

LABOUR FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE

A Socialist Defence Bulletin on Eastern Europe and the USSR

30p

WOMEN



SPECIAL ISSUE

Abortion * Being Gay * Family

Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

STATEMENT OF AIMS

A growing number of socialists and communists are taking a stand against the suppression of democratic rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The Labour Movement has international responsibilities in this field as well as in the field of solidarity action with those struggling against oppression in Chile or Southern African or Northern Ireland.

But up to now socialists have lacked a source of frequent and reliable information about events in Eastern Europe. Coverage in the papers of the Left remains scanty, while reports in the bourgeois press are selective and slanted. The first aim of **Labour Focus on Eastern Europe** is to help fill this gap by providing a more comprehensive and regular source of information about events in that part of the world.

The mass media give ample space to Tory politicians and to some from the Labour Party who seek to use protests against repression in Eastern Europe as a cover for their own support for social inequality in Britain and for witch-hunts against those who oppose it. At the same time campaigns run by socialists in the Labour and Trade Union Movement for many years concerning victims of repression in Eastern Europe are largely ignored by the media. The second aim of this bulletin therefore is to provide comprehensive information about the activities of socialists and labour organisations that are taking up this issue.

Labour Focus is a completely independent bulletin whose editorial collective includes various trends of socialist and Marxist opinion. It is not a bulletin for debate on the nature of the East European states, nor is its purpose to recommend a strategy for socialists in Eastern Europe: there are other journals on the Left that take up these questions. Our purpose is to provide comprehensive coverage of these societies with a special emphasis on significant currents campaigning for working class, democratic and national rights.

Whenever possible we will quote the sources of our information. Unless otherwise stated, all the material in **Labour Focus** may be reproduced, with acknowledgement. Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editorial collective.

In these ways we hope to strengthen campaigns to mobilise the considerable influence that the British Labour Movement can have in the struggles to end repression in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

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The illustrations are all from journals or books published in Eastern Europe.

SPECIAL OFFER ** SPECIAL OFFER

Do you belong to a women's group or a socialist organisation? Why not organise a discussion on women in Eastern Europe? There is no problem about a reading list: just get a bulk order of this special issue and hand it round. If you send us a cheque for £2.75, we will send you post free 10 copies of this special issue. £4 will pay for 15 copies including postage. If you are overseas the normal costs of ordering **Labour Focus** will apply.

And why not take out a subscription to **Labour Focus** at the same time? For full information about current events and oppositional activity in these countries there is no more reliable and comprehensive source of information for socialists.

EDITORIAL

Some months ago Labour Focus on Eastern Europe asked a group of socialist feminists in the Women's Liberation Movement if they would prepare material for us on the position of women in Eastern Europe. This special issue of Labour Focus is the result. The entire contents and editing have been carried out by the comrades from this socialist feminist collective.

This attempt to give an overview of the position of women in Eastern Europe from a socialist feminist perspective is, in our view, the first of its kind. Such pioneering work is hampered by the scarcity of information on many aspects of the subject and by the relatively

recent renaissance of theoretical debate among socialists on the relationship between the struggle for socialism and the liberation of women.

The articles in this issue have provoked lively debate amongst members of the Labour Focus editorial collective and we feel sure they will do so amongst our readers as well. We would welcome debate on the problems raised here and will be happy to publish letters or contributions from our readers in subsequent numbers of Labour Focus.]

INTRODUCTION FROM THE WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE

The socialist tradition has always involved a formal commitment to the equality of women. In practice, however, women have not been fully involved in the socialist movement and our special interests, particularly the right to control our own bodies and the socialisation of housework, have not received the priority they deserve. The countries in Eastern Europe that claim to be socialist also claim to have given women real equality by acknowledging the social importance of motherhood. In this special issue of Labour Focus we are turning a critical eye on both the present situation of women in these countries, particularly in reproduction, and on the way in which it is developing. We hope that the facts and arguments we present will be of interest to both the women's movement and the labour movement.

Debates on the left over Eastern Europe have largely ignored the question of women's oppression, but over the last few years the 'woman question' has re-entered the political life of these societies. The problem of falling birth-rates and an inadequate labour supply has forced politicians to consider what can be done to make parenthood more attractive to working women. At the same time women are becoming more active in the dissident movement. We hope that the labour movement in this country will recognise that without women's support and involvement the present struggles for democratic rights in Eastern Europe will not get very far and that it will support women's protests and concern for their rights.

The five of us who have worked together to produce this issue have all lived in or visited Eastern Europe and are involved in research projects on the historical and contemporary position of women in these countries. In preparing articles we have used our own personal observations as well as our research findings and have listed useful books and sources at the end of the issue for those interested in reading further. We are all socialists and active in the women's movement.

The women's liberation movement is an international movement, though this is usually remembered only on 8 March and in isolated articles in feminist journals. Last year, however, international co-operation began to take shape when socialist feminists from North America and Europe met in Paris and Amsterdam. But two important groups were absent from these conferences - women from the third world and women from Eastern Europe. Without any information on women in these areas it is difficult for feminists to achieve a comprehensive understanding of women's position and formulate truly international campaigns. We hope the information provided here will be of both practical and theoretical use.

The position of women in Eastern Europe is often referred to in debates in the women's movement on the links between socialism and women's liberation. Many socialist feminists, while recognising that the Russian revolution has not liberated women

completely argue that there are historical reasons for this — the lack of a strong and independent women's movement, the cultural and economic level of the country and its isolation — and that nevertheless the fights for socialism and for women's liberation are connected. For other feminists Eastern Europe proves that socialism does not liberate women — "just look at women in Russia." Others would say that "socialism" in Eastern Europe is no different from capitalism.

We are not in this issue making any assertions about whether these countries are workers' states, state capitalist or whatever. We feel it is clear that nationalisation of the means of production has not brought instant liberation for women, but has led to some changes in their situation. This experience is directly relevant to the debates in the women's movement today. In particular debates on the role of domestic labour in the economy, the question of the sexual division of labour, the family and sexuality, the importance of changing and using the law, and the need for an autonomous women's movement can all be enriched by looking at Eastern Europe.

A feminist perspective on these questions is noticeably absent within these countries. Feminism as a movement is identified with the bourgeois, pro-capitalist women's movements that existed before the First World War. The existing women's organisations attribute women's present inequalities to the limitations of their biology, and in any case have no independent voice. Without autonomy and without the right to meet together freely and raise any and all issues they see as important women cannot begin to organise around their oppression. Thus the fight for women's rights should be closely connected with the dissidents' fight for democratic rights.

There are some dissidents in Eastern Europe — Solzhenitsyn is the most famous — who think that Soviet socialism has degraded and defeminised women. Other dissidents remain socialists, but feel their countries are no longer progressing in that direction. Few of these, however, have mentioned the oppression of women in their critique of East European society. Dissidents have usually ignored women's issues or made an occasional, confused statement. Many women have been active in the opposition, have gone to prison, been forced into exile, or suffered poverty and hardship. Though ready to fight for democratic rights they have been slow to take up women's rights. However, the abortion petition in Hungary is an indication that events themselves are making attitudes change, and we can hope that women as organised groups will in the future play an important role in the fight for democratic rights and for a truly socialist society. We hope that the women's movement in this country will show its solidarity with these women dissidents and with all those fighting for democratic rights in Eastern Europe.

Barbara Brown, Susannah Fry, Alix Holt, Mary Rogers, Adela Rytka.

OFFICIAL VIEWS

Women's Organisations

[Socialist feminists now recognise the need for an independent women's movement to exist both before and after a socialist revolution. So the question is often raised: is this a women's movement in Eastern Europe? In the article on women's organisations we give our answer, and we have also included here quotes taken from the major newspapers of Eastern Europe on International Women's Day. They give an idea of how women are flattered and "thanked" on one day of the year, so they will tolerate their oppression for the rest.]

The Hungarian sociologist Maria Markus has described the situation in her country:

No forms of spontaneous activity organised from below is tolerated, nor any form of real control of the society over the bureaucratic apparatus. This system not only makes impossible the existence of any spontaneous movement and organisation, but also offers no forum for the articulation of the needs and demands of the different sections of the population. In Hungary there exists neither a women's movement in the sense of a real movement, nor any formal organisation.

In some East European countries formal organisations do exist. Czechoslovakia, for example, has a Union of Women; Poland has a League for Women, and in the USSR there is a Soviet Women's Committee. But these do not constitute a real women's movement. They do not discuss or make proposals, have no real contact with women and no influence on government policies. Only in East Germany does the Democratic Women's League have a mass membership of over a million, organise discussions for women where they live and work, and send delegates to state bodies, but it is still firmly under Party control.

In the Soviet Union it was not always like this. After the October Revolution the Bolshevik Party set up *zhenotdely* (women's departments) which at the local level were like modern women's centres, offering advice, information and support, and at the national level held conferences and published newspapers and books. The *zhenotdely* developed methods of organisation which involved the mass of women in political life: working women, peasant women and housewives elected "delegates" who attended political and literacy courses, debated local issues and worked for some months checking the functioning of schools, welfare institutions, etc. in their area. In this way the women's movement in the '20s was beginning to develop into a broad social movement, but was hindered by, as well as economic difficulties, the failure of the Party to recognise the centrality of women's

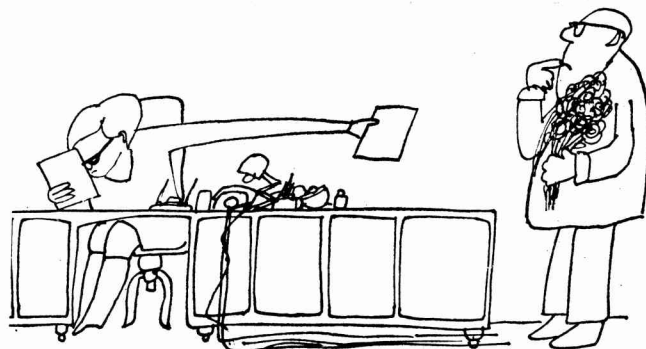
oppression and to clarify the role of the women's organisations. As the 20s went by things got worse and the first five-year-plan dropped any commitment the Bolsheviks had had to integrating changes in the economy with the transformation of everyday life. The *zhenotdely* voiced their resentment, but the government's response was to close them down.

In the 30s millions of peasant women were drawn into the towns and the factories, but they were too hard-worked to try to initiate

organisations. Women grumbled, particularly when abortion was made illegal in 1936, but the women's movement did not re-emerge. During the Second World War the Soviet government set up a women's anti-fascist committee. Undoubtedly many Soviet women opposed fascism, but the aim of the government was not to launch a mass movement. All the committee ever did was to send delegates to a conference of establishment women's organisations in Paris. The present Committee of Soviet Women is



"Either he's drunk or it's the 8th March"



"Our woman"

hardly more active. It receives foreign delegations, is affiliated to the International Women's Federation, sends representatives to United Nations events, etc. and makes speeches on 8 March.

In the USSR during the thaw period of the late 50s and early 60s women's organisations were set up in the local areas which discussed inequalities at the work-place and raised the need for creches, etc. In 1968 the Union of

Czechoslovak Women was involved in similar discussions. However, because they are so closely identified with the existing system it is doubtful that these official organisations could become a focus for the resurgence of the women's movement. The growing importance of women's issues, and the demands by dissidents for democratic rights, are the forces laying the basis for a new, autonomous women's movement.

International Women's Day

SOVIET UNION

"The warmth of the female soul, the solicitude of wives and mothers makes the Soviet family strong. Loving and attentive, women raise their child — the future builders of communism — to be healthy of body and ideologically firm of mind, to be worthy citizens of the socialist fatherland. The nation is grateful to you, women, for your great and noble work."

8 March 1976. *Pravda*.

BULGARIA

"We place great hopes in your flair for the new, the good and the noble, in your skill at creating beauty, for the common struggle towards the furthest possible development and perfection of the socialist way of life. There is no doubt that you will continue ardently and unstintingly to devote your strength, knowledge and capabilities to the many-sided development of the human personality, the formulation of roles and the strengthening of influence on family and social life, in which the worker for socialism is formed, lives and creates."

8 March 1977. *Otechestven Front*.

GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

"We want to express our hearty thanks to our dear wives, mothers and daughters for their many great achievements both at work and in the community, and for their dedicated care of the family."

8 March 1977. *Neues Deutschland*.



"Would you pop out for another ½ litre?"

POLAND

A particularly important social function of women is motherhood, the organisation of family life and stressing the social value of the family. Care of children, bringing up the young generation, forming the personality and character of a person at a period of his life which is of crucial educational value — is the greatest vocation of every mother."

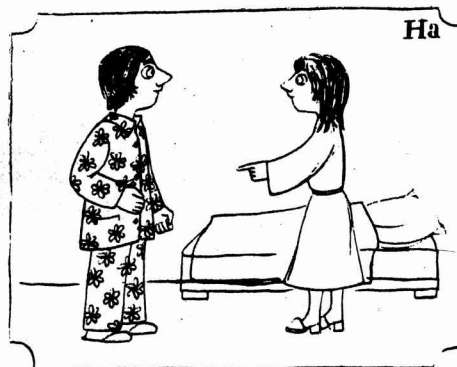
In your hands is the happiness of Polish families, the future of children and the future of our nation." Gierek.

8 March 1977. *Trybuna Ludu*.

HUNGARY

"Today as every 8th March in our homes, at our places of work, nationally and throughout the world we salute women. Socialist society does not distinguish between the rights of men and the rights of women, neither in principle nor in its laws nor in its intentions. But in its practice? The declaration of equality is a decisive step but in no way does it automatically create equal possibilities ... Our troubles at this time of saluting women would also be solved if, next to the flower every year we handed over a bouquet of solved problems. Selfishly, of course, not just for the use of women."

8 March 1977. *Nepszabadsag*.



"What are those pyjamas?" "They're for you instead of flowers on Women's Day."

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

"We, the women of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, link this fighting anniversary with those goals which for us are the main path to the realisation of our wishes and fulfillment of our idea of a full and happy life for our families.

This year's International Women's Day is especially significant for us, for the period of preparation for the 15th Congress of the CPCz is coming to a climax. On such an occasion each one of us definitely thinks about what the period between the 14th and 15th congresses has brought and what are our future perspectives. Under the careful leadership of the CPCz and closely allied with our truest friend, the Soviet Union, the certainties of a peaceful life have in this period become firmer."

8 March 1976. *Vlasta*. (Women's paper).



"Darling. Leave that till tomorrow. I can't bear to see you overwork on your day."

THE OPPOSITION

[Despite the inadequacy of official women's organisations in Eastern Europe, women have not been involved in the dissident movement as feminists. The general feeling is that the fight for democratic rights is the main issue, and that women's rights must wait. However, as issues concerning women become more important politically, it is likely that women's consciousness will change. We have included the interview with Marta as evidence of this, and the case histories of Czech women dissidents to show the serious risks involved for women who decide to take a political stand.]

Abortion Petition in Hungary

In October 1973 the Hungarian government changed its previously liberal abortion policy by refusing abortions on social grounds to married women with less than three children. During the summer of 1973, when the change was being planned, a petition against it was organised. This kind of public protest on any issue, and especially on one relating to women, is very unusual in Eastern Europe. Signing such a petition can lead to serious trouble, but according to some sources, as many as 2000 people took the risk. One of them was Marta Kocsis, now living in England, who we interviewed together with her husband Sandor.]

What was the situation regarding abortion and contraception like before the changes in 1973?

Sandor: Abortion was more or less on demand. But before, for four years, there was a total ban on abortion. It was well known that many of the children born then were unwanted. There was a lot of popular pressure for change — it was a hated law.

Marta: Contraception was widely available too. In the '60s we got the Hungarian pill, Infecundin, but it wasn't all that good. It's banned now — it had side-effects. If you had a friend who was a gynaecologist they would tell you, but there was a complete ban on the media to mention it. It was a hypocritical attitude from the state. There's a new pill now, and all the other methods are available too. Practically all women know about contraception, except perhaps a few in isolated hamlets. Even the gypsy girls are using the pill now.

Why then did you feel that the restrictions on abortion were an important issue?

Sandor: Because contraception is not enough. Not every woman can use the pill — I'd say, from people I know, about every second woman can't use it. In Budapest, the elite can get Western pills. Our pharmaceutical industry is very developed, but it still can't produce chemically pure pills as that would be too expensive.

Marta: The restrictions would make a difference, especially for ordinary women. It's a commission that decides whether to allow an abortion. Before it was just a formality — they would ask are you sure, have you made up your mind, and women weren't put off by it. But now they've heard that the rules have been tightened up and think 'they'll throw us out', so they'll decide to save themselves a humiliating experience.

Sandor: It was felt that the changes would affect intellectuals less than other women. They would not feel shy of the doctors, they would get by somehow. Not to mention that for the elite there are special hospitals.

What kind of people signed the petition, and how many?

Marta: About 300 signed. We don't know exactly how many.

You never saw the signatures, or the actual petition — you just saw your colleague sign it. I heard that not only intellectuals and students signed it but other people - pop stars - who weren't political. Some of the signatures were collected in workers' districts.

Sandor: It wasn't signed mainly by women. Where I work nine men and one woman signed. Possibly more men than women signed, I don't really know.

What did the petition say, and what happened to it?

Marta: I don't remember exactly what it said, but there were three main arguments. One was about the sociological problems raised; then there was the civil liberties question, and then the feminine one.

Sandor: The petition itself was sent to the President of the parliament, in the post. We heard nothing more.

When you signed it, did you think it might be successful?

Marta: No. We didn't expect that. But the funny thing is, I think it was successful in a way. You see, the changes didn't become a law, just a directive. There was disagreement about it inside the Party too.

Sandor: There was a parliamentary debate scheduled, but it was called off two or three days beforehand. The press had been preparing for it, but suddenly there was nothing in the papers. It came out as a government decree, which is legally much weaker. I think the petition frightened the Party, as it was outside their control. They had raised the debate themselves, so it was difficult to handle.

What were your main reasons for opposing the change?

Sandor: It was an encroachment on civil liberty - not specially from a family planning or a feminist point of view - but from one of general civil liberty. A system that says abortion is banned is very despotic.

Marta: All the discussions that went on were not about the woman's right to decide, but more sociological, such as which strata of the population will be most affected. It was not that much a question of whether I feel my rights are infringed.

Sandor: People objected to the way the government introduced the changes, to the ideology behind it. The official view was that the population is too low — at that time the birth-rate was the lowest in the world. There was talk that people preferred consumer goods to children, that abortion was petit-bourgeois. But this is a diversion. The government presented demographic arguments as they need manpower, but this is because they have mismanaged the whole economy and there is enormous waste, there is hidden unemployment and so on. But instead of saying

we will improve the economy, we will democratise the whole system, they say we will harden up the abortion law. Or they argue that we should be patriots, Hungary must be a great nation, so we have to have an increase in population. I would say this is the same argument as the fascist leadership used in the war. Who is against the hardening up of the law, and who is for? Liberal intellectuals, people who agreed with the Czechs in '68, who agreed with '56, and are for democratisation — they are against it. People who are populist, who talk about Hungary becoming a "flowering garden" and who always support the government, are for it. These people also argued that the role of the woman was at home, and how much better it was in patriarchal Hungary when all these women were at home.

Were any measures taken against the people who signed?

Marta: It depended very much where you worked, how liberal your management was, how much it tolerated things like that. Usually people received warnings.

Sandor: Yes, the director gets a list of the people who signed the petition from somewhere and calls them in. It could be absolutely a joking affair. "Don't endanger the position of our work-place. What a silly person you are, to sign such a thing." On the other hand it's somewhere on the records, these things accumulate over years.

Marta: We didn't really know what the consequences would be. It was the first time I had come across a petition — they are a very rare thing. We didn't think anything very bad would happen, as it's not like the Soviet Union, but you can't be certain. Nobody knew how many people would sign, and it might have depended on that. Probably the worst thing that could happen is that you don't get a passport, or a scholarship, or a new job, as you wouldn't get a good political reference. Very few people lost their jobs, though I heard that the organisers did — they took more of a risk.

Was there much opposition to the changes outside intellectual circles?

Marta: No, I don't think non-intellectuals were that much against the change in the abortion law. People were taken in by some of the arguments, especially about the proportion of old people increasing. They felt that was a serious economic problem. And people had appreciated the liberal methods tried by the government, the maternity benefits.

Sandor: Yes, it did come as a package. At the same time contraception was made free and maternity benefits were raised and there was more sex education in the schools.

Marta: You see, Hungary has the most advanced maternity benefits in the world. Since 1969, women can get up to three years paid leave - the first five months on full pay - with their jobs left open for them. This had already made the birth-rate increase, but not enough. There is also a quite developed nursery system - everyone expects to put their baby in a nursery at six months. But if you take maternity benefit you can't have a nursery place. It should be up to you whether you take the two or three years' leave, but it can be very difficult to find a nursery and that's what the problem really was. It becomes a privilege again — which families can find a nursery place, or afford private care. The system is very unfair, it's dominated by privilege. It becomes not a feminist problem but a privilege problem. There again, most women are working in factories; many of them regard work as a

burden, and it is a freedom not to work, but if they don't they have financial problems.

So even with better nurseries, women would prefer not to work?

Marta: Not professional women, but factory workers probably would.

Has the possibility of these maternity benefits holding back women ever been discussed?

Marta: It has been discussed among professional women. They do lose out very badly when they go home for five years instead of going up in the profession. And their income drops much more. But generally, the benefits are popular.

Sandor: How can you encourage people to have children in a socialist way? You need an excellent nursery and kindergarten system, an excellent school system, gynaecological advice, citizen's advice centres, better sex education in schools and universities — everyone would have agreed. But instead they restrict abortion!

I believe the official women's organisations came out in favour of the new law ...

Sandor: They always come out in favour of anything they are told. They are the voice of the leadership.

Marta: They have no function whatsoever.

Has the women's movement in the West had any impact in Hungary? Was it reported much?

Marta: No, not much. There was one article, surveying the WLM, in a popular monthly journal. And I have some friends at the university who were interested and chose to study women's topics, but they were not given any support or taken seriously. Somehow a feminist consciousness hasn't developed. It doesn't really fit the Marxist ideology. Liberation of women can be part of the general liberation, so the woman problem doesn't become independent of the whole human rights question.

Is the question of women raised at all, either by intellectuals or oppositionists?

Sandor: Among intellectuals — if your workplace is democratic, the issue can't arise. It is part and parcel of democratic socialist behaviour that of course women are equal, there's no question about it, nobody would argue that they are not. Among oppositionists two issues are raised. One is that most women work in the textile industry, which is semi-skilled and wages are low. The second is that there is only one woman in the government, one in the Politburo, five in the Central Committee — it's just a shop window arrangement. And middle to upper management is absolutely a man's world, like here.

Marta: But then again, it's intertwined with political issues. The leadership is incompetent, traditional, conservative. What we have to ask is why are such people in these posts anyway.

Women in Dissident Movements

Dissident movements exist in all the countries of Eastern Europe and in all of them women are active. The 'dissent' of women in these situations is substantially the same as that of men: so is the political repression which they suffer as a result. The mothers, wives and daughters of known dissidents are also targets for harassment.

In the Soviet Union many women have been imprisoned as a result of their involvement in national movements, particularly Ukrainian and Tartar women. Others have signed letters of protest, and some have taken direct action, such as Natalia Gorbanevskaya, arrested for demonstrating in Red Square in 1968 against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. There are a few women involved in the groups of intellectuals fighting for democratic rights; these include Malva Landa, Elena Bonner, Olya Hejko, Ludmilla Alexeyeva (now in exile), who are in the Helsinki Monitoring Groups. Often these women have become oppositionists rather than compromise in their professional work. The psychiatrist Marina Voikhanskaya (interviewed in *Labour Focus* No.4) is one such, while the 70-year-old lawyer Sofia Kalistratova is involved in both the Helsinki Group and a working group against psychiatric repression. The female lawyer Dina Kaminskaya, who was defence counsel at many political trials in the late '60s, was the only lawyer who agreed to defend the Jewish civil rights activist Shcharansky. She was expelled from the country in December 1977.

The focus for most political opposition in Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia seems to have been Charter 77 and the events in Poland in June 1976 - the strikes over food prices, subsequent repression, the formation of the Workers' Defence Committee, and continuing agitation and opposition to the regime. In March 1977 a group of Yugoslav intellectuals, including 19 women, one of whom was Zagorka Golubovic of the Praxis group, signed a letter of support for Charter 77. In Hungary also, intellectuals signed a similar letter. Among them were the women philosophers Agnes Erdelyi and Maria Lindassy, sociologists, including Judith Haker, the feminist Maria Markus, and Agnes Heller, a long established critical thinker expelled from the Party in 1959 and attacked for holding new leftist views in 1973.

In Poland several women are members of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR): they include Aniela Steinbergowa, a former member of the Polish Socialist Party, and Halina Mikolajska, an actress. (Many of the women whose dissident views get most published are artists of some kind.) In Poland also there are a large number of



One third of the participants in the hunger strike held last summer in Poland to protest against the arrests of KOR members were women.

women on the Student Solidarity Committee, formed in May 1977 as a result of the death of Stanislaw Pyjas and with the declared aim of forming an 'authentic and independent student organisation' (See *Labour Focus* No.3). Out of 11 people on hunger strike in May 1977 in protest at imprisonments there were 5 women: the wife and sister of Czeslaw Chomicki, an imprisoned worker and three ex-student activists and KOR supporters.

Although women have been fairly active in the dissident movement, some of the literature produced by the Polish opposition (not the KOR) has a disturbingly anti-feminist slant. For example, the 'Programme of the 44', published by an anonymous group in the summer of 1976 - the only oppositional document to make concrete constitutional proposals - says:

"The family is the basic unit of society, the birth and education of children is more important for the future of the nation than professional labour ... The present law permitting voluntary interruption of pregnancy must be replaced with a law that combines all the elements of aid to mothers and children with the questions of voluntary maternity (contraception)."

Charter 77 Document No.7 on social and economic rights, which deals, among other things, with the position of women, argues that the statistics of women's work and their legal equality are in no way a reflection of the achievement of women's emancipation, but rather, because of the nature of women's work and the low pay they receive, an expression of their continuing subordinate position. The writers seem to think that only an alternative to the existing women's organisation - one which had a completely different approach - would be able to start to confront these problems. (For a full copy of the document see *Labour Focus* No.2).

More than 150 women from all kinds of backgrounds signed Charter 77 and many have lost their jobs as a result. The largest number described themselves as 'workers', others were mainly clerks, journalists and professional women.



Marta Kubisova, one of the three spokespeople for Charter 77.

In East Germany, there have been protests about expulsions and arrests of critical writers such as Biermann and Bahro, as well as the recent spontaneous demonstration against the police (*Labour Focus* No.5), but very few women, except for Sarah Kirsch, have been prominently involved.

The only known instance of women in Eastern Europe actively defending their rights is the petition that was organised in Hungary in 1973 against the tightening up of the abortion law. Since many East European governments are pursuing policies on abortion, contraception and maternity that restrict women's freedom of choice, we can expect women to make similar protests in the future.

The Yugoslavian Praxis group in its document on civil and human rights (*Labour Focus* No.4) links the struggle for democratic rights with the women's liberation movement, as one of the "new, unconventional forms of social engagement". This is a hopeful sign that the struggle for women's rights will become an integral part of the dissident movement.

Czech Case Histories

From a number of sources we have gathered information on women dissidents in Czechoslovakia. Much of the material was collected for International Women's Year, 1976, and concerns women who were at that time being persecuted for their activities in 1968. Most of them have, however, signed Charter 77, so their position since 1976 has probably got worse rather than better.

Obviously we couldn't interview the women themselves and the material doesn't really ask all the questions we would have liked to ask. It doesn't give any special picture of whether, for example, being in opposition and being a woman imposes any special pressures. Most of the women it describes are middle-aged: it would be interesting to know, for example, what is the experience of some of the younger women who signed Charter 77.

Marta Kubisova and Vlasta Chramostova were two of the most popular and well-known artists in Czechoslovakia in 1968-9. Kubisova is a singer and Chramostova an actress. Both have won numerous awards for their work. They are still well-known, even though neither of them has been allowed to perform since 1970. Both of them refused to accept 'normalisation': they chose silence rather than to conform. (Kubisova was offered the chance to sing again if she withdrew her signature from Charter 77 — she refused.)

"What did Kubisova do, that she had to be completely silenced, her records withdrawn ... her image cut out of all her TV recordings, what did she do that she has been forbidden to appear even at a local firemen's ball? Perhaps we should start by asking what she did not do. She did not publish a statement renouncing everything connected with 1968 ... she refused to fraternise with political bigshots ... she did not compose a puerile ditty about a 'heroic 23-year-old captain of State Security'." (These are all ways in which other singers have compromised themselves in an attempt to keep their jobs.)

Chramostova once said that 'freedom can only be measured by the degree of possible non-conformity'. In keeping with this philosophy she goes on inviting her dissident friends to her house and uses her right not to vote in elections. Not being able to work she describes as a living death, but under present conditions she has no alternative.

Vera Chytilova is a film director. Her work includes 'Daisies', 'We shall eat the fruit of the trees of paradise' and 'The Apple Game' (see this issue under Reviews section). From 1970-76 she was not allowed to make films: the ban on her work has now

been relaxed and her latest film has just been released in Czechoslovakia and the West. But even so, the letter that she wrote to President Husak in 1976, asking why she was being prevented from realising any of her ideas is interesting because of the way she analyses some of the reasons behind this ban on her work. The head of the studios attributed it to her political beliefs, but Chytilova says:

"The real problem, however, lay elsewhere. I was a female film director. But I was also a mother and a citizen of a socialist country and as such was aware of my rights and would always fight for them. I would not accept dismissal from my job for no valid reason, because this was contrary to the spirit of socialist ideals ... it is clear that the opposition to me is based on a mixture of personal hostility, false assumptions and male chauvinism."

Many of the women who find themselves in opposition were once loyal and trusting members of the Communist Party. Most of them belong to the generation for which Munich was the decisive political experience - it pushed them into the Party and led them naturally to look at the Soviet Union as Czechoslovakia's most trustworthy ally. For some of them political disillusionment was a gradual process: the seeds were sown in the early 50s and then bore fruit in 1969. For others, their exclusion from the Party after 1969 came as a complete revelation. Most of them had worked their way up to positions of some standing within the Party, their mistake was that in 1968 they generally went too far - e.g. criticised the Soviet invasion or the subsequent political repression. Others had been working on projects which were then considered to be dangerous and subversive - for example, liaison between the state and religious groups. Since then, they have found it progressively more and more difficult to get any job, let alone one which corresponds to their qualifications. Their families and children have also been persecuted.

The story of **Vera Stovickova** illustrates the problem of finding a job faced by anybody with a bad 'political profile'. She used to be one of the only women correspondents for Czech radio and TV. She specialised in the problems of Africa and the third world: wrote several books on it and won awards for her journalism. Like many other people of her generation, she had joined the Communist Party, but had soon become disillusioned with the gap between ideals and reality. After the invasion in 1968, she was one of those who continued to broadcast, moving from one secret improvised radio station to another. When 'normalisation' came, therefore, she had no illusions that

she could stay in broadcasting.

For a time after that, she managed to get a job in a museum, but was dismissed because of her lack of 'class and political consciousness'. Months of searching eventually turned up a cleaning job, but she was dismissed from that as well for 'political reasons'. She has therefore been deprived of the right to work and to an adequate standard of living - but this is not her main complaint:

"Losing one's employment means primarily to lose one's means of subsistence. It is worse when it also means that one is condemned to lose one's qualifications. But even this is not the worst thing. (Stovickova) was one of those people for whom work is not a bore or a burden but a passion, the meaning of her life. Not to be allowed to work is more than not to earn, it is much more than not to have money."

Even if women have not spoken out against the regime personally, it may happen that their husbands or children have done so. In this situation, the state often tries to get at women as wives and mothers, and persuade them to put pressure on their husbands or children to renounce their views. Children of dissenters will almost certainly lose their right to secondary and higher education — another weapon of emotional blackmail. A man's political opposition can be used as a way of depriving his wife of her right to work. **Helena Klimova** is the wife of Ivan Klima, a 'banned' writer. She herself was once an editor of *Literarni noviny*, but this seems to be less important than the identity of her husband. Since 1969 she has gone from one job to another, having long ago given up hope of being able to work in her own field. She was dismissed from her last post as a clerical worker for allegedly 'inciting the workers against the management', and has since been unable to get another.

The situations of these women are typical of many others, women who are not so well known and thus have less opportunity of bringing their plight to the attention of people outside their own country. A great many women signed Charter 77 and have subsequently been sacked from their jobs; they are having similar difficulties in finding any kind of new employment. It is worth pointing out that as women in this situation they are marginally worse off than men, simply because the kind of work they can get where their political history is ignored, at least for a time, are the most menial low paid 'women's' jobs, for example, as cleaners or clerical workers.

(Thanks to George Theiner at Index and to Palach Press who made available their 'profiles of persecuted women'.)

NEWS ITEMS

Women form half of free trade union

The latest news to come out of the Soviet Union concerns a group of ordinary working people who in January 1978 formed the "Association of Free Trade Unions of Workers in the USSR". Of 110 candidate members, 52 are women, and include factory workers, teachers, doctors and housewives. They are on average between 35-45 years of age, and are all currently unemployed because of their criticisms of management abuses. Valentina Chetverikova, a woman, is secretary of the union.

The group came together through chance meetings, in the reception rooms of the highest trade union or party organisations, of individuals who had come to Moscow to press their complaints in person. They decided to fight their cases collectively, and to appeal collectively against the repression they and other workers faced for claiming their rights. The case of Nadezhda Gaidar, a woman engineer from Kiev, is typical.

In May 1975 she was arrested in the USSR Procurator General's Office, where she was trying to complain about being unfairly sacked. She was taken to a psychiatric hospital and given the drug aminazin. A doctor said she was suffering from nervous exhaustion brought on by her quests for justice, and that to keep her from complaining any more she would be kept for a while. Despite the fact that there was no one to look after her two children, she was detained for two months. Nadezhda is now an active member of the free trade union.

For news about developments concerning this group, see future issues of **Labour Focus**. There are fuller details of the documents currently available in **Labour Focus** Vol.2, No.1.

Sergei Paradzhanov Released

In 1973 the well-known Soviet film director Sergei Paradzhanov (whose films include 'Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors') was sentenced to five years in a labour camp. The charges were "currency speculation" and homosexuality. He was released last autumn, one year before completing his sentence. A month previously the Italian MP Angelo Pezzana caused a good deal of embarrassment in Moscow when he called a press conference to condemn the Soviet Union's laws against homosexuality as a violation of basic human rights.

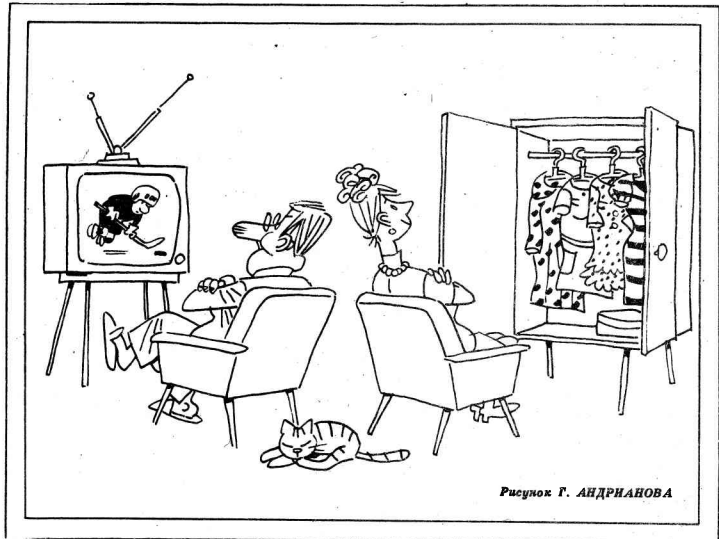


Рисунок Г. АНДРИАНОВА

8 March demonstration

On 8 March 1978 a group of Soviet women "refusedniks" (people who have been refused visas to emigrate) organised a demonstration outside the Lenin Library in Moscow. It was disrupted by the KGB before it could get started - 12 women were arrested at the library or nearby, and 7 more were prevented from leaving their homes.

Earlier on the women had given Western journalists "an appeal to the world's women". This said "We are doomed to continue the life of uncertainty far away from our relatives without the possibility of bringing up our children in Jewish traditions and getting jobs according to our qualifications." (from a **Guardian** report, 9 March 1978.)



Committee of Soviet Women

HOME AND WORK

[Women in Eastern Europe are torn between the demands of home and work. An 8-hour day in "production" plus a 4-hour day in "reproduction" leaves the average woman little time for herself. These two articles are to show how at home women have to cope with cramped housing and inadequate services, while at work they are faced with sex-stereotyping and male prejudice. The end result is that women feel inadequate and guilty because they can be neither the ideal mum nor the successful worker.]

Housing and Services

For Marxist architects in the 1920s and 1930s the problem of housing the proletariat was one of finding a new form of housing which would correspond to the new needs of socialist society. The bourgeois ideal of family housing - a home of your own - had been derided by Engels and others as an attempt to impose bourgeois values on the working class. After the socialist revolution, therefore, the proletariat could find the form of housing which suited it best.

An important factor to be considered in the new housing, as in the new life in general, was the needs of women. Women workers in full time employment, equal to men in every sense, would have neither the time nor the inclination to perform the traditional tasks of housework and childcare which had been expected of them under bourgeois society. Children, also, would no longer be the private property of their parents and would be brought up collectively.

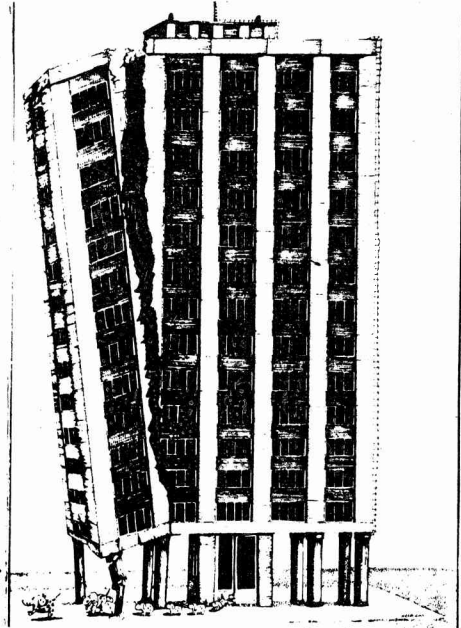
Designs for new housing therefore assumed that the patriarchal family was a form foreign to the proletariat and that both men and women would be glad to be rid of its responsibilities. The new forms of housing which were put up in the Soviet Union and designed by other 'left' architects elsewhere usually consisted of rows of individual, or sometimes family sleeping units opening off an access corridor. Sometimes adjoining units could be combined to make larger ones, e.g. for families with children. These units only had minimal cooking and eating facilities and the space thereby saved was used to provide a lot of communal rooms. There was also a canteen, a laundry, sports facilities, a creche and a nursery. The architects of these schemes tried specifically not to push families into a way of life they knew nothing about: people would still be accommodated as families so that they could make a painless transition to collective living. In other countries, though not in the Soviet Union, another aspect of these communal houses was also stressed: that is, to provide accommodation for single people, to break the cycle of getting married to get away from home.

However, these attempts to find a radical solution to the housing problem never really caught on. They remained isolated and are now ignored or used as examples of mistaken extremism. There are several reasons for this. In the short term in the Soviet Union it was difficult to give collective living a fair trial. The housing crisis at the time was such that in the communal houses which existed individual family units had to be occupied by 2 or 3 families. Many other people also lived in one or two rooms of a large apartment - this was also called a communal flat. There was basically no room for the individual privacy which is essential to a collective way of life, and so communal living and communes have got a bad name.

The other reasons for the abandonment of plans for collective housing are probably connected with the effect that such schemes would have on the family, and in particular, on the tasks which women do inside the family: housework, childcare, etc. If we look at the housing situation in Eastern Europe today, we see that it is oriented towards providing much the same kind of accommodation as is provided in the West - large estates of high-rise blocks consisting of individual flats. Moreover, state policy in general is directed towards reinforcing the family unit and affirming at least some of its household tasks which previous generations of revolutionaries had tried to eliminate. The actual physical conditions of life and the continuing shortage of housing mean that families often have to live collectively in cramped conditions. It is assumed that a home of its own is every family's ideal, and no attempt is made to provide anything else.

To take one country - Czechoslovakia - as an example ...

In Czechoslovakia the housing problem was neglected for the 10 years after 1945: the pressure of the cold war apparently meant that funds were concentrated in heavy industry. When housing construction was resumed on a large scale in 1958 it was confidently expected that there would be enough houses for all in 1970. In fact, the government's population policy, among



The state of building construction.

other things, means that there will still be quite a substantial shortfall in houses in 1980. The type of housing provided is mainly blocks of self-contained family flats with 2-3 rooms. Blocks usually have few if any communal facilities - perhaps a pram park by the front door and a drying room in the basement. Sometimes creches and nursery schools are included in new developments, but they are usually built last, often several years after the first inhabitants have moved in. The same goes for shops.

In Czechoslovakia, as in other East European countries, young people do not live separately from their parents; even students always live at home or in barracks (like hostels) while studying. Young people who have tried to set up communes have apparently been subjected to a great deal of harassment from the police (arrest for alleged promiscuity, etc.). The system of police registration makes it easy for the authorities to control living arrangements. Each person is registered as living in a particular unit of living space in a particular town. It is very difficult to move to another town or to move house within a town. It is occasionally possible to rent a room from a family that considers it has excess living space, but this is expensive and

usually only temporary. The family is very definitely the only approved social unit, and people have really no choice but to live with relatives. The enclosed nature of family life is also emphasized by the limited extent of services provided to reduce housework and childcare and the high level of advertising designed to stimulate family consumption. The low quality and sparse distribution of services is a very common complaint. Laundries and cleaners take 3-4 weeks to return your things; there aren't enough food shops, especially of those selling semi-prepared foods; there are very few places that repair clothes and shoes, or indeed anything. The easiest response to such a situation, among those who can afford it, is to buy expensive labour saving devices and do it oneself. The majority of East European households now have their own washing machines, refrigerators, sewing machines and televisions.

But in a survey carried out by the Communist Party women's magazine *Vlasta* in 1976, it turned out that most women would prefer to have more housework socialized rather than labour saving devices in each individual household. The few women who could spare the time to write down their ideas on the household of the future made this point even clearer. What they wanted to see was more houses of the 'hotel' type, where laundry, cooking and cleaning were taken care of: if labour saving devices were needed, why couldn't there be a central pool from which people could take them as required? The official view of the CP women's organization has little room for ideas such as these. Of course, services must be improved, but the individual household is here to stay.

Even if housework were partly socialized, however, there is no reason to suppose that the eventual responsibility for it would fall

on anyone but women. Childcare in Czechoslovakia, for example, is still seen as an exclusively female activity and the population policies of the government have effectively re-affirmed this. It is impossible for a father to take time off to bring up children and it would also be uneconomical; since men still earn substantially more than women.

The Czechoslovak situation is typical of those in Eastern Europe as a whole. Living standards do vary - they are generally considered to be highest in the GDR, followed by Czechoslovakia, then Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, the USSR and last of all, Romania. But in all these countries, legal equality has not altered the assumption that women still have almost complete responsibility for domestic affairs, and this situation is compounded by the way that families are housed, the lack of facilities for socializing housework and the general low level of services.

Why aren't women at the top?

"The scene is peaceful; I walk past the semi-automatic machines from England and West Germany. Mainly women work here; every minute they take out a finished piece, replace it with a new one and press the starter button. A single qualified worker sets three or four machines to turn out the same few types of work. My contact in maintenance says training these women operators doesn't take more than a quarter of an hour. Their wages are so low that no man would take the job."

Miklos Haraszti — A Worker in a Worker's State

Soviet women are

58%	agricultural workers;	heads of farms	2%
46%	industrial workers;	managers	9%
75%	doctors;	head doctors	52%
71%	teachers;	head teachers	30%
27%	research students;	members of Ac.Sci.	1%
24%	C.P. members;	Central Comm. members	4%
53%	population;	creative artists	20%

Women in Eastern Europe are over half the workforce, but they have not been integrated into it on equal terms with men. The inefficient, labour-intensive economy could not survive without their efforts, but this is not reflected in their share of decision-making power. Women have little say in how the wealth they produce should be distributed, or in how the factory, office or hospital they work in should be run.

There is a tendency for women to be segregated into certain occupations (medicine, services, textile industry) which is in fact increasing despite official worry about the "Feminisation" of this work. Even where men and women share the same occupation, women tend to do the less skilled work, the heavy manual tasks (agriculture). Everywhere a higher proportion of women are doing unmechanised work, and they are 80% of the workers in subsidiary and auxiliary jobs. In the same factory in the Soviet

Union you would find that less than 10% of equipment setters are women, and that the average skill level of female lathe operators, polishers and millers is about half that of the men.

Women's wages are on average 75-80% of men's.

When a group of Polish women were asked why they worked, replies included:

"I can't manage on my husband's wages, sometimes the work gives me satisfaction. At least I'm independent." (28 years, no qualifications, 2 children)

"I work for the children's education and general material needs." (40 years, no qualifications, 3 children)

"I work because I am respected by my parents and children." (30 years, no qualifications, 2 children)

"The question doesn't make sense. I work simply to live, I wouldn't resign from work

even if I won a million." (34 years, qualified, 2 children)

While professional women may find enjoyment at work, for the majority the main motive is money; the average family is expected to have two incomes. But even for unqualified women, work means something more, it brings them independence and self-respect, and a chance to have friends of their own. The content of the job is secondary; in fact many say that they prefer mechanised, assembly-line work which leaves their minds free for chatting or family worries.

When a Soviet survey compared women's attitudes to those of men doing the same job, the women proved to be less demanding about pay and conditions, but more cynical in their view of the job as boring and uncreative, unlikely to lead to better things. When asked if they would like more

responsibility, most replied "it's enough for a woman to be responsible for her home" or "I haven't the nerves to quarrel with people or grapple with problems". Generally, the women were unambitious, content to be doing work they saw as socially important (making shoes), though they were more prepared to criticise the management for inefficiency or favouritism.

Although women are conscientious workers who regularly fulfill and over-fulfill the plan, it is no secret that managers prefer and favour men. To a large part this can be explained (though not justified) by the demands of children and housework. Women are less mobile, less productive, and take more time off. Managers feel that women on maternity leave are so much "dead-weight", reducing the efficiency of their enterprise. They are reluctant to take on women who may become pregnant, and not infrequently complaints come up of unfair dismissal on these grounds. If it can be proved in court, the law demands the woman's reinstatement. Often, however, managers' prejudices make themselves felt in more subtle ways. For instance, they influence the planning of admissions to technical schools by announcing a future need for boys only, even when girls could do the job. Only 20-25% of technical school students are girls, and they are far more likely to be doing dressmaking than welding.



Some women are engineers ...

Once a woman worker has a family, her free time drastically falls to about half the amount men enjoy. It is no longer easy to keep up with developments in her profession, taking evening classes, or even participate in the extra social activities around the workplace. Women are only 8% of those taking part in the innovator and inventor movement; they are poorly represented in the Party branches.

Though the family is an important factor shaping women's indifference to getting on, and management's sour attitude, it is not the whole explanation. Women find time to be the majority of the trade union "social insurance delegates" who act as voluntary social workers, and they are half the representatives on local government bodies. Perhaps it is no coincidence that both these posts involve a traditionally "feminine" concern for people's welfare and day-to-day lives.

Prejudices against women as productive workers continues. Men dislike working under a woman boss. One survey in Poland found that while male workers could think of no negative qualities in male managers, they named a whole string of them for female ones — less objective than a man; unable to react quickly; lacking in authority; unstable; without a good memory; and likely to think about domestic matters at work. On top of this, women's absence from out-of-work activities and Party circles must discriminate against their chances of making informal contacts with the 'right people' and improving their promotion chances.

As women leave a particular sector of employment (eg. transport, construction) wages rise, and as women enter one (eg. science, government administration) wages fall. It illustrates the prejudice that women as such are inferior workers and deserve less reward. Men in fact grow less willing to work alongside women and be tainted by this stigma.

Prejudices may change - they can be influenced. But little is being done to help women workers; in fact discriminatory measures to channel more men into the 'feminised' professions are spreading. Last year, for example, Bulgarian introduced ratios of 70 men to 30 women for admittance to certain university courses. As this is not being balanced by similar measures to channel more women into technology, it appears to violate the constitution of these countries.

The fact is that the fight for women's equality — for real equal pay, for conditions that take women's needs as the standard, not a deviation - would cost these countries dear. Not only would considerable numbers of men lose the comfortable



... but most are unskilled.

feeling that they are doing a job high in prestige and well compensated (relative to women!) but the major prop to the East European economy of low-paid, hard-working, docile female labour would crumble away.

SEXUALITY

Being Gay in Moscow

[The "sexual revolution" of the 60s in the West has been rejected in Eastern Europe as decadent and bourgeois. This is not because they appreciate its oppressive aspects but because their own views are still shaped by old-fashioned moral codes and stereotypes. The article on sexual attitudes in the GDR and the Soviet Union describes the most liberal and the most repressive extremes in official views — attitudes in the other countries fall somewhere in between. Gay people are typically seen as sick and deviant, and the interview with a gay man in Moscow shows the difficulties this can bring. Rape, prostitution and violence against women still exist despite official silence on the subject.]

This interview took place in Moscow during the summer of 1977. Phillip is interviewing Sasha, who is 26 and who works as an engineer for the City Council.

When did you first become aware that you were gay?

Very late, really. When I was 21, I suppose - about six months after I had got married.

So late?

Yes. You see, I'm not exclusively homosexual and I've always felt a certain attraction towards women, but it was only after I got married that I realized that my main sexual interest was in men.

Had you had any sexual experience with men prior to your marriage?

No. I'd been in love with men and been physically very close to men, but I'd never had sex with a man.

When did you have sex for the first time?

In the summer of 1972, while I was on the Black Sea. My marriage was on the rocks and I took a month's holiday to sort myself out. It was while I was playing football on the beach one day that I met a 16-year-old boy who was to become my lover.

How did you feel the first time you slept with him?

I don't really know. I remember that even after I had slept with him several times, I still refused to admit that I was homosexual. After all, Russian men are very physical towards one another, and I kept saying to myself that sleeping with another man was nothing unusual.

How do people regard homosexuality?

Generally, in a very negative way. At best as a sickness or a psychological disorder, and at worst as a symptom of bourgeois degeneracy or as a crime.

Homosexual activity is punishable by law, isn't it?

Yes. Homosexual men - though not women - can be jailed for up to five years; eight, if one of the partners is under 18.

This is the law which Stalin introduced in 1934, isn't it?

Yes. You know, most gay people have no idea that between the Revolution of 1917 and 1934 homosexual activity was perfectly legal.

But is the law frequently applied? I mean, do you personally live in fear of imprisonment?

Well, obviously, I'm careful. A certain amount of discretion is essential. But only one person I know has ever been done for homosexuality, and that was because he was a bit of a dissident. The police used a homosexuality charge because it was convenient. The same thing happened recently to a Leningrad poet.

How much do the police harass gays?

Generally, I reckon the police are prepared to turn a blind eye, providing we don't get out of hand. For instance, a certain amount of cottaging goes on, which the police seem to tolerate.

Is that where most gay men meet - in public toilets?

Oh no. There are various places one can meet other gays. In Moscow, for instance, a lot of gay men meet around the Bolshoi Theatre and lesbians sometimes meet around Mayakovsky Square.

But there are no pubs, are there?

None whatever. Hardly any social facilities exist for anyone - gay or straight. In the past there have been one or two cafes where gay people have met, but as soon as one gets a reputation, the police step in. I personally tend to meet gay friends at home, but then I'm lucky, because I have a flat. If I didn't, I'd do what everyone else does and spend my time just strolling round the city with friends, which isn't so bad on summer evenings, but gets horrific in winter.

You just said you were lucky to have your own flat. Why is that?

The housing situation is desperate, particularly in big cities like Moscow and Leningrad. Married couples have to wait for ages to get a state flat or else pay exorbitant rent for a room which has been sublet.

Can gay couples get flats together?

In no way. Not even single people qualify for a state flat. The vast majority of my friends either live with their parents or else they get married - either way, any sex life is ruled out.

Do a lot of gays get married?

Oh yes. As you know, marriages of convenience are a real industry here. Because of the laws relating to residence, if you want to live in a big city, you must either have been born there, or get special permission to live there because of your job, or else marry someone who is a registered citizen. Few people want to live in some provincial backwater, especially if they are gay - because outside of big cities like Moscow, Leningrad or Odessa, it's virtually impossible to live a homosexual lifestyle. And so gays try to get married to some one registered in a particular city. That way they might be able to get a flat and stand a chance of living as a gay.

But doesn't that kind of fictitious marriage make for all kinds of dishonesty - for example, men deceiving women into marriage, or men getting married and leading double lives?

Oh yes, absolutely. The whole situation is terrible. Of course, money helps. If you are fairly well off, you might be able to buy a flat as a single person through a co-operative scheme, but it's expensive.

Is the situation much the same for lesbians?

I've a couple of lesbian friends who are lovers, but they live with their respective parents. Generally, I guess, lesbians have a worse time than gay men. At least gay men are recognised. And there are even one or two environments - the theatre or ballet being obvious examples - where homosexuality is accepted. But people simply refuse to believe that lesbians exist.

So if, for example, a woman were discovered to be a lesbian, it would be very unlikely that she would be allowed to keep her children?

Certainly.

My impression, after living here for some time, is that attitudes towards women in general are very bad. I mean women do full time jobs, run homes and look after children and still get incredibly patronised by men.

Well, as you know, for a long time, I just couldn't understand what you meant by 'sexism' - I mean we don't have any such concept in Russian - and though I still think that you underestimate the real degree of equality for women which has been achieved in the Soviet Union, I am beginning to notice some of the ways in which men do oppress women.

One of the things which we have tried to do in the gay movement in the West is challenge sexism and sexual stereotyping among gay men. Do gay men in the Soviet Union define themselves as butch or femme or behave accordingly?



Social pressures force many gays to get married.

Yes. And as you might expect, effeminate men get shit not only from hets, but from other gay men too. It's quite easy for someone like me to pass as straight so I often forget how prejudiced people's attitudes are. But I once had a boyfriend who was very effeminate, and the abuse and so on which he got was quite incredible. It's interesting that in regions like Armenia, it's only passive homosexuality which is regarded as abnormal.

Did you know that in Stalin's prison camps, according to Marchenko's My Testimony, although homosexual activity was rampant, only men who played a passive role were punished?

Yes, that confirms what I was saying.

Have you ever considered 'coming out'?

Absolutely not. What would be the point? People would think I was either sick or crazy; I'd almost certainly lose my job, and

I might end up in a psychiatric hospital or even in prison.

So there's no possibility of a gay movement emerging in the USSR?

Definitely not in the foreseeable future. Firstly, we don't have even the limited gay subculture which exists in the West, and so it's very difficult for us to develop any sense of common identity, still less a consciousness of our oppression. And secondly, even if we did have a group solidarity, it would be impossible to organise, given the repressive political situation. The state definitely has the upper hand in the USSR at present, in a way which perhaps it does not have in countries like Poland. And just as a workers' movement committed to democratic socialism is more likely to emerge in Poland before it emerges here, so I'd expect any movement concerned with sexual politics to emerge first in one of the other East European countries.

Attitudes to Sexuality

The concept of equality in Eastern Europe is based on the maintenance and promotion of the family unit and a woman's role as mother. Sexual relationships outside marriage and the family are not encouraged and are, also, not materially facilitated in respect of housing etc. Although in a country like the GDR abortion is freely available on demand up to 12 weeks and contraception is also free available to women from the age of sixteen and sometimes under, attitudes towards sexual relationships remain fairly rigid throughout Eastern Europe.

However, in the last few years, important developments have occurred in Eastern Europe. The incredibly high rate in divorce has highlighted the hitherto hidden crisis in the family. 'Official' explanations for the high divorce rate consist of the breakdown of

early marriages, financial difficulties and the acute housing shortage (many married couples have to live with their in-laws). Whilst all these are true, the official explanation very noticeably omits the breakdown of sexual relationships within marriage.

Within a country like the USSR, attitudes to sex and sexuality remain extremely rigid and are not challenged publicly. Sex is regarded as one of the basic instincts, which can be controlled and shaped. The following quotations, from *Zdorove* (Health) which is a popular health journal, illustrate this extremely clearly.

"A premature (before 18-20 years) sexual life leads to a rapid exhaustion of the sexual centres, inability to perform the sexual act and, consequently, infertility."

"Young people must know that up to 22 years the organism is rapidly growing; sexual restraint until that age helps the gathering of mental and physical strength. It not only has no undesirable consequences, but on the contrary, accumulates energy and aids fruitful, creative work."

Contraception is not much advertised and prevalent attitudes are cynical about its effectiveness. Many, especially men, think it reduces sexual pleasure. In one survey 70% of newly married women who did not want a child failed to seek contraceptive advice because they were too embarrassed to discuss it with a doctor. This must contribute to the abortion rate being so high.

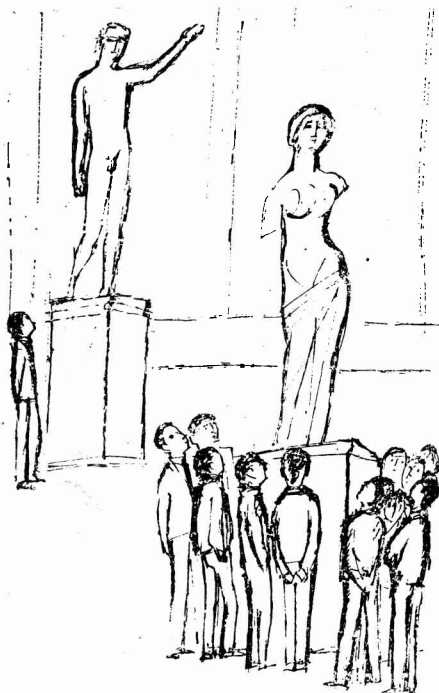
This is in stark contrast to the available facilities in the GDR. Consultation centres run by the Party women's organisation do give advice on sexual problems and

information on different methods of contraception is also readily available.

However, advice is informed by traditional attitudes and given within the framework of maintaining an ailing family or marriage.

Although personal relationships outside marriage are not frowned upon and the concept of illegitimacy does not exist, the possibility of developing relationships outside the family unit is not encouraged. The housing shortage makes it virtually impossible for single people to live together let alone have children.

The influence of the women's liberation movement in the capitalist West has brought to the fore debates on the family, sexuality and the nature of women's liberation. Eastern Europe has not experienced a movement comparable to that of the West but attitudes and changes are beginning to occur especially in the GDR with its access to West German television and radio. Women's magazines carry articles and debates exploring male and female attitudes to each other and the question of sexuality including homosexuality and lesbianism.



"Different from others"

Homosexuality and lesbianism were made legal in 1962 but are not in practice accepted. They are considered "unnatural". The general attitude is that homosexual or lesbian relationships are entered into as a result of physical or psychological make-up rather than from choice. Gay clubs do exist, in Berlin, although they are not encouraged, which indicates the non-acceptance of other forms of sexuality other than hetero sexuality. Recently, debates in magazines have shown a breakdown in rigid attitudes towards sexuality and there have also been one or two cases of lesbians gaining custody of children. But this is by no means widespread.

The GDR and the USSR symbolize the two extremes of attitudes towards sex and sexuality; the other Eastern European countries remaining somewhere in between. However, developing changes in attitudes among young people even in the USSR are leading them to challenge the very basis of official attitudes to sexuality. This must indicate the start of a fundamental reassessment of the role of the family in Eastern Europe, which is so integrally tied to its economic and social structures.

Violence Against Women

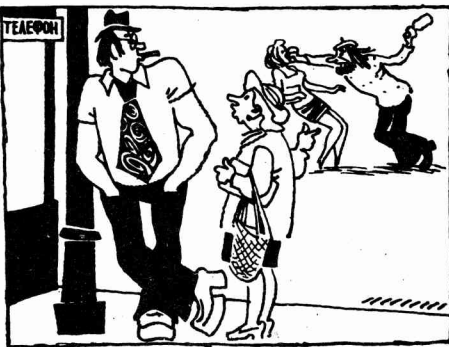
[Incidents of violence are very rarely reported in the East European press; nor are there any official statistics on such crimes. As information is scanty this is largely an impressionistic account, but one included because of the importance of these issues for women.]

RAPE

There is a certain degree of male "machismo" in East European culture which encourages the treatment of women as sexual objects, to be laid, enjoyed, and forgotten. There is, however, none of the subtle reinforcement of this attitude we find in the West in advertisements, in films, on page 3 of the Sun, etc. There are no red-light districts with prostitutes, strip clubs and porn shops. (The one exception is Poland, where strip clubs are now permitted. Pornography does circulate, but is illegal and entirely underground.) Though rape certainly exists in Eastern Europe it is consistently regarded as a very serious offence and carries stiff penalties. If an incident is mentioned it is with the kind of heavy moral emphasis that accompanied reports of three gang-rape cases tried in Poland in 1972, a couple of years after a change in the law stipulated heavier sentences. The cases were in Lodz, Warsaw and Krakow, and sentences of 12-15 years were imposed on the 16-19 year old offenders. The same source (Polish student exiles) stated that there has been an increase in gang-rapes and sexual murders.

PROSTITUTION

Prostitution around the big hotels and sea ports to obtain foreign currency is known to take place in most, probably all, the different countries. With the exception of agents for the security forces, this is on a casual and illegal basis. To avoid being considered a vagrant or a speculator, every individual has to have an evident source of legal income, usually a job, and this makes professional prostitution fairly difficult (though it is possible to arrange 'token' employment where very few hours are required). It is generally illegal, though in Poland there are some professional prostitutes, registered



"You should be ashamed. Before your eyes a drunken hooligan is hitting a girl, and you're doing nothing." "I'm not doing nothing — I've already called the ambulance."

with the militia and obliged to undergo periodic medical examinations. Where it exists, prostitution is more likely to be "occasional", either for a little extra cash or foreign currency, or for the advantages and privileges usually procured by bribery (e.g. a place higher up the housing queue, access to certain consumer goods, gaining a job or promotion). The line becomes blurred between a cynical kind of promiscuity and prostitution proper.

BATTERED WIVES

In old Russia a peasant was considered abnormal if he did NOT beat his wife. Now this kind of violence is officially frowned on, but still considered by many a private affair between the man and the woman. If she does complain, the law will back her up by evicting the man, "depriving him of parenthood", or even sending him to jail. With the shortage of men after the enormous losses of World War II husbands were hard to find, and many women had to choose between loneliness and the lashing-out that often follows an alcoholic spree. Alcoholism, especially among men, is the social problem in Eastern Europe, but it seems that women are now more prepared to fight back, as the numbers of divorcing husbands for "drunkenness" or "disrespectful attitudes" are on the increase.

BIRTH RATE POLITICS

[The low level of productivity in the countries of Eastern Europe means that the maintenance and increase of the labour forces is vital. Nearly all of these countries now provide financial inducements for women to stay at home to look after children and to have larger families. In many countries this attitude is compounded by the difficulties women experience in obtaining abortions or adequate contraception. "A woman's right to choose", although it existed for a time, has proved insecure because it was nowhere won by a mass women's movement. Women's needs can still be sacrificed to economic goals.]

Babies or Jobs

Human beings are needed as workers in the process of production and therefore reproduction becomes inherently linked with the needs of economy. Having a child is not just an individual woman's choice, but a social question. Women's role in production and reproduction has become a complex one in Eastern Europe. Historically, women's right to control their fertility in Eastern Europe as elsewhere has been subject both to economic needs and the demands of ideology. Labour resources have currently become a burning issue in E. Europe. Demographers and economists reduce it merely to talk about resources and net reproduction ratios but it also raises the question of not only giving birth to, but also of bringing up children to become future workers. This task has so far remained the lot of women. Recent campaigns have reinforced that further. They have dwelt on the joys of women's fulfillment in childbirth and the joys of big families. Hence labour resources is not merely an economic question; for women in particular it has important social and political implications.

In the 1930s, Stalin's government tried to increase the birth-rate by banning abortion, restricting divorce and awarding "motherhood medals" to women who had five or more children. Presently, the need is greater, but perhaps the governments' chances of success are not so great. It is not the problem of unemployment that is forcing the issue in E. Europe. Officially there is no unemployment and no figures are issued, although in Poland in the early '70s there were some pockets of youth unemployment and young women were more affected by this. Generally, though, there are jobs for all and more, it seems. Some jobs are artificially created — Russian babushki are paid to sit around the entrance to institutions to see undesirables do not gain admittance; many similar jobs exist as a result of the unmechanised economy. Women are affected — they do unnecessary and unskilled work.

However, there are economic problems. Although the countries of E. Europe have not been as affected as those of Western Europe by the world economic recession, none can boast a flourishing economy. In the Soviet Union agricultural problems have affected the supply of consumer goods. There were price rises in Czechoslovakia in August 1977. In Poland the situation is particularly bad because the entire economy is based on huge loans from the West. In an effort to cope with the problems, the government announced price rises in 1976, but the workers rioted and the idea had to be shelved. Recently the government has passed legislation allowing small-scale private trading.



Overfulfilling the norm.

The problems remain the same - low productivity, inefficiency, waste - the government measures change. In Poland even as early as the mid-fifties (55-58) there were sackings of women on the pretext of stopping the growth of bureaucracy and discussions about giving allowances to men whose wives weren't working. In the '60s the economists suggested decentralisation, rationalisation and mechanisation. They talked of overemployment and rationalising the labour force by cutting the number of women working. There was talk in the Soviet Union of the dignity of housework and its contribution to the national economy. Now policies have changed - planners have accepted that economic

Birth-rates (per 1000 pop. per year)

	1965	1970	1974
USSR	18.4	17.4	18.2
Bulgaria	15.3	16.3	17.2
Hungary	13.1	14.7	17.8
GDR	16.5	13.9	10.6
Poland	17.4	16.6	18.4
Romania	14.6	21.1	20.3
Czechoslovakia	16.4	15.9	19.8
Yugoslavia	21.0	17.8	17.9

Abortion and

	Cost	Availability (medical grounds are everywhere permitted throughout pregnancy; social grounds in first three months only)	Who decides?	Period when ab. was "on demand"
S.U.	Free (illegal ab. — 40 r.)	Not within 6 mths of previous abortion or birth. (1955)	Woman	1955 onwards
Bul.	5 leva	Only when woman is unmarried and childless; a widow; over 40 and divorced or with 1 child (1974)	Commission	1956-68
Rom.	30 lei (illegal ab. — up to 5000 lei)	Only when pregnancy is result of criminal act; if woman has 4 or more children or is over 45 (1968)	Commission	1952-66
Pol.	Free (private ab. — 1000 zl.)	Only when pregnancy is result of criminal act or there are 'difficult living conditions' (1961)	Woman	1961 onwards
Cz.	2-8000 kcs.	Not within 12 mths of previous abortion or birth. Not for married women with less than 2 children unless 'exceptional circumstances' (1973)	Commission	early '60s - 1973
G.D.R.	Free, if insured	Available on demand (1972)	Woman	1972 onwards
Hun.	1000 ft.	Only when pregnancy is result of criminal act; if woman is unmarried, separated, has recently given birth, needs separate housing or is over 39. (1973)	Commission	1956-73
Yug.	—	Available to avert 'a serious personal, familial or economic situation for the pregnant woman' (1960)	Commission	1960 onwards

improvements are only going to be achieved by extensive methods i.e. by increasing the labour force.

The problem is that the social changes of the last decade have resulted in a falling birth-rate. Urbanisation continues, women's education and economic position improves, expectations about living standards have been rising. The pattern we are familiar with in Western societies repeats itself - women have smaller families. It is difficult to combine a full-time job with bringing up children when childcare has not been socialised, and children prevent women from leading active social lives. The better knowledge and use of contraception has given E. European women more choice about when and how many children they are to have. The experience of all the countries of E. Europe has been similar — even in rural Bulgaria and Romania the birth-rate fell in the '60s. In the GDR in 1975 fewer people were born than died (there was a -35 increase per 10,000 pop.) but this is not seen as too pressing a problem as the East German economy is less shaky. Elsewhere, as economic policies changed the demographers became increasingly alarmed at the figures. Soviet calculations show that only thirty million people are likely to be born in the next thirty years and only five million in the second half of this period. Before long the net reproduction ratio will drop below 1, i.e. the next generation of child-bearing women will be smaller than the present one. Unless this trend is reversed it is difficult to see how the governments of E. Europe can pursue their economic policies, especially as immigration is not a politically feasible option for them.

The measures the governments are taking are economic, social and ideological. They are trying to make pregnancy and motherhood economically more attractive to women. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia women receive benefits while they stay at home to look after their small children. In Hungary the government says there is no money for building any more nurseries, but is enthusiastic about the childcare scheme which costs 30,000 million florints a year (£400 million). The benefits are not equivalent to full pay but provide a certain economic independence. In Poland, women can stay at home for three years without losing their jobs or losing out on pension rights. In the USSR women have one year off without losing their jobs and there is talk of extending maternity benefits beyond the present 8 weeks. Pay for looking after sick children, as well as creche and kindergarten facilities have been improved. Governments have used the methods of the carrot and the stick. They have combined persuasion such as increased economic benefits and lower taxes with coercion. In some countries abortion laws have been tightened up while progress on contraception has halted. In the USSR the right to abortion was restored in 1955 by Khrushchev (it was banned in '36); the other E. European countries had either introduced liberal legislation somewhat earlier or did so shortly after (see table p.16). When the fall in the birth-rate became obvious, some governments did not hesitate to withdraw the right and in several E. European countries at the present time abortion is severely restricted. Modern contraceptive methods are not everywhere available, and even where the pill and the IUD do

Contraception

	Organised F.P.A.	Hormonal ie. Pill	Mechanical I.U.D.	ie. Cap	Condom	Pessaries etc. (b)	Physiological		Reliance on Ab.
							Rhythm method	Coitus inter.	
S.U.	No	Not available	Officially encouraged since '68	10%	Most popular	some use	5%	8%	50%
Bul.	No	limited supply	trials began in '69	—	5%	—	5%	70%	20%
Rom.	No	not available	not available	—	only legal contr.	—	little used		more than half
Pol.	Yes since '57	available since '69	available since '68	still used, mainly by older women				40%	
Cz.	No	available 3% use	available 2 1/2 % use	not widely used			still used, esp. by unmarried		wide-spread
G.D.R.	Yes since '63	available 50% use	available since '65	all methods available			little used		rare
Hun.	Yes	available since '67 popular	all methods used, interchangeably with pill						rare
Yug.	Yes since '67	available popular in towns	all methods available			little used		wide-spread esp. in villages	

Notes.

- Exact information on contraception is difficult to obtain — all figures are approximate.
- Sterilisation is unpopular in Eastern Europe, because of its association with the Nazi occupations.

(a) 'On demand' here means that if the woman applied within 3 months, and had not had a pregnancy in the previous 6 months, she was able to insist on an abortion. Illegal abortions have always continued, either to avoid these time limits or for reasons of privacy or comfort.

(b) Some devices are very primitive (e.g. pieces of lemon). These peasant-type methods are probably used throughout Eastern Europe though they are not reported.

exist supplies can be irregular, or of inferior quality. Contraception is not much publicised, and it appears that little research is being done.

Although the governments have promised and already delivered some improvement in social facilities, the burden of reproduction is planned to fall upon women. Women should work in production, take a few years off to raise a family, then return to work, looking after the family in after-work time. It is women who take time off to look after sick children, although there is provision for either parent to do so. Women's roles as mothers are seen as primary and their roles as workers secondary. Reproduction is to take place still essentially within the family structure. In Bulgaria the government promotes the idea that every family should have three children. There has been a long campaign in the Polish press on the family with emphasis on and pictures of large Polish families. In the Soviet Union the government has engaged in propaganda to promote the idea of the happy Soviet family.

It is uncertain whether these policies will succeed in convincing women in Eastern Europe. Birth-rates have risen (though this was inevitable anyway, as the large number of women born in the post-war years are reaching child-bearing age).

Despite the hardships of the double burden of work and family, surveys show that women value their work in production and dislike the idea of spending more time at home with the children. In Hungary, one third of the women who had taken up the offer of benefits were back to work within a year. Women in the Soviet Union seem in no hurry to take up the promises of part-time and home-work. The vast majority of Polish women go back after a year of maternity leave. There is also economic pressure to work - the benefits are not sufficient. In Hungary some women are drawing the benefits and working illegally in small private enterprises for one-third the usual wage.

If women fail to respond to government pro-natal measures, the governments will be forced to seek other ways out of their economic problems. However, even if the new aspirations of women, their desire to get more out of life, foil the plans of the planners the pro-natalist policies cannot be so easily ignored. Without proper contraception and abortion facilities, women will be unable to control their fertility. This will seriously threaten their position in production. However, there has been some action in Hungary against attempts to limit abortion (see the interview with Marta). We hope women in other places will also start to oppose policies which directly affect their position in these societies in such a basic way.

THE FAMILY

A few months ago a Soviet newspaper printed a letter from a Soviet husband, complaining about his domestic problems:

"In the first months of our married life my mother and I noticed that my wife had a loathing for housework. In 1964 our first son was born .. it was terrible to see how my wife completely lacked the desire to constantly, day in day out, look after the child, feed it at the right time with the right things, wash and sew for him, etc.... My wife sees household tasks as encroaching on her independence and her personality, as an attempt to deprive her of her self-expression ...As time passes I begin to worry more and more that fewer years are left to me to make my contribution to science; after all, I am the man in my family and my duty is to work and not to slave away in the kitchen or over the washing — when I have a wife for that. I tend to think I ought to throw her out of the house..."

Evidently the editors of the paper felt the husband, Mr. A. Bubentsov, had a point. Alongside his letter they published the article of a researcher from the Institute of General Educational Problems, entitled 'Where Do All the Bad Wives Come From?' According to this expert the root of the problem was insufficient sexual education; the husband and the wife, the one under compulsion and the other voluntarily, were neglecting the roles dictated by the specificity of their sex; measures should be taken to improve the situation; schools should do more to prepare young girls for the domestic duties that will be theirs in adult life and teach them to be Mothers, educators of their children, guardians of the family.

The same suggestions have been put forward in other articles in other papers and journals: the increasing number of women doing men's jobs is eroding sexual differences and confusing children about their roles; a little girl who does not play with dolls may end up a bad mother, wife and housekeeper, a little boy who sees his father doing the washing up may end up effeminate; to protect our children from developing an 'incorrect sexual orientation' and to halt the merging of sex roles, the schools and the family must educate girls to be girls and boys to be boys — 'see that boys behave in a manly way and little girls in a womanly way'.

The socialisation techniques already practised in society seem comprehensive enough. The little girls wear ribbons in their hair and frilly aprons as part of their school uniform; little boys, on the other hand, are dressed in practical, no-fuss clothes.

Children read stories in which the women are with the children while the men make revolutions and conquer outer space. In the adult world an elaborate system of etiquette operates, decreeing that men assist women into coats and on to buses; men ask women to dance and men pay the restaurant bills. Men are by definition gallant, strong, resourceful and clever; women are modest, soft and sensitive - also, indecisive, dependent and hysterical.

This sexual stereo-typing is not a 'remnant' of patriarchal ideology fast on its way to extinction; it reinforces and is reinforced by the existence of domestic labour-privatised housework and childcare. Though most Eastern European countries have a more extensive network of communal facilities - nurseries, laundries, etc. - than Western Countries, housework is still time-consuming because facilities are not always convenient, cheap, round-the-clock or of adequate standard, household appliances not universally available and food supplies are inefficient. Comparative studies have shown that working women spend more hours a day on housework in Czechoslovakia than in France, more hours in the USSR than in the USA. In the Soviet Union housework consumes 180.000.000.000 hours annually; about 80% of it is done by women, who thus spend eight hours daily in paid work, four hours in unpaid work.

This sounds very familiar. As in the West domestic labour is performed mainly by women and is performed as unpaid labour in the family. Soviet women, like Western women, organise the home and are responsible for the care of the children. The men do the small household repairs, head the family and relax.

The shape and size of Western and East European families are similar: a man and a woman and one or two children living together under the same roof. The division between personal and public, between the family and the work-place is not very different either. The adults leave the home for most of the day to earn wages, while the children are looked after by women at home, in play-groups, nurseries or schools. Family members spend their evenings and week-ends together in the home.

The official East European view is that these similarities are inevitable, since the family is the natural basic unit of any society. If society is capitalist it has a capitalist family, if it is socialist its family is socialist, too.

Many Western socialists have been sceptical of East European claims to have discovered 'a socialist family' — after all, the

Communist Manifesto spoke of abolishing the family, not of strengthening it and the Bolsheviks in the twenties introduced radical changes in family law. Kollontai argued that socialism meant changes in family as well as economic life; socialisation of domestic labour and the encouragement of collective ways of living would lead to greater scope for the full development of the human personality. Western feminists today are hardly likely to accept that a social unit in which women are responsible for 80% of the work is egalitarian and unoppressive. Given the many similarities between the family in the West and in Eastern Europe it has been argued that there are no fundamental differences, that the family plays the same role in the East as it does in the West. By examining closely the advantages that the family has for capitalism the significance of the similarities and differences between the West European and East European family can be more clearly understood.

Because of the family, women in the West can be brought into the labour force as unskilled and low-paid workers when necessary, and sent back to the home when the size of the work force needs reducing. Within the family the future work-force is born and brought up, the present work-force maintained. Through the family property and propertylessness are transmitted from generation to generation. By means of the family the working class is broken down into small units and workers' loyalties split between struggles at the work-place and the need to support wives and children. In the family individuals are prepared for the roles they have to play in society, learning to accept hierarchical and authoritarian relationships and acquiring the characteristics which are associated with



Boys will be boys ...

their gender. And lastly the family acts as a 'refuge' from the pressures of the outside world, providing a space in which individuals can express their emotions and satisfy their need for close personal relations.

The governments of Eastern Europe try to use the family in the same way that capitalism has done and continues to do, but the differences in the economic and social relations of these societies have led to adaptations in the family and certain changes in its role, most importantly the introduction of the vast majority of women into the labour force.

When economic policies of rationalisation were adopted in the '60s however, there was talk of the unprofitability of female labour and the advisability of sending women back to the home; the present system of maternity benefits in Czechoslovakia and Hungary encourages women to stay at home to look after their children, thus reducing the number of women workers for the present in order to increase the total number of workers in the future. But as there is no unemployment in Eastern Europe and no market regulating the size of the labour-force the governments can only control the size of the labour-force by introducing incentives which persuade women to give up paid employment or by curtailing women's right to abortion and reducing childcare facilities. This gives the governments plenty of scope for influencing and narrowing women's choice, but so far women's right to work has not been lost. Obviously, the type of work that women often do limits the liberating effect of their participation in production, but the fact that almost all women are economically independent for almost all of their adult lives has important consequences for the relations within the family and, notwithstanding the ideology of sex roles,



... and girls will be girls.

for the way women view themselves and their place in the world.

Because so many women work outside home during the day, childcare facilities have to be provided and are provided on a wide scale. Previously grandmothers often acted as child-minders, but since the war Soviet and other East European women have looked to the state nursery which offers its services for a nominal charge. Recent debates in some of these countries on the superiority of family over community childcare and the introduction of maternity benefits represent an attack on the principle of the social upbringing of children and reinforce the idea of the maternal role. Outside work hours the family in Eastern Europe still shoulders the main responsibility for the upbringing of children and the responsibility falls mainly on women. Nevertheless the provision of creches, 5-day nurseries, late-opening schools and summer camps makes it possible for more women in Eastern Europe to have a career, acquire skills and play a role in the community.

It's easier for some women than others. In Eastern Europe some families are more equal than others, have greater access to consumer goods, more money to spend on meals in restaurants, etc. The privileged women in these families are better able to cope with their dual role as wives and mothers and as workers, and their children have a better chance to get on in the world. Until the late '50s social mobility was a characteristic of East European societies; children of workers and peasants could aspire to the best education and the highest positions society had to offer. Now this has changed and the social status of the parents is an important factor determining the education and future career of the child. Sometimes a house or a farm can be passed on through the family, but since the means of production have been nationalised, children can inherit little in the way of property (banks, factories, businesses). What the sons and daughters of privileged families can and do inherit is good connections, a privileged place in the social hierarchy. But without the backing of property relations the family does not determine its members' position in social relations with the same efficiency.

With women's independence the old economic mechanisms which held the family together have lost some of their force. In the Stalinist period the Soviet government took tough measures to shape a family that answered its needs, banning abortion, introducing single-sex schooling and making divorce difficult. Today, though it is the tax laws, housing regulations and wage rates that keep the family together it is now less easy for the governments to intervene directly in the personal lives of their citizens. Consequently, they have begun to rely more on ideological means - on propaganda about the joys of family life - to preserve the

family. By encouraging men and women to view the family rather than the work-collective as the main institution within which they can develop close personal relationships and a sense of identity the governments atomise the work-force into small family units and turn attention away from the problems of the work-place. By offering individuals more scope for a family life — bigger flats, cars, and family holidays — the governments hope that they will not have to deal with



or ...!

demands for popular control over production. The family still functions as an institution of social control, teaching discipline and obedience on the one hand and on the other absorbing the energy of its members thus blocking the struggle for a more democratic and egalitarian society. The current emphasis on 'strengthening the family' illustrates that the ideological role of the family is increasing.

The East European family still determines and limits the role of women; it is through the family that the oppression of women is organised and maintained in these societies. The family, which existed in pre-capitalist society and was taken over and integrated into the capitalist mode of production has been taken over and integrated into the social system of Eastern Europe. To this extent the essence of the family has not changed. But throughout history the form of the family has been continually changing, and has adapted and been adapted to each different society. While recognising the relation between women's oppression and the family which has always existed we need to be sensitive to the family's place in economic and social relations and its influence on women as a social and political group. With regard to Eastern Europe we should not dismiss the impact equal pay, economic independence, legal equality, maternity and childcare provisions and educational opportunities, despite their limita-

tions and inadequacies, have had on the relationship between women's two roles and the development of women's consciousness. But at the same time it is important to recognise that the rights women have won are under attack. East European governments are seeking to reduce women's participation in production and increase their maternal responsibilities. The ease with which this can be done and the urgency with which it needs to be done varies from country to country; all East European governments are trying to use the family to keep economic and political problems at bay. The family is an area of struggle. East European dissidents and radical thinkers have been slow to see the connections between economic, political and family policies.

Women themselves, though they have not consciously made these connections, have resisted government family policies — in some countries more than in others. In the Soviet Union, where women's economic independence goes back several generations and working women associate sexual equality with the traditions of the Russian revolution the government has taken few measures to expand women's maternal role and even these have been received without enthusiasm. The younger women are not so prepared to accept the stereo-types and the

housework. The author of the article, "Where do all the Bad Wives Come From" mentioned a survey of the qualities secondary school girls considered most important in men and women. In men they rated 'respect for women' most important, and put bravery in 10th or 11th place. Of the thirteen female characteristics given they placed dignity and strength of character at the top of the list and housewifery and domestic efficiency at the bottom.

In the absence of a women's movement it is difficult to trace changing attitudes, but recent debates in the press have shown that women are demanding more equality in the family. The question of sex roles and the nature of the family is becoming an object of public debate with some championing the conservative family in which women retain their traditional role of domestic labourers and others calling for a family that is strong because it is based on a partnership of equality, the man and the woman sharing housework and childcare.

Women wrote indignant replies to Mr. A. Bubentsov's letter. The men, they said, were the real parasites in the family. "The man in the family", said one letter, "is a capricious child never satisfied with anything, or a roaring lion who nags his wife over petty

things. I'm not generalising from my own experience. You only have to listen to what women talk about when they're together." Another remarked that if a woman had written in complaining that though her husband did not drink or smoke and was not unfaithful to her, he refused to wash and cook, the editors would have thought her crazy and would not have published her letter as they had Mr. A. Bubentsov's, "Which goes to show that it isn't a problem of girls not being prepared for family life, but of husbands being their wives' dependents."

Women are beginning to challenge the sexual division of labour in the family, not as yet the need for domestic labour itself; women are still protesting individually, not as a social group.

But this awareness of the injustice of women's dual role is new and represents a great step forward. If the family becomes an area of struggle the governments of Eastern Europe will have less room for manoeuvre; no longer will they be able to use the family to head off political and production crises. If women organise as a social group, the prospects in Eastern Europe will be that much brighter for the creation of a truly socialist society in which sexual oppression has finally been eliminated.

REVIEWS

A BALLAD OF TWO LOVERS (USSR)

[The 'woman question' in Eastern Europe is also being given more attention by sociologists, writers and film-makers. The most accessible form in which their work reaches the West is the cinema, and so we have included reviews of four films that have been shown, with sub-titles, in Britain. In their different ways these all deal centrally with questions of the family and changing personal relationships.]

The writings of sociologists are not much translated, and, apart from statistical surveys, not much is worth translating. The Hungarian essays in The Humanisation of Socialism are an exception in both ways, and represent the most developed views on the position of women to come out of Eastern Europe.

In literature, the best example available in the West is the short story by the Soviet writer Natalia Baranskaya 'A Week Like Any Other'. This moving account of one woman's attempt to cope with her dual role was recently serialised in Spare Rib Nos. 52-59. If any readers know of books, stories, plays or poems with a feminist content that have been written in Eastern Europe, in whatever language, we would be very pleased to hear about them.]

We are introduced to the two lovers as they spend an idyllic summer day on the deserted bank of a wide river. They walk the golden sands hand in hand, they kiss under water. He has a guitar and sings for her; he also has a shiny new motorbike to take her home on. As all this is in glorious technicolour, one is reminded of nothing so much as a TV advert.

But despite its opening the film has a very serious and Soviet content, and is not so much about love and passion as about duty and the family. The review in the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* was right to say that *A Ballad of Two Lovers* "tries to uncover the essence of our way of life, our patriotism and the nobility of the Soviet people", but in the changing world of today patriotism and nobility have to be reinterpreted. It is this search for new moral values that the film explores. In the old days the Soviet people were taught to defend the motherland against capitalist aggressors, to make sacrifices for the sake of future generations. Love and duty were civic virtues - duty to the motherland, love for Stalin, the Communist Party. In these days of detente and the consumer society such teachings no longer make any



Scenes from *A Ballad of Two Lovers*.

sense. The Soviet people need new goals, a new code of personal morality. They are being offered the family. *A Ballad of Two Lovers* is about how one man finds his family.

The owner of the guitar and motorbike, Sergei, has to leave Moscow and his girlfriend for military service in the Far North. He apparently drowns during a storm at sea, but several months later is found and returns home... to find his girlfriend, Tanya, married to another man.

The film is not interested in what a modern woman does when she loves two men. It does not admit that women are modern. The women in the film are seen as men want to see them - accepting suffering and their traditional role. When Tanya worries that Sergei has been posted to such a faraway place her mother points out that there are things, like military service and politics, that men have to do - "That's why they're men". When Tanya learns that Sergei is dead she grieves until her mother persuades her that life is for living and that women must get husbands, for only when they are married and have children can they be full persons. When Sergei returns Tanya explains that she is married to another man and therefore cannot kiss him. So women follow the rules, play their roles and have no problems.

It is with men and their problems that **A Ballad of Two Lovers** is concerned. The film shows the camaraderie of army life, emphasizing that through military service the Soviet man can still serve the motherland and affirm his masculinity (in Eastern Europe only men do military service). Then the camera focuses on Sergei's return to Moscow and his reaction to the loss of his loved one. On the rebound he marries a woman who works at his bus depot's canteen. They move into a new flat and his wife has a baby. Not until the day of their house-warming party does he realize that he loves his wife (she has loved him all along). He comes to terms with family life and dreams of the future when his block of flats in the dreary housing estate will become green and beautiful.

The old Soviet hero would have dreamed of his factory fulfilling its production targets and of making sacrifices for his country; the modern hero dreams of improving his back-yard. There is nothing wrong with this except that there is as little real control over conditions of life in the new dream as in the old.

The film, however, is about a real problem. Soviet men are having to accept a change in the masculine role and a larger role in the family. **A Ballad of Two Lovers** is by men, for men, about the problems of this change.

That is no doubt why it was so popular and perhaps why it won a prize in a Czech film festival.

It is disheartening, though not surprising, that one of the only recent Soviet films to look at family life should ignore so completely women's experience of personal relations and should be so uncritical of social institutions.

MAY I TAKE THE FLOOR (USSR)

This film ends with Elizaveta Andreevna Uvarova, chairperson of the Zlatograd city Soviet, scrubbing the floor of her flat to the sounds of the revolutionary song, 'Forward, friends, forward'.

It is not, however, a film about women in politics. Its main theme is the nature of government, the process of decision-making. As chairperson Elizaveta has to decide whether a large crack in the side of a block of flats can be repaired, or whether the building has to be demolished; she wants to build a bridge in the town, but does not manage to get permission from the central authorities; she insists that a local writer make cuts in his play before it can be performed, only to find that Moscow has already passed the play. It is a much better film than **A Ballad of Two Lovers** and tries to examine reality critically. But since the chairperson is a woman, the conflict between her political position and family responsibilities is shown.

The conflict, it appears, can be resolved. When Elizaveta is elected to head the Soviet, her husband is genuinely pleased and he and the children are shown giving encouragement and support. True, the children would like their mother to use her influence to get better toys, a country cottage, and the husband reproaches her for not taking enough interest in his work. A woman's political activity is a strain on family life, but not an impossible one.

Some people are slow to accept this, though. The retiring Soviet chairperson, for example. Showing Elizaveta round the office, he expresses his disapproval of women holding public office when they should be looking after the family. She answers with asperity that men can do housework, the laundry and the washing.

There is a flash-back in the film to Elizaveta and her husband celebrating the birth of their first child. Elizaveta says she wants them to have more children. Who will earn the money, the husband asks. You, the wife answers. The camera suddenly switches to Elizaveta practising at the rifle range - she is All-Union rifle champion; and the whole film shows how she went on to reject the traditional female role and interest herself in the welfare of the community.

The heroine is portrayed as very strong and capable - a very positive character. She is an idealist, a true communist. She refuses to use her power to feather her family's nest. She is shocked and upset when the fall of Allende's government and the repression in Chile is reported on television. She does her political work conscientiously and is unpretentious and sincere in all her dealings with colleagues and her electorate. (Perhaps that is why the script-writer chose to have a heroine -

a male chairperson with such virtues might have struck the Soviet viewers as too far-fetched). We sympathize with Elizaveta in her battle against the impersonal and arbitrary government machine and see it as quite fit and proper that such a person should hold government office.

But there is a long opening sequence in which Elizaveta's son finds a gun in the snow, shoots himself and dies. The relevance of this incident to the main theme of the film is not clear. It seems that, after all, women's right to participate in political life is being questioned.

A DAY FOR MY LOVE (Czechoslovakia)

This film must have been one of the biggest Czech box-office successes of 1977. Subtitled 'The problems of a young marriage', it deals with a few months in the life of a young married couple; the wife is a photographer and the husband a student. They have a child. One day the child falls ill and suddenly dies. This causes a crisis in their relationship by bringing many latent problems to the surface. The wife is supporting the husband while he studies; this produces tensions - for example, she feels that he is not taking his proper share of family responsibilities. He tries to alleviate these tensions by having an affair with a fellow student. None of this, however, is stated explicitly in the film. Its terms of reference are simply Real Love - the couple's problems stem from the fact that they have ceased temporarily to be In Love. The social and economic pressures which usually constitute at least some part of the problems of a young marriage are ignored: for example, the couple live in a very nice flat with a studio in an old house, none of your high rise flats or housing estates.

The film moves from one stylised, blurred-at-the-edges cameo to another: the only touch of realism is in the portrayal of their sexual relationship (though even this is strictly above the waist and very out of focus). We learn very little about the characters themselves: what do they do all day? What do they talk about together? Their problems now are merely counterposed to their relationship as it was in the beginning - an excuse for numerous flashbacks of the 'boy meets girl' type. The conception of another child, however, brings all their problems to an end. Real Love rules O.K. once more. The viewer is thus left secure in the knowledge that children are the things that brings couples together and that marriage, though marred in the early stages by occasional 'problems', is basically an endless romantic idyll, completely unrelated to the pressures of everyday life, tastefully photographed through a thick sheet of glass in muted colours.

THE APPLE GAME (Czechoslovakia)

The *Apple Game* was Chytilova's contribution to International Women's Year. She described its subject as 'the problem of responsible parenthood, unnecessary abortions and the moral as well as material aspects of female equality in our society.' The setting is a maternity home. Jiri Menzel plays a young unattached doctor who is having an affair with his colleague's wife and also with the latest in a succession of young nurses. As the film progresses, his way of life begins to crumble; his affair is discovered, he comes under criticism in his job and his casual relationship with the nurse goes sour on him when he thinks that she is trying to trap him into marriage because she is pregnant. By the time he decides that he might really like to marry her after all, she has decided to have no more to do with him and is preparing to have the baby on her own. The film ends with her cycling off into the distance, hugely pregnant, and Menzel panting vainly behind.

Within this framework, the message that Chytilova tries to put across is that childbirth and parenthood should be a joyful experience. The nurse gets great satisfaction from her work, and she is also better at it than most of the doctors. But events in the film demonstrate that, for many people, there is no decision about whether or not to have a child - it is purely accidental. It is overwhelmingly fathers on whom the blame falls - having helped to conceive a child they are unwilling to undertake the responsibility of parenthood, and try to persuade women to have abortions. Chytilova clearly feels that men enter into relationships on false pretences, that whereas women want babies, men just want a good time. Thus, although the film is encouraging in the positive way it portrays women, I was disappointed that it did not do more to attack those male and female sexual stereo-types which it shows to be so invalid.

FURTHER READING AND...

Until recently hardly anything was written on the position of women in Eastern Europe. Over the last few years a number of books and articles have come out. We have used them in putting together this special issue of *Labour Focus* and you might find them useful:

Woman and Socialism by Hilda Scott, Allison and Busby, 1976.
Women's Work in Soviet Russia by M.P. Sacks, Praeger Publishers 1976.
Soviet Women by William Mandel, Anchor 1975.

THE HUMANISATION OF SOCIALISM By Hegedus, Heller, Markus and Vajda. [Allison and Busby, London, 1976.]

When a conference of sociologists met in Minsk (Soviet Union) in 1969 to discuss the problem of women's dual burden of work and home, the most radical proposals to come out of it were for women to have better on the job training plus extended maternity leave; for women to have a day off per month for housework plus the education of boys to help at home. Such piece-meal and even contradictory measures reflect the dominant tendency in East European sociology to look only at the surface of society, to collect statistics rather than analyse problems. The Hungarian writers of the essays in "Humanisation of Socialism" are determined critics of this trend, which they see as an empirical extension of "histmat" (vulgar historical materialism), defined as "the refusal to confront theory with social reality". In contrast their own writing on such questions as the family and everyday life, women's dual role, and the experience of work is clearly related to the principles of socialism i.e. equality; the satisfaction of self-defined human needs; and the development of a full human personality.

Seeing that present conditions are forcing people to search for means to these ends - and obviously influenced here by the Western radical movement in the late '60s - they reject the path to socialism usually offered in Eastern Europe, i.e. greater efficiency and availability of consumer goods, in favour of more scope for individual choice and self-determination. One practical example is the suggestion that people should not be trained for one narrow vocation in life, but overtrained so that a demand for new, more satisfying forms of work is created. They also advocated more factory experiments in collective organisation, with the workers genuinely responsible for their efforts and in control of economic life. It is particularly welcome that changes in the family are felt to be as important as changes in production. In an article most un-

usual for Eastern Europe, Mihaly Vajda and Agnes Heller describe the possibility of moving towards communal life-styles and the benefits this would have for freeing sexual relations from property concerns, and for raising a new generation accustomed to democracy, not authority.

Returning to the present, the articles generally recognise that women, because of their dual burden, have even less chance than men to determine the development of their own lives. Maria Markus, in "Emancipation at a Dead End", is against any narrowing of what choice there is (eg. she opposes forced maternity benefits) and is in favour of any measures that widen it (eg. more state socialisation of domestic labour, more collective forms of mutual help, greater emphasis on the skills involved in housework and on the need for both sexes to participate). Unlike the delegates at the Minsk Conference she does not think this is a simple matter of just correcting outdated prejudices, but sees the problems as rooted in the existing conditions of life.

These writers accept that the family will persist as long as it compensates for the alienation and powerlessness of the individual elsewhere. The emancipation of women, the development of more communal ways of living and the extension of democracy must take place alongside an overall humanisation of social relations. The forces opposed to this process in Eastern Europe are only hinted at in phrases such as 'bureaucratic relations in the management process' and 'the extension of the historical need to defend the new social conditions in the '30s beyond its viability'. They advocate the need for self-criticism in the socialist countries, but with repression and the resulting self-censorship it is not easy for such thinkers to develop their views. It is not surprising that some of these writers, including the two women, Agnes Heller and Maria Markus, signed a letter supporting Charter 77, or that several of them have since emigrated to the West. Their work is necessarily limited, but still worth reading for its affirmation of what socialism can mean for both men and women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Information for the articles in this issue has also been drawn from:

Health Care in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe by M. Kaser, Croom Helm, 1976.
Town and Revolution by Anatole Kopp.

Also various issues of the English journals: Soviet sociology, Radio Free Europe, Labour Focus on Eastern Europe.

East European journals we have used are *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *Semya i shkola*, *Zdorov'e*, (Soviet Union); *Vlasta* (Czechoslovakia).