism and Gender Values in Soviet Art', in M. Liljestrom et al. (eds), *Gender Restructuring in Russian Studies* (Tampere, 1993) pp. 99–116. Except for Hilton, they concentrate primarily on posters and other mass-produced imagery in the period from the revolution to the first five-year plan.

3 G. Bandalin (ed.), *Vsesoyuznaya khudozhestvennaya vystavka 'Industriya sotsializma': Katalog* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1939). It was rehung within the first year and remained open into 1940. RGALI, f. 962 (Arts Committee), o. 6, ed. khr. 694.

4 The term 'Great Retreat' was coined by N.S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: the Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1946).

5 D. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialisation: the Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928–41 (*London, 1986) pp. 144–7.

6 G.W. Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley, 1978) p. 103.

7 Waters, op. cit., pp. 238, 242; Bonnell, op. cit., pp. 79–82, 107.

8 R.T. Manning, 'Women in the Soviet Countryside on the Eve of World War II, 1935–40', in B. Farnsworth and L. Viola (eds), *Russian Peasant Women* (Oxford, 1992) pp. 211–13.

9 *Industriya sotsializma: Tematicheskii plan vsesoyuznoi khudozhestvennoi vystavki (*Moscow, 1935) pp. 48, 52.

10 *Industriya sotsializma,* single issue broadsheet, June 1939, p. 6.

11 S.A. Zombe, comp., 'Tekst besedy obzornoi ekskursii po vystavke "Industriya sotsializma"', RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, l. 45.

12 Ibid., 1. 33.

13 *Industriya sotsializma: Tematicheskii plan,* p. 65.

14 Script of guided tour, S. Fomina, comp., 'Pod'em narodnoi kul'tury i narodnogo blagosostoyaniya', RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, l. 70; and Editorial, 'Iskusstvo v strane sotsializma', *Iskusstvo,* no. 6, 1937, p. 7 (reproduction) and p. 31.

15 See issues of *Pravda* and *Rabotnitsa* for 1936–39.

16 Waters, op. cit., p. 235; Bonnell, op. cit., pp. 66, 78.

17 This stereotype persisted through and beyond the Stalin period. See Susan E. Reid, 'Masters of the Earth: Gender and Destalinisation in Soviet Reformist Painting of the Khrushchev Thaw', *Gender & History, v*ol. 11, no. 2, 1999, pp. 276–312.

18 V. Gertsenberg, 'S.V. Ryangina. "Vse vyshe", "Podstantsiya na Suramskom perevale"', *Iskusstvo,* no. 4, 1934, p. 145; and G. Revzin, '"Devushka moei mechty"', *Iskusstvo,* no. 3, 1990, p. 40.

19 Editorial, 'Iskusstvo v strane sotsializma', p. 31.

20 M. Ilič, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: from 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London, 1999) ch. 10.

21 Varvara Zubkova, 'Zhenshchiny prishli na shakhty', *Industriya,* 26 June 1939 (emphasis mine); and V.A. Zubkova, 'Pomozhem nashim muzh'yam', *Rabotnitsa,* no. 16, 1939, p. 7.

22 RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, and RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 694, ll. 6–16.
23 RGALI, f. 2943, o. 1, ed. khr. 124, l. 8; and Yu. Lobanova, comp., *Vsesoyuznaya khudozhestvennaya vystavka pishchevaya industriya. Otdel vystavki 'Industriya sotsializma': Katalog* (Moscow, 1939).
24 See J. Hessler, 'Culture of Shortages: a Social History of Soviet Trade, 1917–53' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1996) ch. 6; and J. Chen, *Soviet Art and Artists* (London, 1944) pp. 36–7.
25 *Pravda,* 21 March 1939.
26 A. Gudilov, 'Malen'kii fel'eton', *Za industrializatsiyu,* 26 September 1935; see also S. Fitzpatrick, '"Middle-Class Values" and Soviet Life in the 1930s', in T. Thompson and R. Sheldon (eds), *Soviet Society and Culture* (Boulder, Colorado, 1988) pp. 20–38; C. Kelly and V. Volkov, 'Directed Desires: *Kul'turnost'* and Consumption', in C. Kelly and D. Shepherd (eds), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940* (Oxford, 1998) pp. 291–313; and Hessler, op. cit., ch. 6.
27 Compare Gudilov, op. cit.
28 Reproduced in M. Banks (ed.), *The Aesthetic Arsenal: Socialist Realism under Stalin* (New York, 1993) colour pl. 19.
29 Fitzpatrick, op. cit., pp. 25–6; Hessler, op. cit.; and Kelly and Volkov, op. cit., p. 292.
30 Osip Beskin, 'Sredi obrazov izobiliya i radosti', *Tvorchestvo,* no. 9, 1939, p. 16.
31 R.Ya. Abolina, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo perioda razvernutogo stroitel'stva sotsializma (1933–41)* (Moscow, 1964) p. 52.
32 Waters, op. cit., pp. 240–1.
33 I.L. Belakhov, 'Kul'tura tela i gigiena', *Rabotnitsa,* no. 2, 1937.
34 'V knige otzyvov', *Industriya sotsializma,* June 1939, p. 6.
35 Describing his conception of the painting, Shegal' related how he saw 'Stalin, [as] a simple Soviet person'. G. Shegal', 'Istochnik nashego vdokhnoveniya', *Industriya sotsializma,* June 1939, p. 2.
36 S. Razumovskaya, 'Tvorchestvo G.M. Shegalya', *Tvorchestvo,* no. 7, 1939, p. 12; M. Neiman, 'Na vystavke "Stalin i lyudi Sovetskoi strany v izobrazitel'nom iskusstve"', *Tvorchestvo,* no. 2, 1940, p. 6; and N. Shchekotov, 'K otkrytiyu vystavki "Industriia sotsializma"', *Tvorchestvo,* nos. 11–12, 1937, pp. 9–10.
37 Tupitsyn cites Hélène Cixious: 'When a woman is asked to take part in this representation she is, of course, asked to represent man's desire.' M. Tupitsyn, 'From the Politics of Montage to the Montage of Politics: Soviet Practice 1919 through 1937', in M. Teitelbaum (ed.), *Montage and Modern Life, 1919–42,* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 20; and Tupitsyn, *After Perestroika,* p. 11.
38 F.G. Tret'yakov, 'Domashnyaya khozyaika', *Rabotnitsa,* no. 15, 1939, p. 16. See also the self-effacing statements by three wives of pilots about how they support their husbands in their work: *Pravda,* 24 July 1936.
39 *Industriya sotsializma: Tematicheskii plan,* p. 12.
40 For the diverse activities of the Red Army Wives see *Rabotnitsa,* no. 1, 1937.
41 For sources on *obshchestvennitsa* see Chapters 1 and 8 by Scheide and Buckley in this volume. A new study of *obshchestvennitsa* has appeared since the original version of this article was published and casts further light on the way its members were conceptualised as 'mothers of socialist

society' and 'housewives of the great Soviet home': R.B. Neary, 'Mothering Socialist Society: the Wife-Activists Movement and the Soviet Culture of Daily Life, 1934–41', *Russian Review,* vol. 58, no. 3, 1999, pp. 396–412. For similar conclusions regarding activist women in the 1920s, see E. Wood*, The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1998).

42 M. Neiman, 'Novye portrety tovarishcha Stalina', *Iskusstvo,* no. 6, 1937, p. 65; A.I. Zotov, 'Khudozhestvennaya vystavka "Industriya sotsializma"', RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 624, l. 2; and RGALI f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, l. 72.

43 For comparison, see S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge, 1997) p. 150.

44 RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, ll. 71–2.

45 Kelly and Volkov, op. cit., p. 297.

46 Examples are cited by K. Clark, 'Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature', in R.C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1977) p. 187.

47 RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, l. 72.

48 Clark, op. cit., pp. 180–7.

49 H. Gassner and E. Gillen, 'From Utopian Designs for the New Order to the Ideology of Reconciliation', in Banks (ed.), *Aesthetic Arsenal,* p. 184.

50 RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, l. 72; and Neiman, 'Novye portrety', p. 64.

51 Aleksandr Balashov, 'O nekotorykh osobennostyakh kompozitsii proizvedeniya V.P. Efanova "Nezabyvaemaya vstrecha"', *Tvorchestvo,* no. 10, 1991, pp. 31–3.

52 Tupitsyn, *After Perestroika,* p. 11.

53 Stalin, Report to Eighteenth Party Congress, as cited in script of guided tour, RGALI, f. 962, o. 6, ed. khr. 948, l. 66; and D(ariya) Sh(pirkan), 'Khudozhnitsy', *Rabotnitsa,* nos. 5–6, 1938, p. 20. On the complicity of women artists in reproducing the terms of their own subordination see Reid, 'All Stalin's Women', p. 171.

54 It was illustrated under this title in L. Rozental', 'Vystavka zhenskogo tvorchestva', *Tvorchestvo,* no. 6, 1938, p. 17. Its position can be seen in the installation view in S. Ryangina, 'Pervaya vystavka zhenshchin-khudozhnits', *Rabotnitsa,* no. 10, 1938, p. 17. The title is given there as 'Listening to a Report'. Ryangina confirms that it is a study for *In the Shock Workers' Box*.

55 Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, 'Les femmes et la traversé du fascisme', *Eléments pour une analyse du fascisme* (Paris, 1976), 1, p. 157; cited in translation in B. Spackman, 'The Fascist Rhetoric of Virility', *Stanford Italian Review,* vol. 8, no. 1–2, 1990, p. 83.

11
Women's Work and Emancipation in the Soviet Union, 1941–50[1]

Susanne Conze

Women's work made a significant contribution to all war economies during the twentieth century. Many have assumed that war consequently also had an impact on the emancipation of women. While this thesis has been disproved with regard to the western industrial nations, there is much to suggest that the emancipation of women was advanced in the Soviet Union. The typical development of western industrial nations is described by Margaret and Patrice Higonnet using the image of a 'double helix', in which men's and women's roles in society each represent one strand of the double helix. The two strands are connected to each other, spiralling upwards interdependently; however, their positions relative to each other do not change. Women's contribution to the war effort was equivalent to men's paid work in peacetime, but compared to men at the front, women workers were again considered second rank. This mirrored the lower value ordinarily placed on women's paid work in peacetime, and after the war women were easily forced out of their hard-won positions. Women's war work was viewed as an interim and emergency measure.[2]

In the Soviet Union the mass entry of women into the production process started well before the outbreak of war. By the 1930s the level of women's participation in the industrial labour force already distinctly exceeded that in western industrial societies. During the Second World War many women worked in traditional 'male' occupations, and a few were also employed as pilots, tank drivers, snipers and partisans. The segregation between women's work and men's work appeared to break down. After the end of the war, the levels of female employment continued to rise, and women were by no means driven out of the labour market. However, they were now tied more closely to the workplace by economic need and official pressures. Despite this, it

would be wrong to assume that the patriotic feats of Soviet women in the Second World War 'were the final step to achieving emancipation'.[3] This chapter argues that no impetus for women's emancipation emerged from the Second World War in the Soviet Union.

The following questions are addressed here: what were the consequences of wartime labour shortages for the employment of women in the Soviet Union? Did working conditions, training opportunities and the potential for promotion change for women during the war? Did the changes in women's employment brought about by the war continue after May 1945? Did the redefinition of gender roles brought about by the war affect women's emancipation in the long term? And, if not, what prevented the opportunities for emancipation from being realised?

In this chapter, women's emancipation is defined in terms of their liberation from political, economic and social dependency. Using this definition, 'emancipation' is not restricted to women's equality with men, but provides the opportunity to describe the effect of ascribing gender – and more specifically, the processes that hindered women's self-determination.[4] In this sense, the chapter aims to describe the various restrictions on women's emancipation rather than to measure their successes in absolute terms or in comparison with male comrades.

Beginning with the recruitment of women workers in large numbers to manual labour in Soviet industry in the 1930s, this chapter proceeds to outline the development of women's industrial employment in the 1940s. It discusses briefly the problems that arose when women were mobilised to take over production, and also the question of women's training. The example of the protection of women's labour is used to demonstrate how working conditions changed in the course of the 1940s. The government and enterprise managers had little scope for manoeuvre in this area. Women's war work, coupled with the new concept of 'motherhood' as it was decreed and promoted in the Soviet Union from 1936 and reinforced in 1944, meant that the potential for emancipation remained limited. In addition, this chapter argues that in the second half of the 1940s women's work in industry was gradually devalued.

Women industrial workers in the 1930s

The key to understanding the role of women in the 'Great Patriotic War' lies in the developments that took place in the 1930s. As a result of industrialisation policies and labour shortages, the employment of

women increased enormously in the 1930s. In 1929 barely one third of those employed in the national economy were women; by 1940 the proportion was nearer to 40 per cent. How substantial the change was is demonstrated by the following statistics: in 1929 there were 3.1 million women in paid work; four years later there were twice as many, and in 1940 there were nearly 12 million.[5] Yet the level of female employment varied between occupational sectors and regions. Women factory workers remained concentrated in the light industrial sectors, where wages and social security benefits were lower.[6] They had lower levels of skill and less experience of paid work. Despite the slogan 'equal pay for equal work', women earned less on average than men.

Women's extensive industrial employment and greater educational opportunities in the 1930s gave rise to a revitalised image of the ideal Soviet woman, the essential feature of which was that she should become the economic and political equal of men. Women's equal status was embodied in the 1936 Constitution, and from then on was officially considered a reality. At the same time, the traditional conservative values of femininity and motherhood were reasserted, though these now had to be combined with participation in paid work. The clearest signs of this development were the steps taken by the Supreme Soviet in July 1936 to prohibit abortion and the introduction of disincentives to divorce. A *Pravda* editorial of May 1936 made the sociopolitical intentions of the law clear. 'Bourgeois attitudes to women, the family and children' were sharply criticised. In contrast, the model of the socialist family was described as being founded on equal rights and mutual affection. In socialist society women, as well as being mothers, could be citizens with equal rights. A childless woman deserved compassion because she did not know the happiness of motherhood.[7]

The provision of social and welfare services, which in the 1920s had been regarded as a primary function of the socialist state and through which it was hoped to liberate women, now once again became the responsibility of the family, and particularly women. The double burden of the working mother was glorified, as the protagonist of Feodor Panferov's 1937 novel *Bruski* enthused:

> The wife should also be a happy mother and create a comfortable home, but she should not neglect her job because of that, for the sake of the community. She must be able to keep everything going at home, and then still keep up with a man's performance at work. 'Exactly', said Stalin.[8]

Women industrial workers in the Second World War

In 1940, 41 per cent of workers in Soviet industry were women. By 1942 this figure had risen to 51.6 per cent. In 1943 it reached a peak of 53 per cent and in 1945 was still about 51 per cent. In the national economy as a whole (excluding agriculture) the increase in the employment of women was even more dramatic: from 38.4 per cent in 1940 to 57 per cent in 1943, with a slight fall to 56 per cent in 1945.[9] An increase in women's employment was seen in all occupational sectors. There was some tendency for a greater increase in the areas of metalworking and mechanical engineering, since these were critical sectors in time of war and in particularly urgent need of workers.[10] At the same time the supply of labour decreased drastically during the war. While in 1940 there were 10.9 million people working in industry, in 1942 there were only 7.2 million. The number of workers in industrial occupations rose steadily to reach 9.5 million in 1945, but this figure was still lower than the pre-war level. In the national economy as a whole, the number of people employed amounted to 31.2 million in 1940, 18.4 million in 1942 and 27.3 million in 1945.[11] Many men were conscripted into the army, and extensive areas in the western Soviet Union came under German occupation.[12] The recruitment of women, young workers and pensioners into industry could not compensate for these losses.

At the beginning of the war, the government and the party used propaganda as a means of mobilising the population into the factories. Women workers urged unemployed housewives to take their husband's place on the production line.[13] Office employees who left their posts to become workers on the production line were swiftly promoted, becoming models of patriotism. Marusya Abramova, an accountant in the engine division of the Stalin automobile factory (ZIS/ZIL) in Moscow, proclaimed in a works campaign: 'take up work at the bench! Learn a craft at the workbench!' According to *Pravda*, many women in the factories responded to this call.[14]

The trade unions urged factory committees to appeal to workers' families directly in order to attract new workers and to recruit them for jobs in the factories.[15] Wives and daughters would obviously work in the same factory as their husbands, fathers or brothers. The families of workers frequently lived in houses belonging to the enterprise, spent their money in shops belonging to the enterprise and also had their medical, social and cultural care arranged for them by the enterprise.

Thus, in wartime too, life could go on in familiar surroundings.[16] Replacing a husband, father or brother on the factory floor became an important slogan during the first months of the war. Such recruitment campaigns emphasised also the personal connection women had to their new occupation in that they not only rendered a great service to their homeland, but also to a loved one. Once more the family became the point of reference for women's work. In war propaganda the nuclear family and the family of the state became one: *mat' rodina* (the Soviet motherland) sent her sons into battle, and the mothers and daughters of the country took over the workbenches.

In contrast to the enormous presence of symbolic motherhood, the mother who took care of her children was far less evident in early wartime propaganda. The undisputed exemplar of Soviet womanhood during the first months of the war was the woman who took her place on the production line for the first time to make her contribution to the war effort. Innumerable reports appeared in the Soviet press about these new heroines of the home front. They were characterised as 'perfectly ordinary women' with whom other women could identify. Factory newspapers celebrated the early achievements of women in the workplace, and skilled workers gave constant assurances that they would provide the women with comprehensive training.[17] The central theme of newspaper reports was the need to learn new skills and take over responsibility for production. Initial difficulties could be overcome with patriotism and enthusiasm.[18]

It is difficult to calculate accurately just how many new women entered the factories as production workers during the Second World War. It has been estimated that before the war approximately 5 million unemployed housewives (equivalent to 9 per cent of the urban population) lived in the cities of the Soviet Union, and that by the end of 1941, 500 000 housewives had taken up work on the production line.[19] For Moscow alone it has been estimated that 374 000 housewives took up employment for the first time during the war, with 100 000 of these working in industry.[20]

It was not only patriotism that drove women into the factories, however. Food rationing, which was gradually introduced from July 1941, also exerted a strong pressure. Rationing was a means of mobilising and controlling the workforce, generally comparable to the policy of widely differentiated pay structures in peacetime. The standard rations for men and women blue-collar workers were higher than the rations for white-collar employees and dependent family members,

whose bread ration was often only 56 per cent of that of manual workers.[21] Standard rations varied considerably even among industrial workers. Thus both men and women working in munitions factories received higher rations. Stakhanovites also received higher rations and had access to special shops and canteens. At the same time, not every factory was able to supply its employees with enough food. The ability of a factory to provide food was linked to its importance in the war effort. This inevitably had an impact on labour turnover between industrial sectors and factories.

On 13 February 1942, eight months after the beginning of the war, the USSR Supreme Soviet introduced a decree that imposed a duty of work on the able-bodied urban population. The decree mobilised women aged between 16 and 45 years, who either had no young children or had access to childcare. In September 1942 the age limits were extended to include women between the ages of 14 and 50, and in 1943 only children under the age of four were classified as being in need of childcare. Pregnant women and nursing mothers were generally exempted from labour conscription.[22] Despite the expansion of labour conscription, however, the numbers of new workers coming from the urban population decreased from 1943. The labour reserves of the towns and cities were largely exhausted by the end of 1942, and the rural population now provided the majority of new industrial workers.[23] In view of the serious labour shortage in agriculture, however, this source was also very limited.[24]

Training women workers

From 1943 the training of the existing workforce was considered a priority, and this was seen as the only practical way to increase productivity in the war industries and to bring about economic stability. The formal training initiatives were focused, in theory at least, on women as a priority. Women had mostly entered production as unskilled workers. They often had no experience whatsoever of industrial work, and in the first days and months of the war they had received only basic training, which enabled them to work on selected machines. Mostly this 'training' consisted of a two-week instruction period, during which a skilled and experienced worker guided and monitored the work of the new recruits. Wages were often paid at piece rates right from the start and there was no paid probationary period for new workers.

As early as July 1941, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (ACCTU) announced that it was the task of the trade unions 'to lead the growing movement of Soviet Patriots onto the production line', to help women acquire new skills, to promote Stakhanovite work practices and to raise the overall levels of skill in the labour force.[25] However, these optimistic intentions were hindered by the chaotic conditions of war production. Voznesenskii has pointed to an increase in the proportion of women employed in skilled occupations during the period from January 1941 to the end of 1942.[26] However, his figures, often cited in later analyses, do not indicate the extent to which these changes were the result of the overall decline in the numbers employed in these occupations.[27] There exist no absolute data for the increase in the numbers of women employed in skilled jobs and, likewise, there are no data for the level of skill reached by women in individual occupations. However, the average level of work-based skills declined rapidly in the course of the war, but this overall decline in qualifications had a gender bias, and affected mainly women workers. On-the-job training in factories was further restricted, and took place without interruptions to production. Training was basic and had little long-term impact. The fulfilment of quotas alone acted as the criterion for the success or failure of training, and basic technical knowledge and understanding of safety procedures were rarely taught.

The much-publicised ideal of the Soviet woman worker changed in 1943 in line with the new demands made on women. Patriotism and enthusiasm remained its essential characteristics. During the first months of the war, patriotism enabled women to overcome any initial difficulties with their new occupations, and they were quickly promoted. At this time, though, skilled work was more highly valued. On 18 April 1943 an article on the front page of *Pravda* assigned responsibility for the levels of productivity and training of women workers to enterprise managers. The increase in the numbers of women employed in industry placed new demands on factories and enterprises that enterprise managers had not yet been able to meet. Many factories had not yet fully adapted to wartime conditions. It was now necessary to integrate women into the labour force more fully and to train them. With enough support from enterprise managers, each woman could become a heroine of labour.

From 1943 the Stalin automobile factory increased its efforts to train its workforce. Both the number of workers to be trained and the level of the training were to be raised. It should be noted, however, that the

reports of the department for technical training make only passing reference to women's skills despite the fact that women constituted between 38 and 43 per cent of its labour force in the 1940s. After a dramatic decline in its labour force in 1941, ZIS/ZIL recruited 21 400 new workers in 1942, mostly women without prior experience of automobile production.[28] Taking this into account, it is somewhat surprising that no sex-specific distinctions were made in the reports of the department for technical training, the only exception being for the year 1943. In that year, a total of 2423 male workers and 1606 female workers were trained to some degree by the department of technical training. Classification according to occupation shows that a quarter of the women were trained as checkers (*kontrolery*). They inspected the finished products for defects. Only nine men were trained for this low-prestige, low-paid occupation. In contrast, only about 30 per cent of the newly qualified fitters and turners were women.[29]

In 1943 women received only basic training, mostly for jobs that required no specific skills and where there was a shortage of labour. The training, therefore, was not directed at specific jobs on the shop-floor. 1943 was obviously not an exceptional year; the proportion of women in low-skilled and low-paid jobs remained high throughout the 1940s. In 1945, 82 per cent of all checkers at ZIS/ZIL were women. This had declined to 70 per cent in 1947, but rose slightly to 72 per cent in 1949. In some areas of unskilled work the proportion of women increased during the second half of the 1940s.[30] Most of the unskilled workers in Soviet factories, including ZIS/ZIL, were unable to adapt their machines to new tasks or to undertake even minor repairs. They were dependent on supervisors for help, and such dependency often reflected the broader gender relations of the shop-floor.[31] It is evident that, in the ZIS/ZIL factory at least, training programmes adhered to a strict and traditional gender divide, and for the majority of women workers they offered no chance of promotion.

The Soviet press and reports by the ministries and trade unions identified the top management in the factories as responsible for the lack of training and the deficient performance rates of women workers. However, even taking into account the continuity of gender bias in the allocation of work in the factories, enterprise managers were still restricted in their ability to improve the training and integration of women workers. They had to meet their production targets on the basis of limited human resources, deal with urgent problems as they arose and were unable to engage in any long-term planning. It was

unreasonable, then, under the prevailing industrial and economic circumstances, to blame enterprise managers exclusively for the apparent neglect of the 'woman question' on the shop-floor.

Industrial safety becomes a luxury

The integration of women into the labour force, which was central to increasing levels of production, raised concerns about overall working conditions, industrial safety, childcare, sanitation, living conditions and housing. These issues caused enormous problems in the factories both during the war and in the immediate post-war period.

The basic safety regulations governing women's work remained more or less unchanged from the beginning of the 1930s. During the war, as in the previous decade, the employment of women in occupations involving heavy and physical labour was prohibited. The government had drawn up a list of such occupations in 1932. According to labour regulations women were allowed to lift or carry weights up to a maximum of 20 kg.[32] A decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet of 26 June 1941 modified the ban on overtime and night work by pregnant women and nursing mothers, but the basic regulation remained in force. The decree obliged both workers and employees to work overtime for up to three hours per day for the duration of the war and withdrew the entitlement to regular summer holidays. It also stated that pregnant women could only be released from overtime work from the sixth month of pregnancy and nursing mothers only for the first six months of breast-feeding. The entitlement to maternity leave and nursing breaks was maintained in accordance with pre-war regulations.[33]

The trade unions and factory committees were responsible for ensuring that the regulations were enforced. They had little scope for independent action, however, and were restricted to pointing out any serious shortcomings and requesting that the factory management put them right. Special committees and industrial safety inspectors carried out a monitoring process in factories and workshops. Each individual trade union and the ACCTU had a department responsible for industrial safety. However, there are no documents from the department for industrial safety in the ACCTU archives for the years 1941 and 1942. It is clear from the reports on industrial safety in 1943 that the outbreak of war led to a virtual collapse of the monitoring system.

There were no committees for industrial safety at the ZIS/ZIL car factory in the period from August 1941 to August 1942. The system of

industrial safety committees and inspectors was not re-established until the end of 1942. In 1943 the number of inspectors increased from 100 in January to 378 in October.[34] The situation was much worse in other factories. For example, in the Krasnyi tekstil'shchik factory there were no industrial safety committees at the end of 1943, and at the time of the inspection by the ACCTU the factory committee was away travelling on official business.[35] The collapse of trade union work in the factories was evident not only in the area of industrial safety, but also in the entire operational work of the factory committees.[36] Many union officials had been relocated to the front or into the eastern regions, and they were replaced with new and inexperienced workers. From the beginning of the war, trade union work in the factories was given a low priority, and was no longer considered important.

Early wartime reports, dating from 1943 and 1944, on industrial safety for women workers reveal only isolated examples of pregnant women and nursing mothers being employed in overtime and night work, though it is likely that such practice was fairly common.[37] In a report about a Moscow textile combine, probably dating from October 1945, a description of unsatisfactory working conditions in respect of ventilation, lighting, sanitary facilities, the provision of drinking water and protective clothing is followed by a statement regarding industrial safety for women: 'there were no breaches of Soviet legislation concerning women's employment. Women enjoy all the rights of Soviet legislation.'[38] The issue of industrial safety for women workers was reduced to specific questions, such as the observance of protective measures for working mothers and regulations governing working hours. Poor working conditions in traditional female areas of work, such as the textile industry, were not included in the discussion of women's working conditions.

It was not until the period of post-war recovery that the trade unions again became involved more explicitly in improving the working conditions of women in industry, and the decline in standards brought about by the war was reported and slowly reversed. Infringements of the protective labour regulations for women workers proved to be significantly more widespread than initial reports suggested. During the war the regulations protecting women existed mostly on paper. From June 1941 women worked increasingly in the restricted occupations. In 1949 statistics for 11 industrial sectors indicated that 26 500 women were still working in these 'heavy' occupations.[39]

An examination of 210 industrial enterprises carried out by the ACCTU revealed that in 1948 the majority of enterprises violated

industrial safety regulations for women. Pregnant women and nursing mothers worked overtime and on night shifts. In some sectors of the economy women lifted weights of up to 100 kg, and in the food industry the standard weight for bags of flour was 100 kg. The mechanisation of production, long under discussion, remained at the planning stage. Even simple hand carts for transporting loads were not available. Sanitary facilities in the factories were not up to standard: either they were too few in number or they were in poor condition. The consequences of such violations were evident. Women employed in the restricted occupations fell ill more frequently than men employed in similar jobs and women employed in other, less physically demanding occupations. Reports noted an increase in cases of lower back pain, prolapse of the uterus, inflammations of the abdominal cavity and miscarriages.[40]

The extraordinary demands of the war meant that such deplorable conditions had been tolerated and excused. A statement by the Ministry for Transport and Mechanical Engineering, dated 22 June 1949, 'on measures for the improvement of industrial safety for women in ministry enterprises', reads: 'the use of women's labour in occupations which make particularly heavy demands on health is a consequence of wartime, in which patriotic women replaced the men of their homeland and took on all tasks, in order to help the front and ensure victory over the enemy'.[41]

In the post-war period, however, this justification was no longer tenable. It is true that the economy had still not recovered after the war, but with increasing economic stability both the state and the trade unions put more pressure on enterprise managers. They worked to make industrial safety standards operational again. Yet enterprises were thereby confronted with an old and familiar conflict: improving safety in the workplace versus the fulfilment of production targets.

Fundamental problems were identified in the course of the debates about the reintroduction of basic industrial safety regulations. According to both enterprise managers and the trade unions, factories that worked a three-shift system and employed many pregnant women and nursing mothers were not able to maintain the normal functioning of the plant if they adhered to the prohibition on night work. There were not enough workers to replace the women who were no longer allowed to work at night.[42] In some cases managers refused to allow pregnant women to transfer to easier jobs.

At the end of the 1940s there were still not enough male workers to replace women who had been working in the restricted occupations.

Again, the mechanisation of production was supposed to remedy this problem, but did not keep up with requirements. The trade unions, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs revised the 1932 list of 'restricted occupations' and tried to open up new areas of work to women. However, no agreement could be reached, and the discussion revolved around the prevailing gender-biased allocation of work, using the need to protect women workers as the basis for their exclusion.[43] In view of the fact that the mechanisation of production proceeded very slowly, women had to take up alternative jobs, at least temporarily. As a consequence, some women faced a drop in income, since most of the physically demanding occupations were comparatively well paid. Wage levels were secured only if the women in question were able to raise their level of skill, which the enterprises could not always guarantee. Women workers frequently protested against their transfer from jobs which were well paid but injurious to their health.[44]

By 1950 this problem had still not been completely resolved. Sanitary facilities were not yet in place and there were still reports of violations of industrial safety regulations. The government and the trade unions continued to blame enterprise managers for the unsatisfactory conditions of work in factories. No debate took place at any time or at any level about the structural problems posed by women's work in industry. Measures for the improvement of women's working and living conditions depended in the long run solely on overall economic recovery. They were not discussed as an integral component of economic policy. Trade union demands for improvements in the conditions of women's employment remained mostly at the level of 'what was feasible'.

New 'motherhood'

In July 1944 the USSR Supreme Soviet issued a decree 'on increase of state aid to pregnant women, mothers with many children and unmarried mothers; on strengthening measures for the protection of motherhood and childhood; on the establishment of the title "Heroine Mother"; and the institution of the order of "Motherhood Glory" and the "Motherhood Medal"'. The re-evaluation of motherhood (in both its ideal and its material aspects), and further restrictions in access to divorce, which were also part of the decree, were designed with the view of reshaping post-war society. War had caused an extensive destabilisation of social relationships as a result, firstly, of mobilisation,

evacuation and deportation, and, subsequently, as a result of demobilisation and repatriation. The neglect of children and young people, which was manifested in an increase in petty crime, became a significant social problem. The demographic crisis as a result of the war led the government to introduce measures to encourage an increase in the birth rate. Approximately 28 million people died during the war, and by 1945 there were many widows and orphans.[45]

Mothers occupied a central place in war propaganda: mothers sent their sons to the front, mothers needed to be protected or freed, *mat' rodina* was a symbolic mother of all fighters and the embodiment of the homeland. With the introduction of material and moral incentives to increase the birth rate, every woman was viewed as an actual or potential mother. Both duty and public recognition were bound up with this. At the same time, however, the image of the untiring heroine worker faded into the background.[46]

Yet there was no decline in the proportion and numbers of women in employment: in 1950 women constituted 47 per cent of those employed in the national economy as a whole. This was higher than the pre-war level (38.4 per cent). There was an increase also in the absolute numbers of women in employment: in 1945, 15.9 million women were in paid employment, and this had risen to 19.2 million in 1950.[47] Women's work remained an economic necessity, both for the women themselves and for the national economy. The ambitious goals of the fourth five-year plan (1946–50) for the reconstruction and development of the economy made increased productivity and the expansion of the labour force the central goals of economic policy. The importance to the economy of women's work in industry remained as great as ever.

Working conditions and the supply of material benefits improved only slowly in the post-war period. Accommodation remained a major problem. Many foodstuffs and consumables were rationed until December 1947. The reduction in wages in real terms meant that the majority of women could not afford to give up paid work.[48] After the privations of war it might have been expected that many women would want to return to a 'normal' life as mother and wife. However, the possibility of returning to this 'normality' remained a dream. There was no alteration in the direction of either economic or social policy in the post-war period.[49] The ideal of motherhood, as it was widely propagated, remained unattainable for the majority of women. Most women could not afford to raise their children in warm and cosy apartments, and could not

easily create a happy family life. In the post-war period, the contrast between the officially endorsed image of happy marriage and family and the reality for women, trapped between the stresses of work, food shortages and lack of housing, was all the more striking.[50] There is much evidence to suggest that women privileged domestic concerns over professional advancement. However, this was as much the result of the lack of career opportunities and the need to expend a great deal of effort to secure even minimal domestic comforts as it was to do with a reassertion of family values. As Greta Bucher has recently pointed out, women adopted a practical approach towards the different images of the ideal of Soviet womanhood. For most women, given the prevailing economic conditions, employment was simply a necessary means of securing an income.[51]

At the same time, as women struggled to survive and expended enormous amounts of effort on keeping everyday life going, enterprises adapted only slowly to the increased employment of women. The integration of women into the production process, whether through their training or the expansion of social benefits, remained closely bound up with the economic and socio-political considerations of the period. In 1950 the socio-political goals of the state had yet to be realised. There were no specific political initiatives targeting women, just as there were no state offices or staff with responsibility for furthering the integration and promotion of women workers. Furthermore, any improvements in living and working conditions for women resulted from general economic recovery. Women's issues were of secondary importance compared to other problems and policy concerns. Measures such as quotas in the organisation of training or the creation of institutional policy frameworks for the promotion of women had existed as far back as the early 1930s. Even though these had not been given a very high priority, they had nevertheless had consequences for the emancipation of women. A draft report, dated February 1949, found among the documents of the ACCTU department for industrial safety, reinforced the need for such measures. The author called for the creation of elected posts, to be filled by women, as well as for the organisation of regular women's assemblies. These recommendations, however, were not widely disseminated.[52]

At the end of the 1940s only a few women were promoted in industrial enterprises. Improvements in women's levels of skill were a consequence of the general rise in the level of education rather than of particular training measures for women during the war or in the post-

war period.[53] The growth in the occupational equality of women was an unintentional consequence of efforts to modernise the economy, and was not specifically promoted by the state.

The files of the ZIS/ZIL car factory support the conjecture that after 1945 it was primarily young women who were promoted to more highly-skilled work. After the war, in factory and vocational schools as well as in new institutes, young women were offered vocational training, which opened up opportunities for promotion in the workplace. As well as this group of young women, older women workers with long experience of paid employment were now more fully integrated into the production process. They were employed more frequently in positions of responsibility and were able to retain these posts after 1945. However, the housewives who had started work in industrial production in 1941 and 1942 had only been offered basic training. They remained auxiliary workers. Armaments conversion, the return of men to the factories and the growing automation of production made these women the 'victims of modernisation' during the late Stalin era.[54]

Conclusion

The war was hardly a catalyst for the full integration of women into industrial production or for women's emancipation. Occupational and social mobility were experienced by only a few women in the 1940s, and depended on the sector in which they were employed, their age, their training and their work experience. The suspension during the war of the segregation between 'women's work' and 'men's work' in industry did not last. Women only occasionally gained entry to traditional male occupations. The main obstacle was clearly not the protection of women in the workplace, but, rather, deeply rooted preconceptions about gender roles.

To some extent, also, it was not uncommon to hear stories of women workers with successful careers. After 1945, however, reports of women working in heavy industry were heard less and less often compared with the early days of the war. With the reinforcement of motherhood as an integral and obligatory part of womanhood, there was a return to traditional views of women's work in industrial production. With the increasing prosperity of Soviet post-war society, the segregation of industrial labour into traditional male and female occupations re-emerged.[55]

The employment of women was important both for women themselves and for the national economy, and women made good the shortfalls in both the social and the reproductive spheres. The conservative image of women and the family in the post-war period was combined with that of the woman worker. While the ideal woman worker participated heroically in the reconstruction of the economy, the mother cared for her family and made up for general shortages with her own enterprise. In such a way, women contributed not only to economic growth, but were responsible also for the creation of a post-war idyll, in which the traumas of wartime could be forgotten and future socialist generations could grow up. It would be wrong to claim, however, that the rhetoric of the post-war period, involving a conservative definition of the position of women in society, was alone responsible for women being redirected to traditional roles. There was little opportunity for female self-determination, and women accepted the burdens of both factory work and family life. While factory work ensured access to food supplies and medical care, motherhood was rewarded and publicly recognised. Employment in a professional career, and seeking promotion in the factory hierarchy, however, were not regarded as part of women's vocation.

Notes

1 This chapter was translated by Jean Audoin and prepared with the help of Melanie Ilič.
2 M. and P. Higonnet (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (London, 1987) p. 34.
3 See the statement by the Soviet president M.I. Kalinin in 1942 at a meeting of political functionaries of the Moscow Air Defence. J.K. Cottam, 'Soviet Women in Combat during World War II: the Ground/Air Defence Forces', in T. Yedlin (ed.), *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York, 1980) p. 123.
4 See G. Lindemann and T. Wobbe (eds), *Denkachsen. Zur theoretischen und institutionellen Rede vom Geschlecht* (Frankfurt, 1994).
5 These figures do not include agriculture. In the 1930s agricultural work became 'feminised', since many able-bodied men migrated to the new industrial centres. In 1940 men constituted only 22 per cent of the able-bodied rural population, and this declined in the course of the war to 7 per cent by 1944. See S.L. Senyavskii and V.B. Tel'pukhovskii, *Rabochii klass SSSR, 1938–1965gg.* (Moscow, 1971) p. 101.
6 M.J. Hutton, 'Russian and Soviet Women, 1897–1939: Dreams, Struggles and Nightmares', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Iowa, 1986) p. 622.

7 *Pravda*, 28 May 1936. See also R. Schlesinger (ed.), *The Family in the USSR: Changing Attitudes in Soviet Russia* (London, 1949) p. 252.
8 Cited by F. Navailh, 'Das sowjetische Modell', in G. Duby and M. Perrot (eds), *Geschichte der Frauen*, vol. 5 (20 Jahrhundert) (Frankfurt, 1995) p. 277.
9 *Istoriya sovetskogo rabochego klassa*, tom 3: 'Rabochii klass SSSR nakanune i v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny' (Moscow, 1984) p. 374.
10 Central Board of Statistics of the Council of Minister of the USSR, *Women in the USSR: Brief Statistics* (Moscow, 1960) pp. 39–40.
11 *Istoriya sovetskogo rabochego klassa,* p. 356.
12 For details of population changes during the German occupation see Ibid., pp. 347–8.
13 For example, see the appeal made on 24 June 1941 by women workers of the Voikov chemical factory: *Profsoyuzy SSSR: dokumenty i materialy v chetyrekh tomakh, 1905–1963gg.,* tom 3: 'Profsoyuzy v period zaversheniya stroitel'stva sotsializma i postepennogo perekhoda k kommunizmu (1937–1952gg.)', (Moscow, 1963) doc. 158.
14 *Pravda,* 27 June 1941. See also Senyavskii and Tel'pukhovskii, op. cit., p. 130.
15 See, 'Postanovlenie prezidiuma TsK profsoyuza rabochikh chernoi metallurgii vostochnych raionov "o rabote zavodskikh komitetov po privlecheniyu na proizvodstve novykh kadrov"', in *Profsoyuzy SSSR,* doc. 160.
16 K. Straus, 'The Transformation of the Soviet Working Class, 1929–1935: the Regime in Search of a New Social Stability', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1990) p. viii, describes very vividly with regard to the 1930s the development of the enterprise as a 'community organiser' or 'social melting pot'. The social system of the enterprise played a vital role in the integration of new workers into the industrial work process.
17 See, for example, *Stalinets,* nos. 80, 81 and 83, June/July 1941.
18 'Zhenshchiny ovladevayut novymi professiyami', *Pravda*, 30 June 1941; 'Zhenshchiny idut na rabotu v partiinyi apparat', *Pravda*, 12 July 1941; 'Zhenshchiny – metallurgi', *Pravda*, 19 July 1941; 'Partiinaya zhizn' – zhenshchiny na rukovodyashchei rabote', *Pravda*, 10 October 1941.
19 Senyavskii and Tel'pukhovskii, op. cit., p. 110.
20 *Istoriya sovetskogo rabochego klassa, p.* 348; 'Velikaya otechestvennaya voina, 1941–45', *Entsiklopediya* (Moscow, 1985) p. 270; V. Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow, 1974) p. 22.
21 U.G. Chernyavskii, *Voina i prodovol'stvie: snabzhenie gorodskogo naseleniya v velikuyu otechestvennuyu voinu, 1941–1945* (Moscow, 1964) p. 77; J. Barber and M. Harrison, *The Soviet Homefront, 1941–1945* (London, 1991) p. 79.
22 Men between the ages of 16 and 55 years were mobilised. Decree of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, 13 February 1942: 'O mobilizatsii na period voennogo vremeni trudosposobnogo gorodskogo naseleniya dlya raboty na proizvodstve i stroitel'stve', in *Resheniya partii i pravitel'stva po khozyaistvennym voprosam,* tom 3: 1941–1952gg. (Moscow, 1968) p. 64.
23 Senyavskii and Tel'pukhovskii, op. cit., pp. 111–12. RGASPI, f. 17, o. 121, d. 232, l. 147.
24 Senyavskii and Tel'pukhovskii, op. cit., p. 112.
25 *Profsoyuzy SSSR,* doc. 159. See also, 'Voina i profsoyuzy', *Pravda*, 21 September 1941.

26 N.A. Voznesenskii, *Voennaya ekonomika SSSR v period Otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow, 1948) p. 111.
27 See, for example, K. Segbers, *Die Sowjetunion im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1987) p. 238.
28 AODM, f. 433, o. 3, d. 12, l. 30.
29 TsMAM, f. 415, o. 7 (otdel tekhnicheskogo obucheniya), d. 40, l. 10.
30 Ibid.
31 S. Conze, *Sowjetische Industriearbeiterinnen in den Vierziger Jahren: Die Auswirkungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges auf die Erwerbstätigkeit von Frauen in der UdSSR, 1941–50* (Stuttgart, 2001) pp. 173–4, 187.
32 A.A. Abramova, *Okhrana trudovykh prav zhenshchin v SSSR* (Moscow, 1954) p. 23. See also M. Ilic, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: from 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London, 1999).
33 *Resheniya partii i pravitel'stva po khozyaistvennym voprosam,* pp. 37–8.
34 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 11, ll. 29–31.
35 Ibid., ll. 14–16.
36 The factory committees of the trade unions had to hold by-elections. The first were held in July 1941 after many official post holders had already left for the front. *Profsoyuzy SSSR,* doc. 116.
37 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 73, ll. 19–30. To make comparisons with violations of labour protection measures in the interwar period see Ilic, op. cit.
38 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 74, ll. 9–12.
39 This equalled approximately 1.34 per cent of all women employed in the industrial sectors under review. The total number of women employed in these sectors was approximately 1.9 million. GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 204, l. 29.
40 See, for example, GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 204, ll. 1–5 and d. 203, l. 135.
41 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 203, l. 42.
42 In these cases the industrial sectors involved called for the extension of a 1938 regulation, which permitted enterprise managers to allow women to work an extra night shift, for which they received one additional day's holiday per month in compensation. GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 204, l. 39.
43 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 11, ll. 14–16.
44 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, dd. 201–4.
45 G.M. Smith, 'The Impact of World War II on Women, Family Life, and Mores in Moscow, 1941–1945', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Stanford, 1989) p. 201.
46 S. Conze, 'Kaempferin – Arbeiterin – Mutterheldin: Die Frau in den Anforderungen des Sowjetstaates, 1941–1945', unpublished masters dissertation (Ruhr-Universitaet Bochum, 1992) p. 115.
47 There was a corresponding increase in the total labour force from 28.5 million to 40.4 million. See, S. Fitzpatrick, 'Post-war Soviet Society: the "Return to Normalcy", 1945–1953', in S. Linz, (ed.), *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union* (New Jersey, 1985) p. 139.
48 For the increase in the per capita production of consumer goods from 1928 to 1950 see, D.R. Hodgman, *Soviet Industrial Production, 1928–1951* (Cambridge, 1954) p. 125. Between 1940 and 1948 wages rose by approximately 75 per cent, but price increases were between 200 and 300 per cent. See H. Schwartz, 'Soviet Labor Policy 1945–1949', in P.E. Mosely (ed.),

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Sociological Science: the Soviet Union since World War II, volume 263, May 1949, p. 80.

49 See T. Dunmore, *Soviet Politics, 1945–1953* (London, 1984), and W.G. Hahn, *Post-war Soviet Politics: the Fall of Zhdanov and the Defeat of Moderation* (London, 1982).

50 See Smith, op. cit., p. 280, and Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p. 150.

51 G. Bucher, 'Struggling to Survive: Soviet Women in the Postwar Years', *Journal of Women's History,* vol. 12, no. 1, 2000, pp. 137–59.

52 GARF, f. 5451, o. 27, d. 204, l. 44.

53 R.A. Clarke, *Soviet Economic Facts, 1917–1970* (London, 1972) p. 29.

54 Conze, *Sowjetische Industriearbeiterinnen.*

55 M.P. Sacks, 'Women in the Industrial Labor Force', in D. Atkinson, A. Dallin and G. Lapidus (eds), *Women in Russia* (Stanford, California, 1977) p. 203.

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AODM: Arkhiv obshchestvennogo dvizheniya g. Moskvy
GARF: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii
Memorial (Moscow)
RGALI: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva
RGASPI [formerly RTsKhIDNI]: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii
TsGA: Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RSFSR
TsGAGM: Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv gorod Moskvy
TsGAIPD: Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov
TsGAKFD: Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kinofotodokumentov
TsMAM: Tsentral'nyi munitsipal'nyi arkhiv gorod Moskvy

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