Women in the U.S.S.R.

The Stalin Era

by Tova Yedlin

> Anybody knows, if he knows anything about history, that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment; social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex. (Karl Marx, 1868)
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> The ultimate end of all revolutionary social change is to establish the sanctity of human life, the dignity of man, the right of every human being to liberty and well-being--not mere external change, but internal, basic, fundamental change. (Emma Goldman, 1925)
>
> Woman will first attain justice . . . when she builds the socialist state. (A. Lunacharsky)

One of the striking features of the women's liberation movement in the west is the renewed interest in the status of women in the countries of the socialist bloc. It comes as little surprise that the woman's liberation in the USSR should be of prime importance. The interest in the woman question in that country began with the October Revolution of 1917 and the decrees that were promulgated. These changed radically the legal status of women in the first socialist state.

The western preoccupation with the status of Soviet women has annoyed some members of the women's community

in the USSR, as the following excerpt from an article in the Literaturnaia Gazeta ("Literary Gazette") illustrates:

> . . . in the past half century we, Russian women, have become objects of examination by everybody . . . . Sometimes we are looked at as though we were utterly out of the ordinary and not entirely beings of this world. . . . I'll make so bold a statement as to say that there is no other woman, not even Brigitte Bardot herself, about whom so much nonsense has been written as about the ordin= ary Russian woman. . . .(1)

The writer continues to extol the achievements of women in her country, emphasizing the opportunities that were given to women by the revolution, at the same time pointing to the difficulties that Soviet women still face:

> . . . as far as our country is concerned, the task of liberating women from slavery to the family cell was one of the serious problems we had to solve. Never and nowhere in all human history has woman's level of education, culture and occupational status been as high, and her role in economic social life as great, as in our country.

The author continues her analysis of the problems the Soviet woman faces today when she says:

> . . . and it would clearly be an untruth to say that the life of a woman with a job is very easy and pleasant and that she makes no sacrifices for the sake of her standing as an independent human being. She makes them. . . . It was not for nothing that a certain great man said that the level of freedom of a society is measured by their position in it.(2)

Without an understanding of the Stalin era one cannot grasp the problems of women in the USSR today. In spite of the literature available there are many problems to be encountered in trying to discuss the status of women in the USSR in the period between 1927 to 1953. The main reason for the difficulties is that the emphasis has always been on the revolutionary period and the one immediately following. Although a few studies of the role of women were done in the thirties, it is only recently that the subject has received wide attention. The contemporary Soviet press has been very vociferous on the woman question. The falling birth rate, in particular in the European part of the Soviet Union, is a matter of grave concern to the government, which tries to get answers from demographers, sociologists and social psychologists in order to explain the disturbing phenomenon. The difficulty, of course, is multiplied by the multinational character of a

country where great diversity of traditions, cultures, and--the official ideology notwithstanding--beliefs, still persists.

The explanation for the present situation of women, however, is not to be found in the here and now. It is important to understand the Stalin era which lasted over a quarter of a century and left a strong imprint upon all aspects of life in the Soviet Union.

In the discussion following, an attempt will be made to show that, in the Stalin era, women in the USSR were called upon to make supreme sacrifices in the cause of building "socialism in one country." The rights they had won as a result of the Revolution were taken away when it suited state interests and were given back to them again when it was opportune. Women were allowed to enter almost all occupations from which they had previously been excluded but, since the attempts at a socialized household did not materialize, they had to carry a double load, being gainfully employed outside the home as well as taking care of the family.

The Stalin era in the history of the Soviet Union took a heavy toll of life and caused much suffering. In this women were not spared. In spite of their numbers and their participation in the economic development of the country, they were grossly underrepresented in the political sphere and in the decision-making processes. They made progress in their personal development but paid a heavy price for it. Soviet power drew (and still draws) heavily on the dynamism of women, exploiting their capacity and willingness to endure, without giving them equal say in the running of the state.

The process of women's liberation began immediately following the October Revolution of 1917. The newly established regime was guided by the ideas expressed by Engels in The Origin of the Family, State, and Society, written in 1884, and by Lenin's pronouncements on the question. In his work, Engels outlined a programme for the socialist women's movement. According to this programme, the first step was to be the attainment of equality of both sexes before the law; the next step was the realization of women's economic independence by securing employment outside the home--the duties of housewife and mother were to be taken over by society. However, before all these steps could be realized, the capitalist system had to be abolished. Engels did not provide a blueprint for the future. He thought that the elimination of the economic justification for marriage would make room for true monogamy based on individual, sexual love.

In accordance with the above ideological consideration and the belief which Lenin had expressed long before the October Revolution, the principle of complete economic, legal, political, cultural and sexual equality was proclaimed. The decree of December 1917 made obligatory the civil registration of marriage, thus reducing ecclesiastic ceremonial to the purely private sphere. Also established by that decree, was freedom of divorce. On November 18, 1920, freedom of abortion was guaranteed. By 1926 all differences between the positions of the married and the unmarried mother were abolished, and de facto marriages were recognized. The legislation was quite revolutionary and was to give woman the opportunity to build socialism "hand in hand" with man. This was the period when the Party, recognizing the importance of recruiting women in the work of building socialism, established the Zhenotdely (Women's Bureaus). This was done because of the rising consciousness among women, who were entering the labour force in ever

greater numbers, and who soon realized that there were some specific problems related to their position of worker, mother and wife. The Party, fearing the competition of the active feminist movement, reluctantly moved in the direction of establishing the Women's Bureaus.

Further evidence that the Party recognized the importance of women's participation in the newly established socialist state (beset by many problems) was the first socialist all-Russian Women's Conference convened by the Central Committee in Moscow. The 1200 delegates represented nearly a million working women in Soviet Russia. Lenin maintained that the Party had to win the millions of working women in the city and in the village for the cause of Communist transformation of society and "every cook had to learn to rule the State." Still, the idea of separate Women's Bureaus was not popular with the Party leadership and was in essence an alternative to an organized women's movement.(3)

The Women's Bureaus were formed in 1919-20 and at the IX Party Congress, held in 1920, these became an official component of party policy.(4) It is of interest to note that a Soviet scholar, writing in 1971, tries to emphasize the role of the Party in the establishment of Women's Bureaus:

> The task of the Women's Bureaus was a difficult one. On the one hand there were women Party members such as Kollontai and Konkordia Nikolaevna Samoilovna, who wrote in defense of the Bureaus which were to look after the welfare of the woman, the worker, the mother and her child (one of the acute problems was that of child care); on the other hand was the old attitude toward

> women, ". . . which manifested itself. . . in the activities of many, even party leaders."(5)

As it developed, the goal of the Zhenotdely was not to give women a voice in the decision-making processes but rather to engage them to their full capacity in implementing the tasks set by the Party. Thus the policies concerning working women were made by men, a situation which has not changed significantly in the past fifty years. The head of the Zhenotdely in the Secretariat was invited to a conference only when affairs of her section were discussed. When discussion turned to issues not concerning women she would be asked to leave. In 1929 the Central Committee of the Party abolished the Zhenotdely. By that time Stalin had decided that the women question was solved and that there was no need for special bureaus dealing with women's problems.(6)

The twenties also witnessed the establishment of the International Women's Secretariat of the Comintern in Moscow, with Klara Zetkin as head. The programme of the Comintern regarding women included the following provisions:

> . . . complete equality between men and women before the law and in social life: a radical reform of marriage and family laws; recognition of maternity as a social function; protection of mothers and infants, initiation of social care and upbringing of infants and children (crêches, kindergartens, children's homes, etc.); the establishment of institutions that would gradually relieve the burden of household drudgery (public kitchens and laundries); and systematic cultural struggle against the ideology and traditions of female bondage.(7)

Furthermore, the programme included stipulations which forbade employment of women in harmful trades and provided them with social insurance and free medical care. Thus the programme of the Third International, founded in 1919 under Lenin's leadership, was most progressive regarding the solution to the inequality of women. The women delegates at the founding meeting proposed a resolution which stated that the dictatorship of the proletariat could be realized and maintained with the active participation of working-class women.

There were, however, great obstacles in the way of the implementation of the provisions outlined. In 1919 only a small percentage of the female population of the Soviet state could read or write. Moreover, the demographic structure of the state was upset by the losses suffered in the war, revolution and the Civil War. Many women found themselves responsible for the

upbringing of the family. Much confusion existed following the revolutionary changes in the laws governing marriage and divorce. The freedom given was misunderstood. The so-called "glass of water theory" in the relations between the sexes was condemned by Lenin as "un-Marxian and unsocial." As a communist, he had no sympathy with this theory. The postcard divorce also worked against the woman, who lost the protection against abandonment.

One of the reasons for all the confusion was that the Party leaders, mostly urban intelligentsia in a country still predominantly agrarian, were ignorant of the situation in the rural areas of the country. This was true even of Kollontai, the Commissar of Social Welfare after the revolution and a staunch supporter of the Women's Bureaus. In any event, Kollontai was not given a chance to develop a comprehensive scheme of social welfare. Following her involvement in the Worker's Opposition, she was sent to Norway to serve as the first woman ambassador of her country. Kollontai's career in actively building socialism ended in 1922. She was, however, mercifully spared the lot of the vast majority of the Old Bolsheviks.

On January 1, 1927, a new Code of Laws on Marriage, the Family, and Wardship was passed: both registered and non-registered marriages were equally recognized; all property acquired during marriage was considered as joint property; divorce was made easy; both partners had a free choice of name at the time of marriage or divorce; the concept of a child being illegitimate was abolished; abortion was made legal; welfare institutions for the protection of mother and child were established; and petty bourgeois customs such as wedding rings and the use of cosmetics were rejected. By this time, however, Stalin's control over the country was being consolidated and the First Five Year Plan being put into operation.

The goals of collectivization and rapid industrialization placed a heavy burden on Soviet women as it did on the country as a whole. On the eve of the First Five Year Plan, women constituted 27% of the total number of those employed in the national economy. They accounted for 51.7% of the population, and in the ages between 9-49, 42.7% were literate (as compared with 13.7% in 1897). Also, women numbered 29% of the total number of professional workers; 28% were in attendance at institutions of higher learning and secondary special schools. Although progress was being made by women in the professions, it should not be forgotten that, for instance, even before the First World War, women in Tsarist Russia constituted 10% of all medical doctors in the country.(8)

Nadezda Krupskaia (Lenin's widow) at 1935 Congress

Alexandra Kollontai with women of Central Asia

At the same time, in spite of the fact that women accounted for over half of the total population, and almost one-third of the labour force, the percentage of women in the Party was rising very slowly. By 1929, 13.7% of the CPSU were women, as compared with 7.8% in 1922.(9) Few women were to be found in high government positions: only six in 1928, and out of these two were prominent.(10)

Although women began to be represented in almost all occupations and the numbers of employed women in the economy far exceeded those in other countries, a factor due to the radical political and economic transformation after the revolution, the imprint of traditional values regarding women was not to be easily erased. In a pamphlet written in 1931, the question of prejudice against female labour was raised. The writer of the pamphlet, S. Berezovskaia, quoted data from 1930 which showed among women workers lower absenteeism, fewer violations of work discipline and higher gross output. It was obvious that the negative attitudes towards the woman worker were unjust and discriminatory. The promotion of women to executive and management posts also proceeded at a slow pace. In 1930, the Central Committee of the CPSU had to pass a resolution recording "extreme indecisiveness by local Party bodies regarding the promotion of women to leading posts involving independent authority, and in some cases absolutely open bigotry . . . ."(11)

Perhaps as important as the attitude towards the advancement of women into managerial positions in the economy was the attitude of the upper echelons of the CPSU towards female participation in the decision-making processes. Since the Party, and, in fact, the by now almighty Secretary of the Central Committee, was soon to take the place of both the Party and the Central Committee (a development which Trotsky had foreseen as early as 1903), it is necessary to examine the attitude of Stalin towards women.

Stalin is reported to have said: "There are three things no woman can do: understand Marx, play chess and fold a newspaper."(12) This anecdote was at one time attributed to Lenin, with Stalin being its "popularizer." In the Georgia of the late nineteenth century, where Stalin spent his childhood and youth, semi-oriental traditions (and with them, the attitude towards women, who were regarded as being subservient to men) were very strong. Coupled with these were the teachings of the Orthodox Church, with its Byzantine traditions which Stalin was exposed to during his years as a student in the theological seminary in Tiflis. The young Josif had ample opportunities to observe the outward expression of that attitude in the treatment of his mother in the home.

Stalin had no regard for women's accomplishments or potentialities. Although it is a known fact that women were very prominent in the revolutionary movements long before the revolutions of 1917 and that full emancipation of women was one of the goals of these movements, after the revolution women were not to be found in key positions in the Party or in the government apparatus. Stalin, himself, made no effort to increase the role of women in the inner circles of the Party during his reign of power. This only supports the point made previously that Stalin did not value women's abilities and contributions.(13)

"The years 1927-1939 were tumultuous, heroic, creative, cruel and even retrogressive years."(14) The crucial time was the middle of the decade when creative Marxist thinking on the woman question ended. This was not confined to the USSR only, in view of the role the CPSU played in the policies of other Communist movements.(15) What was happening in the thirties in the USSR was unique and not likely to be repeated anywhere else. In the all-out drive to industrialize and modernize the country, manpower was of utmost importance and women were needed in all areas of production, including construction, where they accounted for 12.8% of the workers in 1932, as well as railroad construction, where they constituted 17.3% of the workforce.(16)

Within a decade, the percentage of women in the total number of those skillfully employed rose by 11%--from 27% in 1929 to 38% in 1940; 83.4% of them were now classified as literate and women constituted 52.1% of the population. At the end of the decade, their input into the many large-scale industries was very significant. Women were also entering, in great numbers, secondary schools and institutions of higher education.(17) [It should be borne in mind that developments were not equal in all of the Soviet Union, with the European part much in advance of that of the Asian republics.]

Women were also heavily employed in the collective and state farms in a period of extreme privations brought about by the ruthless process of collectivization. It was evident that in view of the great scarcities and the ever-falling standard of living, incentives were needed to urge the people on to greater efforts. Celebrations, speeches by the leaders of the Party, numerous titles and awards were invented to achieve this goal. In an address by Stalin delivered at a reception given November 10, 1935, by the leaders of the Communist Party and the Government "To Women Collective Farm Shock Workers in Sugar-beet Growing" he stated:

> Comrades, what we have seen here today is a slice of the new life, the life we call the collective farm life, the socialist life . . . . We have heard the

Soviet Women in the
Construction Industry

Pioneer Worker
in the Textile
Industry--1930's

> speeches not of ordinary women, but I would say, of women who are heroines of labour, because only heroines of labour could have achieved the success they have achieved. We had no such women before. . . . Only free labour, only collective farm labour could have given rise to such heroines of labour in the countryside. . .. The collective farm has liberated woman and made her independent by means of the work-days. . . .(18)

Stalin continued extolling the "blessings" of the collective farm and later proceeded with the distribution of awards to the over-achievers:

> I think the government ought to confer distinctions on the heroines of labour who have come here to report their achievements to the government. How should this day be marked? We here, Comrades Voroshilov, Chernov, Molotov, Kaganovich, Orjonikidze, Kalinin, Mikoyan and myself. . . have arrived at the idea of requesting the government to award our heroines of labour with the Order of Lenin--the team leaders with the Order of Lenin and the rank-and-file shock-workers with the Order of the Banner of Labour.(19)

Stalin speaking to the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites on November 17, 1935, a year before the beginning of the great purges, spoke of the radical improvement in the material welfare of the workers. "Life," continued the Leader, "has become more joyous."(20)

But what of the assistance for the women who needed better facilities to cope with the combined burden of home and employment outside the home? The plans fell short of expectations. Byt communes, socialized canteens, i.e. the socialization of the household, did not solve the problem. There was a shortage of crêches and kindergartens. Many of the children grew up in the streets for lack of care. In addition, the inefficiency of supply and distribution of essential goods forced women (mostly) to spend hours standing in queues. According to some statistics of a survey of the workers and peasants for Soviet Russia in 1932, one million labour hours were wasted daily on standing in queues. (21)

In 1936 came a reversal of the policies of the 1920s on marriage, divorce and abortion. The measures which were to become law on June 27, 1936, were preceded by discussions conducted on a wide scale in the country. But these were just a screen. Stalin was determined that the government had high stakes in a more stable family--'the socialist family,' as the official designation went--and in population growth. Divorce was made difficult and a progressive fee had to be paid for obtaining it. The parties had to be summoned before the Regis-

trar and any divorce had to be entered in the partners' passport. The law of June 27, 1936, stipulated total prohibition of abortion except for very strictly limited medical reasons.

Special awards were introduced for mothers with many children; the law of June 27, 1936, concentrated on mothers with more than six living children, with a highly increased rate from the eleventh child.

> However. . . the law of 1936 forbidding abortion in point of fact did not and could not be any serious stimulant to raise the birth rate. . . . It merely led many women with unwanted pregnancies to have illegal abortions, risking their health and sometimes their lives.(22)

By 1938, to make life more difficult, maternity leave with pay was reduced from 112 days to 70 days.(23) [In 1956 the 112 days paid leave was restored.]

The propaganda machine stressed the point that the anti-abortion and anti-divorce laws were not expedients but fundamentally right. Of interest here is the reaction of the few prominent women in the CPSU to the new laws enacted. Most seemed to welcome the changes, for they thought that the radical legislation introduced in the twenties were emergency measures and were undermining the family. The foreign communists, too, accepted the changes as a sign of progress, having considered the experiments of the 1920s as too radical. The Constitution of 1936 on the other hand, contained guarantees regarding the status of women in the Soviet Union that no other country wrote into its highest law. These were: the right to work; the right to health and education; equal rights in the family and on the job; protection of mothers and children. (Section 122 of the Constitution). The budget for maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens more than doubled. There was, however, one thing wrong: most of the guarantees remained a dead letter in the day-to-day life of most women. In addition, the period of the purges,which was to be launched on a gigantic scale soon after the promulgation of the 1936 Constitution, hit the women hard.

Before turning to that chapter of the thirties, it is interesting to look at contemporary reactions from people outside the Soviet Union. Ella Winter in her work Red Virtue, published in 1933, wrote about "human relations in the new Russia" after her return from visiting the Soviet Union:

> Soviet Russia is something new under the sun. There has never been a society like that before . . . . The revolution is to lead to a society without classes; a society without inequalities and discriminations. . . economic, social, racial, legal, sexual.(24)

The work is full of praise for the progress that was made in the position

of women and in the relationship between the sexes.

Fannina W. Halle wrote in a similar vein. Her work, entitled Woman in Soviet Russia and published in 1933, is a much more thorough examination of the status of women in Russia from the pre-Christian era to the 1930s.

> A fundamental remoulding and reordering of all human relations is being attempted in the Soviet State. . . . The process of emancipation now going on in Russia differs from all earlier ones in the recorded history of mankind in that it is carried out according to a plan and on an unprecedented scale. And, however that process may turn out in the course of historical development, one thing has already been attained: the humanization of woman.(25)

And this work was written two years after the disastrous famine which killed millions and a year following the suicide of Nadezhda Alilueva.

Some of the English women socialists were also enthusiastic about the new life as observed in the Soviet Union. Margaret I. Cole, in a chapter entitled "Women and Children," wrote:

> . . . and if we can draw, in this matter, some help from the experience of the Russians, and particularly if we can remember also to copy their elasticity and the wide allowance they make for individual differences, then the treatment of women and children in Soviet Russia may be a source not merely of inspiration, but of real practical utility to English socialists.(26)

A totally different evaluation of the status of women in the Soviet Union came from the pen of Ethel Mannin. In her work, Women and the Revolution, published in 1938, the author writes:

> Of what use to give women equal social, political, and moral status with man, to give her crêches and clinics, child and maternity welfare centers, and sick pay and maternity grants and all such social services, if she is to have no existence as an individual, if freed from the slavery of the home, she is sold into a new slavery, the slavery of the machine and the slavery of a dictatorship which even dictates to her the nature of her home-life, and Fascist-wise, attempts to dictate to her on the question of child-bearing, presenting it to her as a duty to the State?(27)

The work was dedicated to Emma Goldman and Mannin ended her discussion by quoting the celebrated woman anarchist:

> It is once the great failure and the great tragedy of the Russian Revolution that it attempted (in the leadership of the ruling

> political party) to change only institutions and conditions while ignoring entirely the human and social values involved in the Revolution.(28)

Further bitter criticism of the situation in the Soviet Union was to be found in the work of Leon Trotsky, who wrote his The Revolution Betrayed in 1936. There, in a chapter entitled, "Family Youth and Culture," Trotsky devoted attention to the changed situation of Soviet women. He felt (as he naturally would) that the October Revolution fulfilled its obligation in relation to women.

> . . . it gave the woman an access to all forms of economic and cultural work. . . . The complete absorption of the housekeeping functions of the family by institutions of the socialist society was to bring to woman a real liberation from the thousand-year-old fetters.(29)

This did not materialize. Repeating Marx's dictum, Trotsky wrote that "the actual liberation of women is unrealizable on a basis of generalized want." The collective farm did not provide for its members, and the private plot, as he called it, the "midget farms," lay a double burden upon the women. He criticized the shortage of accommodation for children, the inadequacy of educational institutions, the lack of care for the young and deplored the existence of prostitution in the Soviet Union, of which he learned from "accidental newspaper remarks" and from episodes in the criminal records. Women were driven to the sidewalks for the most part by want, he argued. The situation "is even more serious," wrote Trotsky, because these are not "relics from the past." The prostitutes are recruited from the younger generation.(30)

Trotsky was concerned over the mass homelessness of children, which only confirmed the difficult situation of the mother, and over the revocation of the right to abortion, which left women to depend on "back street" abortions, with all the terrible results that these implied. In his hypocrisy, the ruling party spokesman, Soltz (a specialist on matrimonial questions--later purged), stated that "in a socialist society where there are no unemployed, etc., etc., a woman has no right to decline 'the joys of motherhood.'" Such attitudes and the new law against women was for Trotsky a logical fruit of the "Thermidorian reaction."(31) He went on to criticize the new laws governing marriage and divorce. He was particularly critical of the cost of a divorce, which was no burden for the members of the elite, but a very real obstacle to the less fortunate. Condemning the hypocrisy surrounding the promulgation of the new laws, Trotsky considered the most compelling motive of

the cult of the family, the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations for reinforcing authority and power.

> No, the Soviet woman is not yet free. Complete equality before the law has so far given infinitely more to the women of the upper stratum. . . . The situation of the mother of the family who is an esteemed Communist, has a cook, a telephone for giving orders to the stores. . . has little in common with the situation of the working woman. . . . (32)

The October legislation designed to encourage the creation of a genuinely socialist family, Trotsky reasoned, was not realized because of economic and cultural backwardness. Trotsky concluded his evaluation by reiterating that the Thermidorian legislation was beating a retreat with false speeches about the sacredness of the "new" family. Of all the commentators on the status of Soviet women, no one was more penetrating in analysis than the exiled Trotsky.

The thirties were also the times of the great purges. The repressions of 1936-38 became massive because of the practise of arresting relatives or "enemies of the people," especially wives, grown-up children, and parents. By 1937 it had become law to arrest wives and children, with an imprisonment of eight and five years respectively. True, there were no trials of prominent women Old Bolsheviks, mostly because there were not many of them around. Out of those who were, some were saved by Stalin's whim. Kollontai, for example, lived to the ripe age of 80 serving as ambassador of her country in Norway, in Mexico and then in Sweden, watching from afar as her former comrades, including her lover and co-organizer of the Workers' Opposition, A.G. Shliapnikov, were being destroyed one by one. Also relegated to oblivion, but not to camps, were Elena Stasova (Secretary of the Central Committee in the first months after the revolution), who died in 1966; Lenin's secretary, Fotyeva; E.P. Peshkova, the widow of Maxime Gorky, and number of others. In the case of Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Konstantinouna Krupskaia, Stalin used her for his aims; "she was more useful to him as a propagandist than a victim."

In the only biography of Krupskaia written in the west, the author, R.H. McNeal, provides evidence pointing to the fact that Krupskaia was being harrassed by the police; that she received from 400-450 letters a day(!) with requests to intercede for the victims of the purges, particularly in the period from 1937-38; that only in few instances was she successful in saving the victim's life. She did manage to save the life of I.D. Chugurin, who in 1917 issued a Party card to Lenin.(33)

Those imprisoned came from all walks of life. Evegenia Ginzburg, in her book Arutoi Marshrut ("A Journey into The Whirlwind"), tells about an old woman from a kolkhoz who was accused of being a Trotskyite ("trotskistka"). The poor woman did not understand the term, and thought that the talk was about traktoristka (tractor-driver). She tried to explain that in her village old people did not drive tractors. Ginzburg's work, a shattering account of imprisonment and camp life, is but one of many such works. Another is A.I. Solzhenitsyn's Arkhipelg-Gulag. He includes there (in Vols. III-IV) a special chapter entitled Zhenshchina v lagere ("Woman in the Camp"), in which he describes, in vivid colours, the humiliation and degradation of the women in camps. The choice of compromise in order to save one's life; the heavy work; the unsanitary living conditions--all this made camp life into a nightmare. An often heard statement--"And when you will be left free, and return to the 'other' world, who will need you?"(34)--indicates the terrible fate of people temporarily denied participation in the mainstream of Soviet life.

These inhuman conditions coupled with the constant worry about relatives and friends proved too heavy a burden for many to carry. Often good looks were a curse rather than a blessing. To escape the brutality of camp life, if even for a short period, women tried to become pregnant; the children born to the inmates were taken away from them to be cared for by wetnurses hired for the purpose. Some camps were segregated and others mixed; the most dreadful camps for women were Kengir, Alzhir, and Kolyma.

One will never know how many talented women perished in the purges together with the men. Ginzburg lived through the period to write her memoir. Nadezhda Mandelshtam also survived to write the story of her poet husband Osip Mandelshtam. Some of the women writers such as Anna Akhmatova and Lydia Chukovskaia lived through the terrible years in silence. After the purges, many remained as single parents, often not even knowing where and when their husbands had perished; these women had the following family statistical data added to their vitae --wife of "a political prisoner."

In 1941, at the outbreak of the war, the whole nation was mobilized to fight the invaders. By that time women had entered many occupations from which they had previously been excluded. Over 43% of the entire working force were women (1939); they constituted 34% in the total number of professional workers; 60% of all doctors were women; 58% of the total number of students attending higher and special secondary schools were women. They accounted for 52.1% of the total population of the country.

Volunteers on their way to the Front-1941

The watch on the Neva at the Siege of Leningrad

The CPSU membership dropped from the previous 16.5% for 1934 to 14.9%-- a drop which could be explained by the purges.

The war forced women to take the place of men now fighting at the front. Women became sole supporters of the family. The pension paid to wives and mothers of those mobilized was insufficient to provide for the bare necessities of life. In order to further strenthen family ties, the government enacted legislation in 1944 which freed men from responsibility for children born out of wedlock and again made illegitimacy an identifiable and therefore stigmatized status. The 1944 law meant in fact that many Soviet citizens would now be considered as illegitimate, a phenomenon which had previously been considered a bourgeois prejudice. One can only explain that particular law by Stalin's determination to make the family a more stable unit in a country fighting a total war.

The end of the war brought a further demographical imbalance. In 1959, six years after Stalin's death, the census showed twenty million more women than men, and in the ages thirty-two and older, twice as many women as men. In 1945, 55% of the workers and employees in the USSR were women. Many found themselves single parents. Although in theory the possibilities to acquire better skills and advance on the job were there, in practise caring for a family under conditions of a dislocated post-war economy proved to be an impossible burden. The majority of women still did not advance in the political life of the country. By the time of Stalin's death about 20% of CPSU total membership were women. They were, however, not to be found in the upper echelons of party or government. The 27% of women deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR did not have much to say in the decision-making processes which were made for them by the Party. They continued to be under-represented in the managerial apparatus, in the higher positions in the government and in the party.

The death of Stalin brought some changes. Abortions were legalized again and divorce proceedings were simplified. The essentials did not change. Although the ideological commitment to sex equality was strong, the mother was left with the responsibility of caring for the children, whether in a normal family situation or, as in the case of divorce and consequent child custody, in one designated by the courts. In addition, in spite of all the pronouncements and works of propaganda, the task of "two shifts" proved to be a burden for women, the majority of whom are still to be found in the low-paying and semi-skilled jobs.

In the words of Louis Fischer:

> . . . the liberation of woman had a shimmer of reality: they

> could vote for one candidate in elections, they would be elected, they could in Moslem areas discard the veil and go to school. But a statement in the Moscow Kommunist of November, 1963, casts some light on the fate of Soviet women. The author writes on page 82, that the average length of life of a Russian woman, which was two years less than that of the average man sixty-five years ago, is now eight years less. . . . Most adult Soviet women are wives, mothers and wage earners. The revolution brought them formal freedom and excessive burdens.(35)

The women question in the Soviet Union under Stalin was just one aspect in the life of a people ruled by a tyrant. The imprint of his rule is still evident. It will be ". . . only when the Soviet people are able to look at their recent past and recognize it for what it really was--tragic and heroic, certainly, but also in many ways preposterous--that the spell will be lifted and the Stalin era will finally have ended."(36)

NOTES

1. Quoted in William M. Mandel, Soviet Women (New York, 1975), p. 206.
2. Mandel, pp. 207-208.
3. See "The Bolsheviks and Working Women, 1905-1920," by Anne Bobroff, in Soviet Studies, Vol. XXVI (October 1974), pp. 540-568.
4. Mandel, p. 64.
5. Mandel, p. 65.
6. Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia, 2nd Edition (Moscow, 1952).
7. Quoted in H. Scott, "Does Socialism Liberate Women?" (Boston, 1974), p. 65.
8. In Canada, only a decade ago girls entering medical schools constituted also 10%. The numbers of women medical students are now on the increase. In the USSR today a quota has been established on women entering medical schools the aim of which is to correct the imbalance that developed in the profession.
9. T.H. Rigby, Communist Party Membership in the USSR (Princeton, 1968), p. 36.
10. Mandel, p. 70.
11. Mandel, p. 69.
12. This anecdote was at one time attributed to Lenin with Stalin being its "popularizer."
13. A. Ulam, Stalin The Man and His Era (New York, 1973), p. 25.
14. R.H. McNeal, Bride of the Revolution: Krupskaia and Lenin (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1972).
15. H. Scott, p. 69.
16. M.P. Sacks, Women's Work in Soviet Russia: Continuity in the Midst of Change (New York, 1976), p. 71.
17. It should be borne in mind that developments were not equal in all of the Soviet Union with the European part much in advance of that of the Asian Republics.
18. Soviet Union 1936, Moscow (n.d.) pp. 37-38.
19. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
20. Ibid., p. 11.
21. According to some statistics of a survey of the workers and peasants for Soviet Russia 1932, one million labour hours were wasted daily on standing in queues.
22. Quoted in Sacks, p. 39.
23. In 1956 the 112 days paid leave was restored.
24. Ella Wirter, Red Virtue (New York, 1933), p. 4.
25. Fannina W. Halle, Woman in Soviet Russia (New York, 1933), IX.
26. Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia, ed. by Margaret I. Cole (London, 1933), pp. 205-206.
27. Mannin, Women and the Revolution (London, 1938), pp. 90-91.
28. Quoted in Mannin, p. 91.
29. Leon Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed (London, 1938), p. 139.
30. Ibid.
31. Trotsky, p. 144.
32. Trotsky, pp. 150-151.
33. Roy A. Medvedev, Let History Judge (New York, 1972), p. 199.*
34. A.I. Solzhenitsyn, Arkhipelag Gulag Vols. III-IV (Paris, 1974), p. 226.
35. Louis Fischer, The Life of Lenin (New York, 1965), pp. 554-55.
36. A. Ulam, Stalin: The Man and His Era (New York, 1973), p. 741.

*Medvedev gives names of a number of distinguished members of the party who were purged and maintains that Krupskaia did not succeed in saving E.N. Egorova, Secretary of the All Union Council of Trade Unions, who in July 1917, was hiding Lenin.

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APPENDIX I

Women in the USSR: Statistical Data

[Zhenshchiny v SSSR: Statisticheskie materialy]

"In the USSR, women are granted equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, governmental, cultural and social and political life."
(Constitution of the USSR)

Number of Women in the USSR

	Number of women (in millions)	Women as percent of population
1913, year-end estimate	80.1	50.3
1940, estimate as of January 1	101.1	52.1
1959, by census of January 15	114.8	55.0
1966, estimate as of January 1	125.9	54.2
1970, by census of January 15	130.3	53.9

Women as Percentage of Wage and Salary Earners by Branches of the Economy

	1928	1940	1950	1960	1969
In economy as a whole	24	39	47	47	50.5
In industry (production personnel)	26	38	46	45	48
In agriculture	24	30	42	41	42
(Of whom, in state farms, subsidiary farms of industrial enterprises, and other farming undertakings	45	34	49	43	43
In transport	7	21	28	24	24

APPENDIX II

Average Annual Number of Women Wage and Salary Earners

Year	Women wage and salary earners (thousands)	Women as % of total wage and salary earners
1928	2,795	24
1940	13,190	39
1945	15,920	56
1950	19,180	47
1955	23,040	46
1960	29,250	47
1965	37,680	49
1966	39,500	50
1967	41,060	50
1968	42,680	50
1969	44,410	50.5
1970 (estimate)	45,700	51

Women with Higher and Secondary
(Complete and Incomplete) Education

	Millions			Per thousand women		
	1939	1959	1969	1939	1959	1969
Educational level:						
Complete higher	0.4	1.8	3.7	4	16	29
Incomplete higher, secondary, incomplete secondary	6.6	29.2	43.0	67	255	332
Total with higher and complete and incomplete secondary	7.0	31.0	46.7	71	271	361

APPENDIX III

Number of Women Professionals and Paraprofessionals, with Higher and Specialized Secondary Education, Employed*

Years	Total women professionals and paraprofessionals with higher and specialized secondary education	Of whom		Women as percentage of all professionals and paraprofessionals with higher and secondary specialized education
		With higher education	With secondary specialized education	
1928	151	65	86	29
1940	864	312	552	36
1955	3,115	1,155	1,960	61
1960	5,189	1,865	3,324	59
1965	6,941	2,518	4,423	58
1966	7,540	2,717	4,823	58
1968	8,719	3,122	5,597	58
1969(estimate)	9,440	3,370	6,070	58

*The data are from accountings made on January 1, 1941, for 1940, on July 1, 1955, on December 1, 1960, on November 15 in the period 1965-1968, and as of the year's end in 1969.

Number of Women Students in Higher and Paraprofessional Secondary Educational Institutions per 1,000 Women in Population

	1939	1959	1969
Women students per 1,000 women:			
In higher educational institutions	4.1	8.9	17
In paraprofessional secondary schools	6.7	7.3	17

APPENDIX IV

Number of Women Physicians of All Specialties
(Except in military; at end of year)

Years	Total women physicians	As % of all doctors
1913	2.8	10
1940	96.3	62
1950	204.9	77
1955	254.8	76
1960	327.1	76
1965	408.9	74
1968	447.7	72
1969	465.5	72
1970 (estimate)	485	72

Women Among Scientific Personnel
(At end of year; in thousands)

	1950	1960	1969
Women scientific personnel	59.0	128.7	343.2
Including holders of degrees of:			
Doctor	0.6	1.1	2.9
Candidate of sciences	11.4	28.8	55.4
Among women scientific personnel holders of rank of:			
Full or corresponding Academician and/or professor	0.5	0.7	1.6
Docent	3.2	6.2	14.0
Senior research associate	3.5	5.8	10.2
Junior research associate or assistant	9.4	13.6	24.2

APPENDIX V

Sex Structure of CPSU Membership 1922-1967

Date	Men Percent	Women Percent
1922 (January)	92.2	7.8
1924 (August)	90.1	9.9
1927 (January	87.9	12.1
1929 (October)	86.3	13.7
1932 (July)	84.1	15.9
1934 (January)	83.5	16.5
1937 (January)	85.2	14.8
1939 (March)	85.5	14.5
1941 (January)	85.1	14.9
1945 (January)	83.0	17.0
1947 (January)	81.8	18.2
1950 (July)	79.3	20.7
1952 (October)	80.8	19.2
1956 (January)	80.4	19.6
1957 (January)	80.3	19.7
1959 (January)	80.5	19.5
1962 (January)	80.4	19.6
1965 (January)	79.8	20.2
1967 (January)	79.1	20.9

Appendices I-IV are taken from Soviet Sociology, Vol. XI, 1972, pp. 57-75. Appendix V is taken from T.H. Rigby, Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967, 1968, p. 361.