

ARTICLES

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THE ALMANAC “WOMAN AND RUSSIA” AND THE SOVIET FEMINIST MOVEMENT AT THE END OF THE 1970S

ABSTRACT: This article presents a short history of the origin and creation of the Almanac “Women and Russia,” which began as a samizdat underground publication devoted to the problem of women and childrearing in the USSR. The idea for creating such an Almanac originated in the mid 1970s in the Leningrad circle of ‘unofficial culture’, at the initiative of the artist Tatyana Mamonova, religious philosopher Tatyana Goricheva, and the women author Natasha Malachovska. The women writers featured in the first edition of the Almanac addressed not only questions about the social conditions prevailing in the USSR, but above all exposed the consequences for women living and functioning in a patriarchal social order, and ironically one where all the questions concerning ‘women’s rights’ were deemed to have been resolved in a progressive fashion much earlier. Not only is the substance of the Almanac important, but the circumstances surrounding its publication and the subsequent consequences related to its publishing also reveal the state of the ‘women’s movement’ in the USSR of that time. These include the reactions of the representatives of the dissident culture, the interventions of the security apparatus and the attendant repression of the women activists and its effect on their lives, and the support of feminist organizations from abroad. Each of the afore-mentioned reactions and consequences became an element of and shaped the everyday lives of the activists involved in the creation of the Almanac. The events related in this work confirm the opinion of those researchers who consider that the publication of the Almanac marked the beginning of the resurrection of the feminist movement in Russia.

KEY WORDS: Almanac “Women and Russia,” feminist movement in Soviet Russia.

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The Russian feminist movement unfolded against the background of the stormy intellectual, socio-economic and political changes taking place in nineteenth century Europe, and took shape long before October 1917. The increase in social awareness and social activities which took place under the influence of the liberal reforms at the end of the 1850s led naturally to the acknowledgement of women as a perceptible social group, and the raised the question of 'women's rights'. The early activities of Russian women activists, conducted in the atmosphere of an authoritarian political regime, focused on fighting for the rights to work, knowledge, and education. The first institutions for women, founded during this period, co-created the institutional structure for later feminist activities. Child-care institutions were created for working mothers, together with women's academies, women's courses and schools, and in subsequent years organizations supporting self-employment and both secondary and higher educational institutions for women.

Women first entered Russian universities as early as in 1859. Four university centres, including in St. Petersburg and Kiev, expressed their support for women's education, allowing them to attend classes as external 'free students', i.e. not officially enrolled. While these changes did not lead to equal rights for men and women in the area of education—a right which women activists would continue struggle for throughout subsequent decades—they constituted a first step in the formation of the multi-layered system of women's education which was in place prior to the 1917 revolution. Among the important steps/advances during this period one should mention the opening of so-called Bestuzhev courses, which were conducted in Petersburg from 20 September 1878, the renewed approval of women's places as 'external free students', and their re-affirmation by ten state universities in 1905, despite the opposition of the Ministry.

Despite the fact that feminist activists encountered many obstacles, and that the question of women's participation in state and political affairs did not gather full strength until the turn of the twentieth century, these first stages in the women's movement played a key role in shaping the organizational and ideological foundations for the later concentrated activities. It is critical to note the 'grass roots', independent and voluntary nature of the initiatives undertaken by the activists of that time, which arose out of their conceptual definition of women as a separate and concrete social category. The socio-cultural consequences of the

earliest feminist efforts would seem no less important—the breaking down of woman's assigned roles and places, changes in social attitudes towards women, and the growing acceptance of equal rights for women among intelligentsia circles. The effect of these many years of collectivist activities and experience led to the gradual emancipation of women from the prison of patriarchal structures, so that at the beginning of the twentieth century concrete social groups supporting women's rights, fully aware of their aims and desires, were ready to join in the effort to build a 'new state'. The validity of this assessment is confirmed by the activities of, among others, Inessa Armand—the Chairwoman of the First International Conference of Communist Women or Alexandra Kollotai—the first woman Minister in Europe, as well as a number of other charismatic women who, during the Revolutionary period, made significant contributions in support of the new authorities, carrying out propaganda activities, co-creating Bolshevik committees, and actively participating in local party organizations. Russian women became one of the first to achieve full voting rights, and the Soviet Constitution of 1918 fully and finally confirmed women's rights to study at all levels of the educational system. The Labour Code of 1918 guaranteed women a 16-week maternity leave and a premium for breast-feeding, but most important of all it guaranteed equal wages for equal work. The creation of a Department of Women's Activities in the Central Committee of the Communist Party was aimed at guaranteeing that words would be translated into actions and that the existing obstacles to women's full participation in public affairs would be overcome.

These and other events which occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century led Irina Yukina to posit the thesis that the pre-revolutionary activities of women were fully successful, and allowed Olga Shnirova to emphasize the chronological and ideological similarities between the first wave of Russian and Western feminism.¹ The very different fate of the above-mentioned women's rights' activities in subsequent decades is reflected in the events which took place at the end of the 1970s in the environment of what was known as the Leningrad unofficial culture.

¹ See O. Shnirova, *Русский феминизм: ждать ли новой волны?* [*Russian Feminism: Is a new wave awaiting us?*]. NZ journal 83 (3/2013). 25 March 2013. <http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/2280>.

The rebirth of feminism in the conditions of Soviet reality began in 1979 with the appearance of the first samizdat publication devoted to the most important social and spiritual questions determining the lives of women and children in the USSR. The founder of the almanac “Woman and Russia” was the artist and poet Tatyana Mamanova, a declared feminist and one of the few women of the time in the Soviet Union who was familiar with western feminist critiques.² Her proposition, floated in the unofficial circles of religious philosophy and presented to the editors of “37”—Tatyana Goricheva and the poet and writer Natasha Malahovskaya—was quickly brought to life. In the summer of 1979 Julia Voznesenskaya, a poet and influential member of Leningrad’s unofficial cultural circle, joined the enterprise of the group of pioneering publicists and already in September, only a month after commencing work, the almanac was prepared for print and ten copies were published.

The fact that the almanac appeared in dissident circles as an underground publication protesting against the ossified order of the Soviet regime would hardly appear surprising. This traditional social order was, in the opinion of the authors, the reason for the degrading way women were treated, and was based on a deformed view of women’s nature and destiny, and a schematic method of showing life experience. The official culture, which followed the obligatory rhetoric that ‘women’s issues’ had been resolved, or even in the best case presented women’s issues in a one-sided and biased fashion, left no space for the explication and demonstration of feminist postulates. Thus it should not be surprising that women activists, joined in their united determination, produced such publications as ‘37’ or ‘Chasi,’

² It should be noted that, at the time of founding ‘Woman and Russia’, most of its authors did not have direct knowledge of the topic of feminism (neither with respect to its ideology, Western theoretical works, nor social movements on behalf of equal rights for women). See. T. Rowieńska, “Historia prozy kobiecej w epoce transformacji, czyli ‘oczy szeroko zamknięte’ rosyjskiego feminizmu,” in *Literatury słowiańskie po roku 1989 [History of Women’s prose in the transformation epoch, or “Eyes wide shut—Russian feminism” in Slavic Literature after 1989.] Nowe zjawiska, tendencje, perspektywy [New phenomena, tendencies, and perspectives]*, ed. E. Kraskowska t. 2 (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2005), p. 86. Similar comments can be found in the interview with the co-author of the Almanac for Radio Svoboda]. See. *25 лет женскому альманаху “Женщина и Россия” [25 years of the Almanac ‘Women and Russia’]*. Radio Svoboda Interview. 29 March 2013. <http://archive.svoboda.org/11/cult/1204/11.121704-2.asp>.

seeing them as creating the groundwork for both self-realization as well as for putting forth and re-discussing issues associated with the supposed equal rights of Soviet women. In a short time, however, it turned out that, as recalled by Malahovskaya "the feminine side of the editors of '37' began to feel like non-conformists within a circle of non-conformists. The materials women put forward for publication were deemed by the male editors to be too extreme, too socially motivated—in a word, too dangerous." (Malahovskaya) Women were willingly assigned technical duties associated with copying and binding published issues, but had little opportunity to express their views on the issues under consideration. This situation led activists to confirm that the almanac was not just the result of many years of women's cumulative efforts, but arose as a direct "reaction to openly-expressed opinions demeaning particular women and the nature of women generally, which was revealed—paradoxically as it may seem—in the circles of those fighting for liberation." (Mitrofanova) This is certainly a reference to the dissident circles within which the women writers began their activities. Mamonova goes yet a step farther in her interpretation of the events of those times. In her introduction to the English language version of "Woman and Russia" she recalls the lack of support (with a few exceptions) received from the male dissidents, and their irritatingly dismissive and protective attitude toward women's creativity. She labels a few of them as outright sexists: "The dissident artists present themselves as nonconformists only in their art; in their attitude toward women, they are absolutely conformist." (Mamonova xiv)

Mamonova's description of the male element in the samizdat circles concerns only one aspect of the reactions the creator of the Almanac had to deal with. Of equal if not greater importance were the reactions of women themselves to the issues raised. The themes of women's dignity, self-respect and quality of life did not interest many of them. They drew their own conclusions from the their own experience. The patriarchal social order, strengthened by years of official socialist doctrine, was felt in different environments at different levels of human existence. Even more, it was maintained not only by men.

Unable to find an outlet for realizing their aims, the activists made a decision to prepare independently a publication—the first of its kind in samizdat history—focused on feminist themes. Despite the very modest number of copies issued (recall that the

first underground issue of 'Woman and Russia' consisted of only ten copies) its appearance in the world of underground literature aroused great interest among the wider circle of persons representing the 'culture'. Nor was there any doubt that the issues ignored for so many years by the samizdat underground were a matter of essence for everyone. The expanding 'reading public' were effusive in their praise of the publication—it was usually read in one night so that it could be passed on the next day to other readers.

More activists and publicists followed the footsteps of the initiators of the almanac, enlarging the editorial board. Natasha Maltseva, Sofia Sokolova, Galina Grigoryeva, and Tatyana Bielyayeva, the poetess Kari Unksova, the artist Natasha Lazareva and the adored 'Mamma of dissidents'—Elena Pavlovna—were all to devote the next years of their work to editing new journals of a feminist and religious nature ("Mariya," "Dalyokiye-blizkiye"—m Far and Near—and "Nadezhda"—Hope), as well as collaborating with local and foreign artistic circles.

It should be emphasized that the publication of a collection of articles under the editorship of Mamonova not only led to the resurrection of the feminist movement today alternately referred to as the Leningrad or dissident movement, it also marked the first in a series of events which would forever change the fate of its authors and collaborators. The reaction of the security apparatus was immediate. Shortly after the issuance of the almanac, the women authors of the publications contained in it, as well as their families, were subjected to a series of repressions. Their private apartments were regularly searched, and being followed and intimidated on a daily basis became a permanent part of their lives. Copies of "Woman and Russia" were confiscated and, in January of 1980, the preliminary mock-up of the new journal "Mariya" was confiscated as well.

The first wave of repressions mainly concerned the instigators and editors of the Almanac. In a later publication of "Woman and Russia" prepared for abroad,³ Mamonova describes in detail the interrogations she was subjected to in 1979 in the Leningrad office of the regional party committee. Asked about her

³ This refers to the 1984 publication "Women and Russia. Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union," which also included a history of the first publication of the Almanac in the Soviet Union, entitled: "Woman and Russia: An Almanac to Women about Women," as well as selected articles from Soviet women authors.

participation in the preparation and publication of the Almanac, she replied: "I don't deny it. I am glad that from the day we signed the Helsinki Accords in 1975 we have finally been given the opportunity to give and receive information." In reply she heard: "You are publishing disinformation. Aren't you ashamed? This pathetic little book . . ." (Mamonova, *A Discussion with the KGB* 216).

The scale of repression brought about by publication of the 'pathetic little book' is also described in specific chapters of the English language version published in 1984, as well as in a number of articles and interviews containing relations of events by those who participated in them at the time. The first to be forced to emigrate were Tatyana Mamonova, Tatyana Goricheva, Natasha Malahovskaya, and Julia Voznesenskaya. This editorial board of 'Woman and Russia' left the country in the spring and summer of 1980. They were followed later by the editors of "Mariya"—Xenia Rotmanova and Tatyana Bielyayeva, and in 1981 Elena Shanygina. The editor of the sixth volume of "Maria," Natasha Lazareva, was accused of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda and sentenced to four years of deprivation of liberty. Altogether she spent five years in prison.⁴

The activists later stated that the arrest, interrogation and even forced emigration did not comprise the worst part of their repressions. Most oppressive was, as it was later dubbed by Voznesenskaya, the 'anti-motherhood' terror applied. Sofia Sokolova's son Andrei was locked up in a psychiatric ward which resembled a prison cell for one month. Other activists, hysterical with fear for the safety of their small children, hid from arrest. The strategy of the security apparatus was made more efficient by their incorporation of an additional factor—their taking into account the sociological and psychological basis for women's behaviour, strengthened by years of Soviet propaganda.

The special situation of Soviet feminists can also be seen from the reaction to the publication of the almanac in foreign feminist circles. It should be noted that it was largely thanks to the efforts

⁴ Information concerning the repressions under went by the editors and authors of the Almanac 'Woman and Russia' appear in almost every publication devoted to Leningradist feminism at the end of the 1970s. See, for example, T. Mamonova (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) I. Yukina (Saint Petersburg: Aleteya, 2007) and Y. Voznesenskaya, *Женское движение в России [The Women's movement in Russia]*. 29 March 2013. <http://antology.igrunov.ru/authors/voznescenskaya/1145211846.html>.

and support provided by Western feminists that a small number of copies of 'Woman and Russia' were preserved. As early as in 1980 special volumes appeared in France, Great Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, and in later years it was published in Holland, Japan, and the United States.⁵ Nonetheless the first contacts between Soviet and European feminists revealed the deep differences between their ways of understanding the essence of feminism and formulating feminist postulates.

To the Western activists' way of thinking, 'Soviet feminism' was, as Alla Mitrofanova described it "feminism in reverse, turned upside down." (Mitrofanova). The Western feminists were fighting for things which Soviet women had achieved long ago. What could Soviet feminists say, at the turn of the 1980s, about engrained inequality when their grandmothers were attending universities in the second half of the nineteenth century and the authorities 'gave them' voting rights already in 1917, women worked in the most difficult professions and for decades were encouraged to take part in all spheres of public life and government activities?

"There really is something to be surprised about and something hard to understand," proclaimed one of the woman authors of "Woman and Russia," trying to describe the specific situation of Russian women:

Here is a society that has proclaimed as its goal the extrication of women from the narrow confines of the family and the inclusion of these women in all forms of public activity. And it would appear that this society had achieved its goal—Soviet women work at the most varied jobs, and many of them are well educated, have a profession, and are financially independent of men. And yet, in this very society, among these very women, a patriarchal social order and its psychology thrive. (Alexandrova 32-33)

The search for the explanation of this "tragic misunderstanding"—as Mitrofanova called it—of Soviet reality became one of the driving forces behind publication of the Almanac.

The Almanac is a collection of articles devoted to the everyday life of Soviet women. Nearly every article illustrates a fragment of reality, presented from a personal experience. The women authors, however, do not stop with the presentation of everyday events. They demonstrate their wide-ranging knowledge of history

⁵ See, for example: 29 March 2013. http://www.womanandearth.com/tatyana_v.htm.

and keen perspicacity in analysing legal regulations and observing the evolution of morality, capturing the mechanisms and nuances of the governmental and political pressures put on them. They destroy the long-standing myth that women are supposed to submit to the needs and ideologies of those in power. They also possess the all-important talent of being able to show visually the connections between their own experience and their oppressive dependence on a system that assigns them their roles and status. The articles, very different in terms of their content and form, expose and illustrate the socio-historical links between the events which determine the situation of women in the Soviet Union. They constitute perhaps the most important part of the Almanac, shedding light on the context of the history presented and providing personal reflections which allow the reader to understand the aim of the publicist enterprise and the value of its contents. Along with episodes taken from everyday life we thus find contents focused on the history of women from the time of the 1917 Revolution until the then-contemporary times. The events which occurred following the end of the first wave of women's movements shed valuable light on the reasons for the ideological gap between Soviet and Western feminism, thus helping explain the initial misunderstanding encountered by the women writers and editors of the Almanac in their first encounters with Western feminist circles.

During the period of the Revolution the aims of the social-democrats and the feminist circles were similar. The Bolsheviks principally did not support feminist aspirations, which they regarded as bourgeoisie, and considered the Marxist feminism of I. Babel as too radical. Nonetheless Bolshevik activists such as J. Sviertlov, V. Kuybyshev or L. Trocky understood and appreciated the significance of equal rights for women and the participation of women in the industrial workforce and in party structures. The point of departure upon which both groups were in accord was the Marxist ideology negating the traditional family structure and the monogamous family per se. However, the legal equality of men and women did not resolve the basic problem. In Engels classic 1884 work *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, he showed that the inequalities reflected in laws were not the cause, but rather the consequences of the economic pressure put on women. The structure of the monogamous family, constituting a guarantee of the private property rights of men, was the factor which pre-determined women's eventual slavery. In this

fundamental social cell, in which the husband is the keeper and lord, women were reduced to the role of wife and servant and, concluded Engels, “a simple machine for giving birth to children” (Engels). In a similar spirit, Kollontai later wrote: “In accordance with the law women received all rights, but in practice they continued to live in the old yoke. They were not equal in family life, enslaved by a thousand details of household responsibility” (qtd. in Yukina 444). The rejection of the typical roles assigned to women as well as the socialization of many spheres of life was supposed to constitute the means to liberate women from male domination, making them socially aware and politically useful.

The fascination of the revolutionary period with Marxism was clearly reflected in the law. On the basis of the decrees of 16 and 18 December 1917, only civil law marriages were recognized, and the decision to enter into or disband a marriage belonged exclusively to the spouses. Along with the secularization of marriage, the decrees gave equal rights to women in the moral and civil spheres. Both women and men were given equal rights to divorce, to property, and to the custody of children. The regulations contained in these decrees were confirmed in the subsequent decree of 16 September 1918, granting child support rights to both parents, regardless of whether the child was the product of a legal union or a free one.

Even more freedoms relative to the sexes are contained in the legal regulations accompanying the decree of 19 November 1926 concerning “The entry into force of a marriage, family, and custody code.” The right to an equal division of property is extended to cover the property of person “actually maintaining a marital relation, even if not registered, if such person mutually recognizes the other as a spouse, or if the marital relationship between them is established by a court on the basis of their actual living conditions” (*Decree of 19 November 1926*). Thus any difference in legal consequences between registered marriages and actual partnerships was virtually eliminated. In accordance with the new regulations partners/spouses could retain their original family names or even take the family name of the woman if they so desired, and could maintain separate domiciles. The weakening of traditional family ties was most prominently reflected however in the divorce law. The new regulations permitted divorces to be granted on the request of a single party, requiring only proper service of a registered letter, without the presence of the other spouse in the court. The decree of

19 November 1926 also maintained the equal rights of children born within or outside of a marital relationship.

Subsequent years after the revolution brought about changes diametrically opposed to the early social regime, opening a new phase in the history of feminism. Already in 1918 many women's organizations were shut down. Women became gradually disappointed and ended their activism, or the leading activists were removed from power. The generation of women whose collective efforts formed a self-identity—*independent and able to express their aims and tasks*—became replaced by a new generation blindly committed to the party and the political regime. In this way, writes Yukina, "[the] ideology of the free individual, with the right to vote and be responsible for herself or himself, became replaced by the ideology of the individual unit, mobilized for the task of building communism, without a voice in the process" (443).

The change in the direction of Bolshevik policies with respect to the 'woman issue' was not accidental. It rather quickly became clear that the progressive programs and ideology of the pre-revolutionary feminists were not included in the party's aims nor among its perceived needs. In response to the dire economic situation the Bolsheviks revised their previous premises. In the face of the growing costs of militarization and industrialization of the state, the issue of social protection was placed on the back burner, and the traditional nuclear family was encouraged and approved. Already at the beginning of the 1930s a new social policy was developing. It found its penultimate expression in the "Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of July 8, 1944" concerning increasing government assistance for pregnant women, women with multiple children, and single mothers, increasing the protection of motherhood and childhood, and establishing the honorary title of "Mother-hero" and funding the Orders of "Praise of Motherhood" and the "Medal of Motherhood."⁶ Despite the expressive and descriptive title of the

⁶ See, for example: *Указ Президиума ВС СССР от 08.07.1944 "Об увеличении государственной помощи беременным женщинам, многодетным и одиноким матерям, усилении охраны материнства и детства, об установлении высшей степени отличия – звания "Мать-героиня" и учреждении ордена "Материнская слава" и медали "Медаль материнства"* [Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of July 8, 1944 concerning increasing government assistance for pregnant women, women with multiple children, and single mothers, increasing the protection of motherhood and

Decree, the actual benefits to women were rather illusory. The directions of changes being implemented by the Bolsheviks were obvious—strengthen the institution of marriage as the basic cell of the social organism, reduce the responsibility of the state in caring for women and children, and make women dependent on the traditional family arrangement. In accordance with the Decree single mothers could no longer begin court proceedings to establish fatherhood or seek child support or alimony, the fathers of children born outside the bonds of marriage had no legal responsibility for their offspring, and divorce became a lengthy and costly procedure. The legalization of marriage as the guaranty of a family's material security and social status became once again the essential question faced by women.

According to Ekaterina Aleksandrova, one of the authors of the Almanac, the introduction of the new legal regulations was only one of the methods whereby women were gradually deprived of freedom and made dependent on the traditional patriarchal social order. The whole process lasted for a half a century and was supported by 'a combination of methods of "persuasion" with direct and indirect methods of "compulsion" (34). The ideological mechanism, based on the principle of the 'healthy Soviet family' and communist and administrative morality, became an effective tool for controlling the behaviour of Soviet citizens, particularly women, thus closing the circle. The image of the model mother, wife, and Soviet citizen, moulded by years of Soviet propaganda, defined a woman's destiny and social role and value for the decades to come.

This model image became the chosen object of study for one of the authors of the Almanac. Nina Yarina, in her presentation of the motivations for the publication, opines that the contemptuous and harmful way of treating women in the USSR is the result of a deformed perspective, intolerance, and above all a tendentious approach to women's nature, the result "of one individual's ill will" (224). The theme of 'women' did exist in the press of that era, Yarina adds, but women were promoted only according the pre-defined pattern emphasizing their 'social utility', which showed women in stereotypical roles, extending the already existing forms of exercising social pressure on women. There was no place for

childhood, and establishing the honorary title of "Mother-hero" and funding the Orders of "Praise of Motherhood" and the "Medal of Motherhood". 29 March 2013. http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_4500.htm.

'true' portraits of women, nor any space in the press for discussing the wide-ranging nature of women's problems. In her opinion, this schematic and one-sided way of portraying women produced important consequences in their lives. They were viewed through the prism of social demands and expectations, working professionally while having the whole burden of 'women's' domestic tasks thrown on their shoulders, forcing them to fulfil dual roles at one and the same time. These traditional social obligations, taken together with the poor quality of health care, social services, and life in general transformed women into objects of exploitation, deprived them of respect, and gave birth to a whole spectrum of problems. The aim of the Almanac was to address and analyse these problems and put them in the proper context.

The acceptance of this common point of view, i.e. as described by Yarina, explains the women authors' devotion to the publication. It was principally aimed at promoting women's various experiences and 'breaking down' the deformed, stereotypical way in which Soviet women were viewed. But this method of showing the personal experience of the women authors in the context of the moral, social, and economic bankruptcy of the state had far-reaching consequences. Viewed in the wider context, they lost their personal and individual character, taking on a universal human dimension. This was clearly the result of the legal, administrative, and ideological mechanisms used to condition the functioning of society as a whole. All of the histories contained in the Almanac need to also be viewed from this perspective.

The feminists of the end of the 1970s wrote about the difficulties and demands arising from 'ordinary matters', which in their eyes turned their everyday lives into 'hell on earth'. Even the smallest action connected with securing that the basic needs of the family were met required superhuman effort. The lack of foodstuffs and ordinary household products and the low quality of household appliances forced Soviet women to live absurd everyday lives. A woman's attribute was to always be equipped with extra net bags for shopping, since every Soviet female citizen was obliged to be always ready in the event an unattainable product might turn up in the marketplace. The hours spent in lines (often three in one shop) as well as the constant search for basic goods deprived women of time for rest, or personal or professional development. As expressed by one of the women authors, "Soviet men predominate in only one kind of shopping

line—the one for alcoholic beverages” (Mamonova, Matilsky 25). What’s more, all family obligations, such as caring for children, elderly, or the handicapped, rested on the shoulders of the female part of the population. In the opinion of the Leningrad feminists, the family thus had become a place for taking unfair advantage of and exploiting women. It might also be noted as an aside that the Soviet regime’s support for the traditional family functions arising from the patriarchal social order represented a complete denial of the postulates proposed by Engels one hundred years earlier in his *On the Origins of Family*.

As noted above, the problems faced by women in their everyday lives were exacerbated by the low level of social services. The authoresses wrote at length about the problems of raising children in a state where day care centres and nursery schools were characterized as “the most destructive institutions in the USSR health care system” (Maltseva 112). Medical facilities were not rated much higher. The allocation of health care workers to a given district was decided ‘at the top’, with many consequences creating burdens on the ‘average citizen’. The doctors, assigned a permanent number of patients, treated them as object, devoting more attention to their bureaucratic procedures than the their health care procedures. Many sick persons were essentially forced to pay for private doctors’ visits. This problem was made all the more unbearable by the constant propaganda criticizing the Western systems of health care and praising the Soviet model. According to Valentina Leftinova these actions were aimed at calling the attention of society to the virtues of the Soviet state structure, which offered its citizens free health care. The propaganda articles omitted any discussion of the quality of the care offered. “Expensive medical care is inhumane,” writes Leftinova, “but anyone can see that it’s better to have good medical care which is costly, than poor care which is free” (108).

The women authors found the attitude of doctors and nurses toward pregnant women to be particularly shameful and scandalous. Many places devoted their energies to humiliating women during childbirth, and patients in abortion clinics were treated in an utterly inhumane fashion. In one article they describe very expressively the fate of a pregnant prisoner, subsisting on the standard prison starvation diet, with a value of 37 kopecks per day, giving birth in the presence of prison guards, and then hauled back to her cell two hours after childbirth.

The stories of Soviet women described in the Almanac are all the more valuable because of their expressively drawn images of

the surrounding elements which made up the everyday existence of Soviet women. Basements without windows or daylight turned into communal apartments, or small single apartments shared by several families, deprived of even a minimum of privacy, make up the daily living space of many citizens. The difficult housing conditions determined interpersonal relations, and wielded a destructive force on family and spousal relationships.

The women authors consider women's work conditions to be of great significance. In this area of life every show of independent initiative or attempt at self-realization was doomed to failure. What mattered were connections, acquaintances, and above all social status and the position of the husband. Women performing physical work faced a much more difficult situation—legal work hours were ignored, as were norms and standards relating to women's biological features, nor was any attention given to the fact they performed dual roles as worker and mother. The women authors considered the situation of unmarried women to be the most difficult. Those who resigned from work to take a maternity leave received a monthly government subsidy which was insufficient to survive on for even a week.

The repercussions brought about by the appearance of the Almanac, like its subsequent fate, leave no doubt that the authoresses were not dealing with topics on the fringes of society, but rather touched on questions of fundamental interest to at least one-half of the population—women of all ages and all nationalities, educated women and those without professional qualifications, workers, housewives, women-engineers and students. What's more, it was not only the themes of the articles, focused around the conditions endured by women in the Soviet Union, that was remarkable for its time. Equally remarkable was its open and unfettered approach to discussing reality, revealing the painful consequences arising from the functioning of the patriarchal social order in a state based on an image, promoted over decades, of equal rights for all its citizens. The feminist literature at the end of the 1970s—exposing the truth about the conditions in birth and abortion facilities, rampant alcoholism, family problems, single mothers, female prisoners, and finally the rising trends in domestic violence against women—ripped apart, as Malahovskaya noted, not only the myth of the social welfare state in general. It also debunked the myth about women, substituting it with everyday histories described from the point of view of the women who experienced them.

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