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NUMBER 141

VILLAGE WOMEN EXPERIENCE THE REVOLUTION

Beatrice Farnsworth

Conference on

THE ORIGINS OF SOVIET CULTURE

Sponsored by

Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies
The Wilson Center

May 18-19, 1981

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Paper prepared for Conference
on
"The Origins of Soviet Culture"
May 1981

Beatrice Farnsworth

Before we explore the peasant woman's earliest perceptions of Soviet culture, we should ask an even broader question: what did the Revolution mean to the peasantry as a whole, male as well as female?

War, beginning in 1914, devastated the village economy. With the healthy young men at the front, with even the horses taken away, there remained in the village the old people, the women, and the children. Farming declined. Especially with the Civil War that followed the Revolution, each year less land was sown and bread grew more scarce.¹ And if the peasants wondered why, if there were a Revolution, they were in economic ruin, it is important to remember--as one historian has pointed out--that generally the peasants had no longings for the past.² For the majority of them--even when they opposed the Communists--Tsarism and the pomeshchiki (the landlords) were gone for good.³ The Revolution freed the peasants from the system of labor service to the landowner, it gave them the status of independent producers, and it offered not only land but--despite the economic chaos⁴ of the Civil War years, new hope.

For the peasant, illiterate and politically a blank, generally no culture existed prior to the Revolution beyond the mixture of orthodox religiousity, local superstition, and folk lore.⁵

Cultural change, when it came, emanated from the towns. The language itself began to change. Peasants heard about People's Courts, "criminals in face of the Revolution," "enemies of the working class," kombedy, smychka, kommuna, delegatki, Komsomol, and Commissar.⁶ The peasant woman, at least officially, was no longer "baba." The Party called her, "krest'ianka." Reactions to unfamiliar expressions have been recorded in literature. Sholokhov depicted a scene in which a Red Army man addressed the crowd. "Tovarishch" he began. The cossacks, troubled by the unusual word stared at one another in agitation. The Red Army man was continually interrupted by shouts: "What do you mean by 'commune'? And what is the Communist Party?"⁷ In another novel of peasant life a Soviet militiaman speaks to Katia, a peasant woman, telling her that the workers and the peasants are no longer separate but are "one element." And the "baba" puzzles over the word "element." What is an element?⁸

An aim of the Revolution was the breaking down of the old byt--the complex of customs, beliefs, and manners that determined the peasant's daily life. At the simplest level, Soviet culture meant knives and forks rather than the peasant's wooden spoon. Literature provides vignettes. In "Black Fritters," we see the peasant woman, Katerina, come

to town to visit her Communist husband and struggling at supper with the unfamiliar utensils--dropping now one, now the other."⁹ Similarly in Sholokhov, the Red Army man requesting food at a peasant hut demands in disgust that he be given something other than the wooden spoon to eat with--a metal utensil, less likely to carry germs.¹⁰ Hygiene and a new emphasis on health care marked the new culture. Thus the peasant wife, Katerina, noticed the clean towel hanging at the sink in her husband's city room.¹¹ A familiar sight were posters in connection with public health. "Syphilitics, do not use alcohol," and "The louse is a carrier of Typhus."¹²

Knives, forks, and public health injunctions could be regarded with casual curiosity. Atheism could not. Many a village family was torn apart when one of its youthful members rejected religion. Nowhere is this family tragedy more poignantly epitomized than in Seifullina's; "The Old Woman,"¹³ who drove her Bolshevik son from their home.

Soviet culture had its iconography. Thus Andron, another rebellious son in another village, put Karl Marx in St. Nikolai's place, and hung two more pictures on either side of him: Lenin and Trotsky. He gave an order to the Women's Department for wreaths. The peasants came to the office of the village Soviet and saw the pine wreaths

above the pictures, the red ribbons, and the banners with golden tassels. Only the candles were missing. A peasant reported to Andron's father: "Just been to your son's chapel.... He's made some new saints."¹⁴

The new culture seemed also to encompass sexual immorality. Immorality of course was not new in the village. As reflected in literature before World War I, peasant behavior fell far below the norm. The main difference was that in the old days vice was recognized as such even by the sinners. Not only did war and revolution cause village morals to deteriorate even further, but the very validity of sexual standards were being challenged.¹⁵ It was nothing new for a peasant girl to give birth six or seven months after her marriage, but after the Revolution, when it happened in the village, gossips might say: "That's the Soviet fashion. If a girl marries under the Soviets she's sure to have a baby in six months."¹⁶

Alexander Neverov, the self-educated peasant writer, described the effect of the Revolution on the village scene: "Girls did not come home at night, and married women stayed away. A strange wife pressed herself to a strange husband...."

The girls sang songs:

Don't you swear at me, Mother,
Now we are free to do as we like!
I'll lie down if I like, I'll get up if I like,
I'll go and spend the night with Ivan.
If Ivan gets a swollen head,
I'll go and get another lover.... 17

"Young girls would sleep unwedded, young men would cease
to obey." 18

Here and there the emancipation of women impacted sharply on the peasant family: Prohorova "learned all sorts of foreign words...culture, equal rights, and so on. It wouldn't have been so bad if only the young girls listened...but the married women listened too." ¹⁹ Women were given the right in 1917 to divorce and occasionally some of them used it. Before the Revolution, a man might abandon his wife but if a peasant woman left her husband it caused indignation. By 1921, especially among the younger population, the fact of a "baba" separating from her husband ²⁰ ceased to astonish her neighbors. Divorce became a theme in peasant literature. A peasant husband went to the Ispolkom--the village office of the Executive Committee of the Soviet--to protest the departure of his wife. The Party official opened the Code of Soviet law. 'You must look upon a woman differently and you mustn't force her to live with you. You mustn't beat her either.' The muzhik looked at the Code--it was a large book--he would have liked to

smash the Code to pieces on the woman's head--but it
couldn't be done; his hands were tied by an invisible
21
force.

But for the majority of peasant women the option of
leaving a husband remained unrealistic. One woman
explained: "Yes, it's all very well to talk about divorce--
but how could I feed my children? Two's better than one
when it comes to that. Alimenta? (the divorced father's
legal share of the support of his wife or children). Yes,
I know about that--but what good would that do me when I
know my husband has nothing in his pocket to pay me. And
if my husband goes away, or if I get land somewhere else,
how can I work the land alone? Together we can manage some-
22
how."

Although the instance of peasant divorce was not high
when compared with the cities, by the mid 1920's most of
23
the village lawyers' cases involved Alimenta. The new
freedom of women to divorce also found expression in a
reported wave of household partitioning initiated by women
24
in many cases as part of divorce settlements. Delegatki,
the women working within the network of the Zhenotdel, the
Women's Section of the Party, became advocates of the
25
property rights of the "baba."

The very organization of government within the village

functioned as an aspect of an alien culture. The sel'sovet, its basic element, was viewed as both imported and imposed. The number of peasants taking part in elections after the Civil War remained small (22.3% in 1922). There were many villages in which no more than 10 to 15% of the peasants would turn out to vote. Peasant lack of interest in this new Soviet institution is understandable since the sel'sovet was controlled by the authorities and its membership was decided upon by the Party in the volost in consultation with the local Party cell, if there was one.²⁶ The peasants regarded the ancient mir, an institution that had revived during and after the Revolution, as the actual village²⁷ government.

The Party staffed the sel'sovet with the village poor, the batraks and the bedniaks, or even workers sent out from the towns to strengthen the proletarian element.²⁸ Thus, this alien import, the sel'sovet, featured those whom the khoziaeva of the village called the rifraff. An aspect of the new culture then was the sudden prominence within the village of its poorer inhabitants.²⁹

And finally, the peasant who previously regarded the village as a unity--the mir--was told that rather than a whole it consisted really of three parts--the rich peasants, the middle, and the poor. Soviet culture from the outset

forced on the peasant a model of class conflict. ³⁰

....

To understand how Soviet culture was perceived initially by the "baba," or in the language of the Communists, the "krest'ianka," one must know first the values of women, how they related to the values of the peasant community, and how they related to the values of peasant men. A sexual division had to some extent always existed in the village. One need recall only the frequent references in literature to "the women," with the assumption that they were a group unto themselves, to understand that women had their separate sphere.

What then were their values? The peasant woman was a khoziaika and she wanted to remain one. Her concerns were narrowly individual and focused inwardly on family. "The women" might move as a group to the spring to draw water, to the stream to wash clothes--but there was no sense of sisterhood. Rather, malice and competition prevailed especially in matters relating to the family. Competition over the possession of a man and the birth--or lack of--children. Young girls lived in a female world where marriage was their utmost concern. They were involved in female rituals, gatherings to sew clothing for dowries, parties for those about to be married, assembling with their

families to await the arrival of the marriage makers who together with the priest would arrange for the dowry--a³¹ situation that remained unchanged by the Revolution.

Although Tolstoy describes a young peasant woman who expressed frankly a sense of release at the death of a child, such an example is probably the exception.³² The theme of Russian lullabyes, a mother's devotion to the infant, was no doubt more representative of the 19th and 20th century Russian mother.³³ A 19th century Russian writer states that 'peasants...view the birth of children as a sign of God's blessing on the parents, whereas not having children is considered a misfortune.'³⁴ Beyond the question of the mother's relationship to the child was the fact that childlessness for the peasant woman was a painful situation often constituting a source of moral humiliation. In the novel Bruski the young peasant wife, Katia, longs for a child and release from the mockery of the women at the spring who called her barren.³⁵ To be barren meant to be deprived of children through whom alone a woman could firmly implant herself in the family of her husband and be guaranteed comfort in her old age.³⁶

The world of women was concerned also with private economic interests. Village women, especially the more prosperous one, were occupied in small scale commerce. It

was the "baba" who went to the city to bargain and to
sell milk and eggs.³⁷ Indeed, it was she who was in charge
of the cow.³⁸ Concerns with family and with commerce were
congruent, of course, with the general values of the
village community. But the world of the peasant woman,
her outlook and her development differed nonetheless from
that of the peasant man. The woman was essentially custo-
dian of the family and the basic rituals of life. They
were "matchmakers, mourners, midwives, gossipmongers, and
custodians of social propriety;"³⁹ the man was "provider
and protector," involved in running the affairs of the mir
and--depending on his economic status--a force in the
village power structure. He was concerned with paying taxes,
renting land, sowing, plowing, and fighting in the war. At
the front he received a degree of political awareness and
a literacy he may earlier have lacked. As one of Tolstoy's
peasants exclaimed, in the Power of Darkness, 'a man, he may
at least learn something in the pub, or in the army, or in
prison, maybe.⁴⁰ But a woman!'

Because of her backwardness and her essentially
familial concerns, Soviet culture when it came to the village
sometime around 1920 threatened the peasant woman in a
particular way.⁴¹ The Communist Party wanted to liberate
her from nearly all that was familiar: her petty-ownership

psychology, her illiteracy, her ignorance, and her dependence on her husband's family. The Party's task was to get the masses of peasant women to disdain and to hate the squalor of their own lives--instead of clinging to their own rusty shackles.⁴² Appealing to her self-pity, Communist women quoted to the "baba" Nekrasov's famous lines:

Dolia ty russkaia,
Doliushka zhenskaia,
Vriad li trudnee syskat' 43

Why was the downtrodden "baba" nevertheless resistant to the message? The reasons were both practical and psychological. The Communists were asking her to reject her accustomed security. They promised communal nurseries, kitchens, and laundries, and a future of participation in public life. To the average illiterate and backward woman, engrossed in her personal world and accustomed to the protection of a husband, socialist dreams of emancipated womanhood were hardly appealing. As a peasant woman explained: if you had a good husband you were all right in the old days, and you are all right now.⁴⁴

Summer nurseries, set up in villages where the Communist Women's Section was active, were a threat. Rumors circulated that once in them children were enrolled as Communists and taken from their mothers.⁴⁵ One saw tentative accep-

tance of the new culture when peasant women, becoming convinced that nurseries were useful, asked the Zhenotdel⁴⁶ to build them. Indeed, organizing a nursery would become, by the mid 1920's, a Communist ploy for "catching" the "baba."⁴⁷

But such acceptance was infrequent in the early years. Upon occasion, women spoke with particular force against nurseries as the following resolution taken at a meeting of peasant women in Penza guberniia indicates. "The women's meeting...under the chairmanship of Evgeniia Romankova, unanimously refuse to open and organize a kindergarten and nursery since in our community we don't have mothers who would refuse to bring up their children."⁴⁸

Labor conscription--decreed in 1920--was another threat. The "baba" liked to gossip with her neighbors or sit in front of her hut cracking sunflower seeds. She worked hard but at her own tempo and ~~she~~ she resented interference, regimentation, managers, and enforced overwork. And although labor mobilization did not require change of location for peasant women with children under twelve it did mean coercion and arduous work such as clearing snow from railway tracks.⁴⁹ Peasant attitudes toward work discipline which was so much a part of the early culture were unequivocal. An American visitor

approaching a group of batrachki working in a Sovkhoz was told very frankly that no, life was not better for them than in the old Tsarist days. "We worked then from dawn to dark--but we didn't have to keep it up all the time. We could even stop to sing, and lie down in the sun and sleep when we wanted to and the foreman didn't mind--he did the same himself. But now they make us stick at our work."⁵⁰

Another cultural change was the introduction into the village of literacy classes for adults. And while education might be perceived by a minority of peasant women as an opportunity, for many the "likpunkt" was an irrelevant bother conflicting with the peasant woman's desire to be left alone.⁵¹ 'Learn how to read and write?' a peasant woman asked. "And when do you think I'd have the time to do that--the cow has to be milked, the pigs to be fed, the water to be carried, the baby screams, or another one is sick--let the children here do the learning.' But in fact some women resented education for the children as an undermining of parental authority.⁵²

The Bolshevik idea that girls should attend school was unwelcome. In a village in Penza guberniia peasants complained that in the old days girls did not go to school. Now a teacher agitates for their attendance and 18 girls

immediately enter.⁵³ Yet, the number of girls in school there in 1924 as compared to 1922 had declined significantly. In some schools there were no girls at all. Traditionally if a sacrifice were to be made, it would be for the son. He would be going into the Army and it was inconvenient for a man to be illiterate. But for the "baba" to remain illiterate was no great misfortune. Frequently it was the mothers who prevented their daughters from going to school. One peasant father wanted his daughter to be educated but his wife scolded that the family could not afford it.⁵⁴ Those girls who did go to school often left before completing the course of study. On the other hand, girls in Penza guberniia were attracted to the "likpunkt," although they felt shy about attending. They⁵⁵ wanted a separate women's literacy group.

The same peasant woman who was so little interested in education that she objected to her daughter going to school, if she lived in a village where the Party was active, was subjected to efforts to change dramatically her outlook. Mainly she was to achieve a different self-image, that of a competent, interested, and literate citizen. If she learned to read then speculators would not be able to cheat her. If she were to take part in elections to volost and village Soviets, the Soviets would not be

dominated by kulaks and former shop and tavern keepers. If she used her equal rights to vote, then the Soviet would be made up of honest people who would defend the village poor. Her self-interest as mother would also be served. For if women participated in the Soviets, and in the volost executive committees, the Soviets would care more about improving the life of women and children.⁵⁶

Occasionally the "baba" was convinced to enter the Soviet. More frequently she responded negatively:

"I have small children at home and a farm. Therefore I have no time to work in the Soviet."

"I am illiterate--what would I do in the Soviet and how will I be of use to the village?"

"My husband is opposed."⁵⁷

Perhaps the most alien of the cultural messages was the one that called on the krest'ianka to act collectively for the general good. The Russian peasants who traditionally worked hard on their own strips of land but half-heartedly elsewhere and who it is said lacked a social conscience were being urged to think in terms of society's interest and to care about the improvement of the general people's economy as they cared about their own.⁵⁸ They were exhorted to understand the concept of mutuality between city and village: the peasant must give grain to

the towns because the factory worker could not produce implements for the farms if he had no food. They were to enter the Soviets where they would work to help the widows and families of Red Army men. They were to construct shelters and nurseries for orphans and children of the village poor and they were to participate in the subbotniki, somehow absorbing the uncongenial idea of work without pay.⁵⁹ This last injunction proved to be particularly awkward. In Kaluga guberniia when the question of wages for the delegatka came up, the majority of them,⁶⁰ not receiving any pay, simply refused to work.

The absence of any general will to collectivity on the part of women is illustrated by their opposition to the early Soviet communes. Women reacted negatively although they were promised more than their husbands. In 1919 Pravda reported that female antipathy was the chief break⁶¹ on the formation of communes. Similarly, in 1930 Kaganovich would argue that peasant women were providing⁶² much of the resistance to collectivization. If they did go into the communes they usually held back from active⁶³ participation. The commune freed women from certain chores but it required of them much more readjustment than it did of their husbands who for the most part went about their accustomed agricultural work. Quarrels arose

in the community kitchens and dining halls. Women did not like cooking for those outside their family, doing impersonal menial jobs or caring for the children of others. According to one source, the women engaged in all manner of recriminations and dodged the work. One reporter, sympathetic to the commune, found that women disliked the communal nursery as much as the kitchen and had to be rotated very often. Bickering and gossip⁶⁴ were the rule. But women, when they needed to, did act collectively. Krest'ianki, especially widows, sometimes formed communes whose purpose it was to sustain each other. The "Fortress of Communism" was started in the lower Volga region by /seven widows or wives. Husbands joined upon release from⁶⁵ service.

...

For the peasant woman in a village that experienced minimal or no organized Party activity, Soviet culture probably meant little besides the "Commissar" who requisitioned grain. And, if she traveled into the large towns, the Agit-Punkt (perhaps only a kiosk in a station) disseminating Bolshevik propaganda. The new culture was experienced more intensely by the relatively few peasant women who were drawn into the Soviet orbit. The semiliterate "baba" who dared to challenge every principle

traditionally held sacred in her environment, a pioneer⁶⁶ of progress became a feature of the rural scene.

Invariably she possessed an unusual personality that had manifested itself before the Revolution. Usually she was remarkable for her personal independence and bravery. Two such fictional heroines epitomize the new peasant woman: Mar'ia-bol'shevichka and Katia Dolga. Mar'ia and Katia were each portrayed as physically larger than their husbands, strong women with loud voices who butted into "the muzhik's business." Katia especially established herself as a force within the mir. During the war, she took over all the masculine responsibilities of farming, performing them so well that she was the envy of the elderly men who wondered why their daughters-in-law could not work in the fields like Katia instead of returning to their mothers or staying indoors fussing over children. Each of them began organizing women within the village. Mar'ia founded a Zhenotdel. "We never even heard of a word like that--it didn't sound Russian" was the peasant⁶⁷ reaction. Mar'ia and Katia turned away from religion. (Katia initially out of anger at a too generous land allotment to the village priest). As a joke, Mar'ia is elected to the district Soviet--few people wanted to hold office anyway. She surprised everyone with her newly

business-like manner. Other women became infected with her Bolshevism. Two of them left their husbands.

To be sure these "new women" reflected a tiny minority in the villages. But as harbingers of a new culture they attracted considerable attention. Author, Aleksandr Neverov, ends his short story with Mar'ia retreating with the Bolsheviks in face of a Cossack attack. "They say somebody saw her in another village, but maybe it wasn't she--maybe it was another one who looked like her. There are a lot of them around nowadays." So it seemed. And readers' reactions suggest he was correct. Mar'ia was praised, congratulated and invited to visit like-minded souls⁶⁸ in other villages.

Who did these kindred souls in "other villages" tend to be? The batrachki, the bedniachki, the single-woman householders, the Red Army wives, and widows, were generally the women most receptive to rural Party activity.⁶⁹ Through the Zhenotdel they were drawn into the Party orbit. They tended to be mature rather than young women. A correspondent reporting on a non-Party conference of worker and peasant women in Orlov guberniia in 1923 noted that of 134 delegatkii (63 of whom were peasants and 71 urban women), the majority, 70, were in the 25 to 45 age group, 49 were from 17 to 25 and 18 were older than 45.⁷⁰ The Party

worker was gratified that there were also some young Krest'ianki present who left farm and children to attend the conference. At a similar women's conference in the guberniia of Nizhni-Novgorod that same year a large part of the delegatki surprisingly were under 30, fewer were from 30 to 40 and some were older than 40. The reporter found the breakdown significant because at previous conferences the older women prevailed. In general, young peasant women burdened with children were less responsive to the Party, while the young unmarried woman was the least likely of all to participate.⁷¹ Reports deplored the paucity of girls in the rural Komsomols.⁷² In some there were no women at all, or at most, simply one in a cell of thirty--a result of parental disapproval and an abusive attitude on the part of young men toward those whom they disdained as "baby."⁷³

The single woman householder--often a widow--had the most reason to respond positively to the Communist presence. The most vulnerable member of the mir, her life was extraordinarily difficult. She was expected alone to raise children, to maintain the cattle, and to farm. A small percentage of these women moved into the category of the landless peasant--the bobylok. The majority of them farmed with varying degrees of success. How did they manage? An

irate Communist reported from one village that it was not with the help of the mir. Instead he found a ruthless exploitation by the mir of the single woman. These women who sowed, harrowed, harvested, threshed and worked in the vegetable gardens, did the work of both a man and a woman. Additionally, they had to work not only for themselves but in the fields and vegetable gardens of others because their farms nearly constantly required timber for repairs. Women did not have the strength to fell and to drag damp, heavy wood. For this service they were required to go to work in the field of a neighbor in return for logs. In the winter it was no better. The single woman must carry firewood, hay, look after the cattle, spin, weave, sew, repair clothing and boots, and launder not only for herself but even for her neighbor whose help she frequently needed.

The mir was not only indifferent to her situation, frequently it compounded her problems. For example, if there appeared in the village a new claimant to land, a missing soldier, or a city employee come to the village, the mir would need to find land to give to the newcomer. As a rule they looked to the household where there was no man. Because if they took land from Ivan or Petrov, they would resist, perhaps violently. But Mar'ia or Akulina

would not contradict the mir. They were not inclined to protest or to undertake a lawsuit. Land might be taken from them by other means as well. The strips of land belonging to the women farmers were usually poorer than the strips belonging to the men because the men, taking advantage of the fact that a woman was not likely to examine the strips, or if she did was not about to start a fight, year after year expanded their own strips at her expense. The mir was not interested. When it came time to apportion tax obligations, the inferiority of land strips cultivated by women was usually not taken into account. On the other hand, the women were frequently taxed higher than the other households--again because they⁷⁴ did not offer strong resistance.

But occasionally from the ranks of the miserably exploited Mar'ias and Akulinas there would be a "baba" more outspoken. Such a woman, A. Volkova, from Smolensk guberniia, wrote a letter to the journal Kommunistka in which she called on the rabotnitsy, the seemingly favored element in the Revolution to "remember the krest'ianki." She read in the women's pages in Rabochi Put' about meetings for city women. She requested similar meetings for peasant women where their questions could be answered about problems like the tax-in-kind.⁷⁵ The unusual "baba"

was represented fictionally by the crude and naive but very bold Katia Dolga who did not hesitate to tell the miller when he was cheating the peasants or the priest⁷⁶ when he was taking someone's turn in line for wood.

It was exceptional women like these whom the Zhenotdel, worker sought when she asked young men in the Komsomols if there wasn't just one woman in their village who was more independent than the rest and with whom they could be put in contact.⁷⁷ But even the stalwart Katia Dolga who readily accomplished a "man's work" in the fields was uneasy when her name was proposed for the presidium of the village Soviet (because the Party wanted a woman representative). How could she sit at the same table with men?⁷⁸ How would it look to people?

The more independent women, responding to the new culture, became the "troublemakers," organizing other village women, attending the Zhenotdel's "babi kursy" and participating in meetings that today we would recognize as consciousness raising and that in China would be called "speaking bitterness." At non-Party volost and guberniia conferences, peasant delegatki would be encouraged to talk about their own lives. In session after session--documented in the pages of the journal Kommunistka and reflected in Soviet fiction, peasant women told not only

about the hardship of their past, but also about their current exploitation both by kulaks and by male members of the Soviet power structure in the villages. Here are some examples: Neverov shows us Katia Dolga at her first political meeting--speaking he writes like "a dam broken open"--telling of the misery of her early married life which began at age 18. How she left her husband's family to return to her mother, and how her husband went to the priest to help get her home. Her mother-in-law gave her husband the whip and told him to beat her. She had a hard life while her mother-in-law lived but she saw that for other women it was even worse. It was as if women were cursed from birth, she told the assembled group.⁷⁹

Another "baba," Tat'iana asked bitterly--what kind of life is it for women? She labored in a family for nothing, bearing six children. Two she lost from being beaten. Three died as infants. The last one lived but crippled. She blamed her mother-in-law for his accident.⁸⁰

Women complained about the conditions of daily life which in some instances were made worse by the Revolution. Drunkenness, well-known in the Russian village, continued to plague the countryside even becoming a feature of local Soviet organs which in the view of some peasants resembled taverns more than government institutions.⁸¹

Drinking at home seemed to the women to have increased. In the old days there was a formal liquor monopoly. Now each muzhik brewed his own and life had become impossible for the "baba."⁸² At a similar meeting in Nizhni Novgorod "baby" protested against the painful tax-in-kind and the cruelty of sadistic Soviet agents, who, instead of sympathizing with the difficulties of a Red Army man's wife and perhaps letting her off more easily, taunted the woman with outlandish requests. One such was that she produce 60 identical black cats so that he could make a fur coat.⁸³ The Party worker noted that this was only one episode of humiliating injustice occurring locally at the hands of brutal collectors of the tax-in-kind.

A twenty-two year old peasant woman told of her experiences the previous year as a member of the Soviet. The kulaks proposed that she chair a work committee with the idea--as she now realized--of manipulating her. When she called them to task for their tax irregularities, they threatened to kill her. I don't go to the Soviet anymore she told the conference. I am twenty-two and I still want to live.⁸⁴

An older woman protested that the working woman in the city got four months maternity leave, while she had borne sixteen children (five of them buried) and worked

all the while. Why aren't the peasant women given the same benefits as the city woman.⁸⁵ Distrust for the city rabotnitsy was common among the krest'ianki who complained about their own difficult lives, the onerous tax-in-kind, the exhausting work in the course of a long summer day while the factory woman worked, in their view, not 24⁸⁶ hours but simply 8.

Along with anger were also affirmations of the new culture. One peasant woman in Orel guberniia recalled that in the past she had no land and the village called her a tramp. "Why? I was not a thief." Now she had 12 desiatin of land and the kulak who formerly had 40 had 8. She sold her son's miner's clothing and even managed to buy a horse. She lived well. It was warm inside in the winter. Still, she did not want to identify too closely with the Revolution. "They call me a Communist. But I am not a Communist."⁸⁷ Another woman explained that she had never before been at a guberniia conference. Indeed she never knew where the city was. But now it seemed to her as though Orel was sitting right in her vegetable patch. And with this colorful exclamation the "baba" summed up the cultural impact of the Revolution on her life: it had taken her out of the village.⁸⁸

Bringing women together to express personal grievances and triumphs was a dramatic way of drawing them into the Soviet orbit. There were other innovations: organizations among single women to purchase glass, firewood, and various supplies collectively and groups to develop summer nurseries which would work together to obtain local funds from committees of mutual aid,⁸⁹ volost executive committees, and local cooperatives.

The peasants did not always accept Soviet-urged cooperation although cooperatives were well-known in pre-revolutionary Russia. They made excuses: the "baba" could not live without her daily trip to the city to sell milk and eggs from her own farm; or, they were not the kind of people to work together harmoniously.⁹⁰ Yet frequently cooperation succeeded.

Work artels brought change to the lives of those⁹¹ relatively few women involved. A member of the Zhenotdel reported a conversation with a "baba" who recalled that in the beginning no one in the village wanted to hear about organizing an artel. They told her to get rid of her Bolshevik ideas. But she persuaded other peasant women to join with her--especially Red Army wives who farmed alone. Together they obtained seed in the city. Their two horses became the common property of the artel.

Going beyond joint agricultural work, they organized a children's dining room with the help of the Soviet network. (It eventually closed due to insufficient supplies.) The Zhenotdel worker marvelled that the artel was begun by the peasant women themselves despite the mockery of the men. Yet we may assume an on-going degree of Zhenotdel help in the form of encouragement, literature for the reading hut, and evidently the very sheets of paper (unavailable in the village) that the women needed to record the protocol⁹² of their meetings.

Peasant women--again in the relatively few villages with energetic Party organizers--might experience propaganda at any level of daily life. Even allowing for the likelihood that Party workers exaggerated the degree of their actual accomplishments, the scope of agitation was broad.⁹³ On Sundays the "baba" was recruited, ostensibly to gather mushrooms and medicinal herbs, but in fact really to hear Party propaganda. Dramatic and choral circles were created in the villages.⁹⁴ Dramatizations and concerts became part of non-Party conferences. Brochures and leaflets were distributed. In reading huts, teachers read from scarce copies of the new Party journal, Krest'ianka.⁹⁵ In "Piter" there were excursions of peasant women to museums, and in Moscow to children's

institutions, the museum of the People's Commissariat
of health,^{to} lectures, and movies.⁹⁶ Cultural innovation
came to the village in the form of "magic lantern"
(slide) exhibits, and model vegetable gardens.⁹⁷ In the
summer of 1920 on the steamship "Red Star" peasant women
of Povolzh'ia marvelled at an exhibition of the uses of
electricity in the countryside--how in several minutes⁹⁸
it was possible from milk to make butter.

The use of street theater was particularly effective
in attracting large numbers of peasants, especially the
dramatization of people's courts. In Saratov, the
Zhenotdel presented a staged court on work deserters,
gangsterism, sabotage, and "new women." In Ekaterinburg
a performance of "the people's court" investigated the
morality of "outrages" against women.⁹⁹

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Undoubtedly a remarkable aspect of the new culture
was the unfamiliar notion that women be active politically.
Whether or not the krest'ianki responded--the message
itself provided cultural shock. Neverov evokes this
bewilderment. In a poignant vignette peasant women asked
the chairman of a village meeting when he called for a

vote whether the "baby" were supposed to raise their
hands too.¹⁰⁰ It was a new world of meetings at which
it was necessary not only to sit without chatting
(difficult to learn) but also to obey seemingly arbitrary
rules of order.¹⁰¹ At a Komsomol meeting in which young
married women were bitterly recounting the hardships of
their lives a young woman burst out with her own story.
When the Chair interrupted with the reminder that people
were not to speak without permission, the krest'ianka
retorted: "I don't know your rules."¹⁰²

Stranger than being summoned to meetings was the sight
of authoritative women within the ruling Communist network--
when it was a tenet of rural life that women were not to
be relied on.¹⁰³ Here we must ask to what extent the
krest'ianki were actually in touch with the Communist Party
in the villages. Three-fourths of the villages, after all,
had no organized Party activity by the end of the 1920s.¹⁰⁴
And in the RSFSR alone there were 150,000 villages.¹⁰⁵
According to statistics for 1920 there were in 15 gubernii
surveyed 428 peasant women in the Communist Party.¹⁰⁶ In
1923 it was estimated that the krest'ianki made up 1.5%
of the village Soviets. In about 36 gubernii there were
1,022 krest'ianki serving in the sel'sovet.¹⁰⁷ The total
number of politically active peasant women was small--

despite the pressure exerted by the Party to bring women
into the Soviets at the local levels.¹⁰⁸ Yet the "baby"
did experience women in political authority through their
contact with the Zhenotdel. In those areas where the
Women's Section was most active, "baby" however indiffe-
rent or negative to the regime, were brought in touch
with a female political culture.¹⁰⁹

But Zhenotdel "activity" might mean merely a poorly
paid volost organizer, knapsack on her back, going by foot,
20 to 30 versts, from volost to volost.¹¹⁰ Usually only
parts of a guberniia experienced the Zhenotdel.¹¹¹ In
general, it was the peasant women who lived in semi-indus-
trial areas like Iaroslav and Gomel' gubernii who received
the greater cultural impact since Zhenotdel workers drawn
from the industrial areas of the guberniia could be sent
into the villages to spread the Party message. The purely
peasant gubernii had a less developed Party apparatus.¹¹²

In the semi-industrial areas, female Party workers
were particularly conscious of the need to develop ties
between city and country women. Thus in Kiev, Kostroma,
and Penza guberniia, delegates meetings were organized
together with city rabotnitsy.¹¹³ With the same idea in
mind, the Kiev all-city delegatka meeting decided to take
under its wing a volost delegatka meeting in Budaevka.

For local women, the result was an increased urban presence in the village.¹¹⁴ The Kiev Zhenotdel sought further to develop linkages by bringing groups of krest'ianki into the city to meet in conferences with the urban rabotnitsy. Despite the optimistic conclusions from Party workers that a smychka was being forged between rural and urban women, the opposite may in fact have occurred. The krest'ianki, as we know resented the rabotnitsy as the dominant, and favored class.¹¹⁵

A look at rural participation in the Zhenotdel network provides a sense of "baby" exposure to politically active women. What follows is not an analysis, guberniia by guberniia, but rather a sampling of the kind of Zhenotdel activity in which the krest'ianki were involved. Each "baba" drawn into the female political network, however, briefly, was herself a cultural phenomenon when she returned to her village.

One report published in mid-1920 relates that non-Party volost conferences of peasant women were--by closest count--conducted in 60 gubernii during the previous half year. In all 853 conferences took place.¹¹⁶ A volost conference usually consisted of around 200 people.¹¹⁷

Delegates meetings among krest'ianki were usually conducted in areas having Communist Party cells (the

Ukraine, Samara, and Riazan gubernii were given as examples). Besides volost delegatskii meetings, there were also village delegatki meetings in those villages having large enough populations, for example, in Ekaterinburg, and Tsaritsyn gubernii.¹¹⁸

The fundamental issues discussed at well-run volost delegatskii meetings were those of land and taxes. The tax in kind and the land code were laws about which the "baby" had the most troubling questions. Other topics of interest were the significance of the committees of mutual aid, the struggle against samoganka-brewing, the new rights of the krest'ianka in Soviet Russia, hygiene and the protection of mothers and infants.¹¹⁹ Questions of anti-religious propaganda were rarely put forth at delegatskii meetings in view, we are told, of the lack of skillful agitators available to deal with anti religious questions.¹²⁰ Reports indicated that some delegatki meetings were poorly conducted, touching not on issues of daily concern to the krest'ianka, but on such matters as the international organization of women and Soviet industrialization. The delegatki in these instances lost interest in meetings.¹²¹

Besides non-Party conferences and delegatki meetings, peasant women were drawn into demonstrations. On 8 March

1921, International Women's Day there were 25 of them in Vladimir guberniia with 56,250 working women and 21,250¹²² peasant women participating. Orchestrated marches did not prove genuine enthusiasm for the regime but only that broad numbers of peasant women were in some way touched by the Revolution.

In Kaluga guberniia a Party worker reported that organizational activity was well developed in 89 volosts (out of 176). Delegatki worked in all sections of the¹²³ volost executive committees. The Kaluga guberniia Zhenotdel in 1920-21 conducted 85 meetings at which 4,500 "baby" participated. Delegatki meetings of peasant women were created in 87 volosts, drawing in around 5,000¹²⁴ peasant women. In Siberia, in 1921, there were 272 volost organizers working among peasant women. In Ufa, Samara, Perm, Astrakhan, and Ekaterinburg gubernii and in the Don area, the Zhenotdel assigned volost organizers, conducted delegate meetings, and apportioned delegates to¹²⁵ volost executive committees. In Saratov guberniia in 1921 there were up to 1,000 peasant women serving as¹²⁶ praktikants--usually for three months. In a series of volosts in Penza guberniia peasant women were elected to the Soviet and in one area, a krest'ianka was chosen as chair of the Soviet. At an uezd Congress of Soviets in

Penza guberniia out of 110 delegates there were eleven
peasant women.¹²⁷ Here and there one met a peasant woman
who was a member of a Volost Executive Committee, a
director of one or another section of the Volost Soviet,
or a member of the board of the Volost cooperative. But
as a Communist reporter noted frankly, it was difficult to
draw even the peasant delegatki into the Party.¹²⁸

Although most peasant women remained passive, reluctant to be involved in the Communist network, within a few years after the Revolution, many became aware, not only of women who stepped out of traditional "baby" roles and entered public life--but of tensions resulting locally from the phenomenon of women in political activity. Let us look at a few examples.

In a village in Penza guberniia when a peasant woman was proposed for the Soviet (presumably at Party urging), the men objected, calling it "unheard of" that "baby" be in directing roles. (Finally they were convinced to choose a literate Red Army wife).¹²⁹ Men reportedly called it a disaster if their "baba" were elected to the Soviet or attended political meetings. If "baby" gad about at meetings, we will find ourselves without troubles, one muzhik explained.¹³⁰

A report from Smolensk guberniia in 1922 told of a

peasant delegatka who, having become enthused at delegatskii meetings, began to attend the village skhod. There she was greeted with abuse. The Party worker recommended to the delegatka that she not go to the village skhod--although her participation was of course legal--but that she develop a circle underground. Once having formed a nucleus of conscious krest'ianki, then she might risk¹³¹ going forth openly.

In one raion in Ivanovo-Vosnesensk guberniia where the Zhenotdel was particularly active such a circle seemed to have been formed as early as 1920. At a gathering to elect members to the Soviet, there were present 48 women and 50 men. Under the pressure of the kulaks, as the report reads, the candidate chosen was a former tavern keeper. The "baby" raised a cry against him--to the scorn of the men. But as a result of their energetic opposition (encouraged presumably by the local Zhenotdel) they succeeded to draw to their side several peasant men and a candidate was chosen from the "baby" side of the skhod. News of the "baby" victory spread over the entire volost.¹³²

In comparative terms the numbers of peasant women touched by the culture of the Revolution in its first years was small, only thousands, when the countryside of the USSR consisted of 18.5 million scattered small

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farms. But that they reached and influenced relatively few women should not minimize the novelty of the Zhenotdel's impact. The Party was anxious to bring peasant women into political life because they represented the most backward element of rural society; they had supported counter revolution during the Civil War and they could by their resistance be a dead weight on the Revolution. But the message to the "baby" was couched not in terms of the trouble women might create as a negative influence on husband and children if they were not brought within the orbit of Soviet power. The message was rather a feminist one. The "baba" was invited to focus on her own unhappy past as a woman. She was reminded of the hardship of her life in Tsarist times with a husband who beat her, but whom she could not leave because divorce was not allowed, and who had the right to bring her back. She was urged to recall a time when she had no rights, when she was the slave of husband, father, brothers, and father-in-law.¹³⁴ Peasant women at a meeting might hear a red-kerchiefed Zhenotdel organizer declare: Comrades, remember your mother, wives, sisters, and how they lived. Listening to the enthusiastic young woman, Neverov's Katia Dolga thought to herself: how good if she would come to our village. This woman would really give it to

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the men! The approach was feminist and occasionally so was the response.

The Zhenotdel's message to the krest'ianka emphasized women's interests, her oppressed situation and her need to utilize her new rights. That an embryonic feminism was present from the outset, is suggested by a report from Ufa guberniia in 1920. In mid-March a non-Party conference of worker and peasant women took place. Despite the difficulty of movement, delegates came from the most remote uezds, 110 in all, of whom more than half were peasants. The delegates were imbued with the idea that they were going to Ufa not for bread or to buy cotton fabric but for a "women's meeting."¹³⁶

We have evidence that many krest'ianki resented and distrusted the Zhenotdel and that they related negatively to the proposal that they involve themselves in public work.¹³⁷ Yet we know also that here and there the krest'ianki turned to the Zhenotdel network as to their advocate and that an authentic interaction developed between the Soviet network and female peasant society. There are reports of delegatki who were conscientious and effective. In a village in Smolensk guberniia, a widow of a Red Army man, receiving a refusal of land from the sowing committee, asked for help from the delegatka.

The latter demanded that the woman receive the land to which she was entitled.¹³⁸ In other instances a delegatka intervened in behalf of a pregnant woman during War Communism's era of obligatory labor citing the rights of pregnant women which she had seen in a report at a delegatki meeting. The chairman of the village Soviet was obliged to release the woman from the assigned work.¹³⁹ The delegatka, in the case of peasant divorces, might be similarly attentive to the property rights of the krest'ianka.¹⁴⁰ Indeed evidence suggests that the "baba" responded readily to efforts to help her obtain her new legal rights. But Party help of this sort was evidently sparse.¹⁴¹

Moshe Lewin writes that in general the Party member did not stand out from his fellows either in respect of political training or conduct. The image of the Party official was often that of the nachalnik, the boss who had to be obeyed. Underlying this attitude there was a fundamental peasant indifference which, at times, turned to disrespect or hostility.¹⁴² There were, of course, exceptions. Some Communists won the respect of the villagers thanks to their dedication and high moral qualities.¹⁴³ The peasants reacted positively in such occasional instances and showed their appreciation. We find examples within the Zhenotdel network of Party workers who made it

a point to explain in the village that they did not
view themselves as "power" but simply as working women. ¹⁴⁴

A Party worker in Smolensk guberniia described how, at the
end of a delegatkii meeting, a young krest'ianka begged
her to come to her village. The Party worker was moved
by her expression of urgency. Feeling that the young
woman sought emotional support, she went to the village
and talked with her, answering her questions. We became
friends, she concluded. ¹⁴⁵

At a meeting in Orel guberniia a volost organizer
told of a typical day spent gathering women for meetings.
Toward evening you are tired of talking, you have not eaten,
and your head hurts. But always there is some krest'ianka
who invites you home for soup and bread urging, since you
teach us for nothing, you must come to us and eat. ¹⁴⁶

In Penza guberniia, a Zhenotdel worker, although she
bemoaned the fact that the Zhenotdel had done little that
was substantial in the guberniia by way of liberating
women, concluded that on the whole the Zhenotdel were
close to the local krest'ianki. She pointed out that in
those areas where there was a krest'ianksii Dom, on the
bazaar days so many women came seeking help, sometimes
simply in writing a letter, that it was necessary to put
them in line. ¹⁴⁷

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The conscientious Zhenotdel worker found indications in such signs that the Communists were reaching the "baba." Still, the evidence is overwhelming that most peasant women in the early years of the Revolution were either hostile or indifferent to the new culture. How then are we to explain the puzzling conclusion of some Party workers, implying quite the opposite, that peasant women, when they received special attention from the Communists, began more than their husbands to favor the regime.¹⁴⁸ In certain instances, we are told, Bolshevik rural activists failed to influence the men but succeeded in organizing the women, appealing to their underprivileged position.¹⁴⁹ Occasionally the peasant women became genuinely zealous. Indeed, a case was reported of a Communist who was reluctant to accept as Party members two leaders among the "baby" because their enthusiasm disrupted¹⁵⁰ political meetings.

If these observations can not be regarded as indications of a positive response of the "baby" to the Soviet regime, neither should they be dismissed as mere optimistic dreaming on the part of Communist women. Rather they indicate that occasionally dedicated Party workers were able to interact effectively with groups of krest'ianki.

These peasant women, out of their own needs, responded appreciatively to the new culture.

Footnotes

1. K.N. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaia Vlast' (Moscow, 1921), pp.12-1
2. M. Lewin, Russian Peasants and Soviet Power (Evanston, Illinois, 1975), p.33. Hereafter M. Lewin.
3. One peasant in Penza guberniia replied to the question what if the "barin" were to return: "I have six sons. I would arm each one with a pitchfork. As for me, I would meet him with an axe."
- N. Rosnitskii, Litsa Derevni (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926), p. 110.
4. M. Lewin, p. 37.
5. One should not, however, be absolute as to the absence of culture. In the village of Viriatino prior to the Revolution there were newspapers. Sula Benet, ed. and trans., The Village of Viriatino (New York, 1970), pp. 154-55.
6. On Communist language, see A. M. Selishchev, Iazyk revoliutsionnoi epokhi: iz nabliudenii nad Russkim iazykom poslednikh let. 1917-1926 (Moscow, 1928).
7. Mikhail Sholokhov, The Don Flows Home to the Sea (London, 1940) p. 79. Hereafter, Sholokhov, Don.
8. Iakov Korobov, Katia Dolga (Vladimir, 1958), p. 26.
9. Panteleimon Romanov, "Black Fritters," in Joshua Hunitz, ed., Russian Literature Since the Revolution (New York, 19-8), p. 415.
10. Sholokhov, Don, p. 95.
11. Rozanov, "Black Fritters," p. 411.
12. Joshua Hunitz, ed., Russian Literature Since the Revolution, p.74.
13. Lydia Selikullina, "The Old Woman," in Joshua Hunitz, ed., Russian Literature Since the Revolution (New York, 19-8), p. 398.
14. "Andron Neputevyi," in A.S. Neverov, Izbrannye Proizvedeniia (Moscow, 1958), pp. 315-16. For reference to Lenin and Trotsky, consult original edition. See translation in Elisaveta Fen,

Modern Russian Stories (London, 1943), pp. 121-164.

15. Xenia Gasiorowska, Women in Soviet Fiction (Wisconsin, 1968), p. 26.

Unfortunately for the historian, illegitimacy statistics were not kept after the Revolution. See unpublished paper, David Ransel, "Illegitimacy in Pre-Revolutionary Russia," p. 1. Paper presented to the AAASS, Philadelphia, November, 1980.

16. F.I. Panferov, Bruski, trans. Z. Mitrov and J. Tabrisky. (Hyperion Press, Westport, Conn., 1977), p. 184.

17. "Andron Neputevyi," in A.S. Neverov, Izbrannye Proizvedeniia, pp. 313-14.

18. Ibid, p. 300.

19. Ibid, p. 308.

20. A.M. Kollontai, Polozhenie zhenshchiny v evoliutsii khoziaistva (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), 198.

21. "Andron Neputevyi," p. 304.

22. Jessica Smith, Woman in Soviet Russia (New York, 1928), pp. 31-32.

23. Ibid, p. 44.

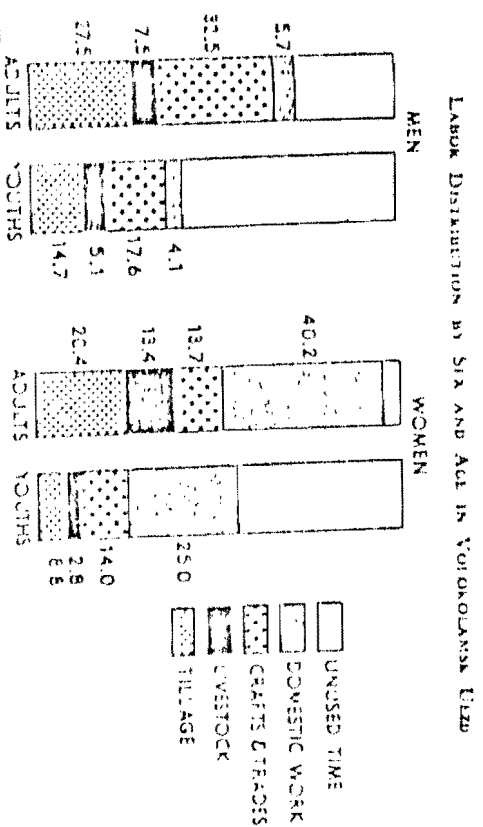
24. M. Kubanin, Klassovaia sushchnost' protsessa drobleniia krest'ianskikh khoziaistv (Moscow, 1929), pp. 71-75. For laws regulating partition of the Dvor, see E. Dombrovski, Krest'ianskii Dvor i semeino-imushchestvennye razdely (Moscow, 1926) and N.M. Tomashevskii, Zakony o nasledstvennosti v krest'ianskom khoziaistve (Leningrad, 1925).

25. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 30.

26. For statistics on Soviet village government, M. Lewin, Russian Peasants and Soviet Power, p. 81.

27. Ibid, p. 26.

28. Ibid, p. 81. A bedniak was a poor peasant. A batrak was an agricultural wage laborer employed by private peasants or by their communities.
 29. See Lydia Seifullina, "The Old Woman," pp. 398-99 and Iakov Korobov, Katia Dolga, p. 18.
 30. See K.N. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaia Vlast', p. 19.
 31. F. I. Panferov, Brusski, pp. 162, 164.
 32. Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina (New York, 1961), p. 605.
 33. See Antonina Martynova, "Life of the Pre-Revolutionary Village as Reflected in Popular Lullabies," in David Ransel, ed., The Family in Imperial Russia (Urbana, Illinois, 1978), pp. 171-185.
 34. Ibid, p. 172.
 35. F. I. Panferov, Brusski, p. 20.
 36. Antonina Martynova, "Life of the Pre-Revolutionary Village as Reflected in Popular Lullabies," p. 172.
 37. Kommunistka, no. 3-5 (1922), p. 33.
 38. For a sense of the importance of the cow in the life of the "baba", see Romanov, "Black Fritters."
 39. Xenia Gasiorowska, Women in Soviet Fiction, p. 28.
 40. Lev Tolstoy, Vlast' t'my, in Sobranie Sochinenii (Moscow, 1963), XI, 101.
 41. But many villages had little contact with Party activity and hence little sense of a new culture. See p. 20.
 42. E. Preobrazhenskii in Kommunistka, no. 7(1920), pp. 19-20.
 43. K.N. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaia Vlast', p. 6.
- The following table shows how much longer the "baba" worked as compared



Source: A.V. Chayanov, Peasant Farm Organization, trans. by H.B.F. Smith (Moscow, 1925).

chart is undated but presumably pertains to the early years of the NEP

44. Jessica Smith, Woman in Soviet Russia, p. 31.

45. K.M. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaya Vlast', p. 10.

46. Ibid, p. 10.

47. D.P. Rozin, Proverka Raboty Nizovogo Apparatov v Derevne

(Moscow, 1926, p. 80. Organization was slow. By 1924-25, halusa Gubernia had only 14 nurseries. Ibid.

48. Kommunistika, no. 12-13 (1921), p. 67.

49. See Krest'ianstvo i trudovaya povinnost' (Moscow, 1920).

For exceptions for women, see Beatrice Farnsworth, Aleksandra Kollontai (Stanford, 1980), p. 192.

50. Jessica Smith, Woman in Soviet Russia, p. 33.

51. As late as 1930 more than half the peasants were illiterate and 2/3 of the female peasant population was illiterate. Viktoriya Ulasovich, Zhenshchina v kolchoze (Moscow, 1930), p. 58.

52. Jessica Smith, Woman in Soviet Russia, p. 32.
53. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, pp. 92-93.
54. Ibid, pp. 92-93.
55. Ibid, p. 107. Although adults were generally negative to the idea of literacy-training, in those villages where cultural work was extensive, even older women went willingly to the "likpunkt."
Ibid, p. 106.
56. K.K. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaia Vlast', pp. 28-29.
57. D. P. Rozit, Proverka Raboty Nizovogo Apparata v Derevne, p.79.
58. On lack of a social conscience, see M. Lewin, p. 22. A number of peasants did enter communes. But only a fraction of 1% of Russian peasants ever joined. See Robert Wesson, Soviet Communes (New Jersey, 1963), p. 6. The average early commune consisted of about 50 people.
Ibid, p. 121. As of December 1918, there were 1,384 communes registered but the actual number was higher. See Bukharin in Pravda, December 20, 1918 as cited in Wesson, p. 117. Collectivist tendencies were always there to some extent among the peasantry. See M. Lewin, p. 108. But collectivist tendencies in regard to one's own economic advantage is not the same thing as a social conscience.
59. K. N. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaia Vlast', pp. 24, 29.
60. Kommunistka, no. 10-11 (1921), p. 46.
61. See Pravda, June 1, 1919 as cited in Robert Wesson, Soviet Communes, p. 216.
62. Beatrice Farnsworth, Aleksandra Kollontai, p. 320n
63. Robert Wesson, Soviet Communes, p. 216.
64. For these comments on women in communes cited in Wesson, p. 216, see Sergei Tretiakov, Feld-Herren (Berlin, 1931). Tretiakov described the "Communist Lighthouse," a commune begun in 1920. Another source on women in communes is P. Lezhnev-Finkovskii, Sovkhozy i Kolkhozy

(Moscow, 1928), p. 187 as cited in Robert Wesson, p. 260, 143.

Also see A. F. Chmyga, Ocherki po Istorii Kolkhoznoho Dvizheniia na Ukraine (1921-25)(Moscow, 1959), p. 193.

65. Robert Wesson, Soviet Communes, p. 112. See A.L. Strong, The Soviets Conquer Wheat (New York, 1931), pp. 121-22 on "Fortress of Communism." See A. F. Chmyga, p. 92 for widows organizing kolkhozy in early years of the Revolution.

66. Xenia Gasiorowska, Women in Soviet Fiction, p. 33.

67. Mariia-bol'shevichka in Aleksandr Neverov, Izbrannye Proizvedeniia (Moscow, 1958), pp. 195-200.

68. See A. Karavaeva's introduction to A. Neverov, Izbrannye, p. 4.

69. See Kommunistka, no.3(1922-), p. 26 and Ibid, no. 12-13 (1921), pp. 66-67. The majority of peasant women in the Soviet were Red Army wives.

70. Ibid, no.6 (1923), p. 39.

71. Ibid, p. 46.

72. Ibid, no.3(1924), p. 26.

73. Ibid, no.8 (1923), p. 20. The writer noted that young girls did not have independent work but worked as a member of the family unit and were thus entirely dependent on the family.

74. The above description of the "baba" on the mir is by V. Romanov in Kommunistka, no.8-9(1922), pp. 35-36. Romanov suggested as a remedy a Zhenotdel sponsored union of single women householders in each volost to protect them from the mir.

75. Kommunistka, no.8-9 (1922), p. 35.

76. I. Korobov, Katia Dolga, p. 42.

77. Ibid, p. 37.

78. Ibid, pp. 43-44.

79. Ibid, p. 44.

80. Ibid, p. 102.

81. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, pp. 38-39.
82. Kommunistka, no. 6 (1923), p. 39.
83. Kommunistka, no. 3-4 (1923), p. 46.
84. Kommunistka, no. 3-4 (1923), p. 47.
85. Kommunistka, no. 3-4 (1923), p. 47.
86. Kommunistka, no. 8 (1923), p. 29.
87. Kommunistka, no. 6 (1923), p. 39.
88. Ibid, p. 39.
89. For collective purchasing organizations, see Kommunistka, no. 3-4 (1923), p. 52 and Ibid, no. 3, (1924), pp. 33-36 and no. 7(1924), p. 33.
90. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 54. For peasant distrust of cooperatives, Ibid, pp. 52-55.
91. The number was small. By the mid-twenties, a friendly source indicated, over 500,000 women were members of consumer's (handwork) cooperatives, 180,000 were members of kustarnye, and "a large number" have joined the agricultural cooperatives. Jessica Smith, Woman in Soviet Russia, p. 43. (Geographical area not indicated.)
92. Kommunistka, no. 3-4 (1920), p. 30. The presence of two horses suggests a relatively prosperous artel. See V.A. Sidorov, Klassovaia bor'ba v dokolkhoznoi derevne (Moscow, 1978), p. 64.
93. See N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevne, p.81 for indication that intentions of Communist activists were not always carried out.
94. Sometimes with unhappy results. Rosnitskii reports an incident of a husband in Penza guberniia beating his wife for joining a choral circle. She remained in the group. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 113.

95. Kommunistka, no. 10-11(1921), p. 47 for indication as to the kind of reading material disseminated in Saratov. See p. 48 for publications aimed at peasant women.

96. Otchet otдела TsKRKP (b) po rabote sredi zhenshchin za god raboty (Moscow, 1921), p. 28; Kommunistka, no. 6-7 (1922), pp. 6-7.

97. Kommunistka, no. 12-13 (1921), p. 55

98. Kommunistka, no. 7(1920), p. 34.

99. Otchet otдела TsKRKP(b) po rabote sredi zhenshchin za god raboty (Moscow, 1921), p. 27.

100. I. Korobov, Katia Dolga, p. 101.

101. For women at early meetings, see E. Bochkareva and S. Liubimova, Svetlyi put' (Moscow, 1967), pp. 86-89 and the chapter "krasnyi platochek" on the delegatka.

102. I. Korobov, Katia Dolga, p. 101.

103. Ibid, p. 110.

104. Gail W. Lapidus, "Sexual Equality in Soviet Policy," in D. Atkinson, et al., Women in Russia (Stanford, 1977), p. 121.

105. M. Lewin, p. 105.

106. The gubernii were: Iaroslav, Simbirsk, Vladimir, Severnaia-Dvina, Kostroma, Pskov, Kursk, Tver, Kaluga, Gomel', Briansk, Moscow, Nizhegorod, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Samara. Kommunistka, no. 10-11(1921), pp. 40, 42. Female membership in the Party for the same gubernii was 6,499. Ibid, 40, 42. The actual numbers were probably somewhat higher since there were no returns listed for Briansk or Moscow. Only 8 gubernii listed any peasant women as members of the Party: Iaroslav, Vladimir, Kostroma, Kursk, Gomel', Severnaia-Dvina, Nizhegorod, and Ivanovo-Voznesensk.

107. Kommunistka, no. 8(1923), p. 6. In the RSFSR, there were 50,000 sel'sovety and 70,000 in the country as a whole. M. Lewin, p. 105. Few women participated politically in the first years of the Revolution. In Guberniia, uезд, and volost congresses, there were never more than 4 women for every 100 men. Sometimes the proportion was as low as .5 women for every 100 men. Only in the city Soviets was female participation higher. See tables in Kommunistka, no. 8-9 (1922), p. 5.

108. Teodor Sharin, The Awkward Class: Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia 1910-1925 (Oxford University Press, London, 1972), p. 176.

109. The Zhenotdel in 1920-21 was active primarily in European Russia. For Gubernii experiencing the Zhenotdel, see Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), pp. 28-31 and Otchet otzela TSPSR(b) po rabote sredi zhenshoiin za god raboty (Moscow, 1921), p. 25.

110. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 28. In a report from Orel Guberniia, Nizrina points out that there are 45 volost organizers, nearly all serving without pay. Their work is therefore of an extremely low level. The women are young and fervent but they are ill-prepared. Kommunistka, no. 6 (1923), p. 38.

111. Thus in Gomel Guberniia out of 36 selected volosts systematic work was carried out only in 16. In Kursk Guberniia out of 36 volosts work was conducted in 32. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 29. And the presence of the Zhenotdel did not necessarily mean substantial progress. For example, a report from Penza Guberniia in 1921 indicated that after a year of work the broad mass of women in the Guberniia were affected only slightly. But peasant women did participate in local elections and here and there went into the Soviet. In 5 volosts 20 peasant women were elected to the Soviet. Kommunistka, no. 6-9

(1921), pp. 54-55.

112. Kommunistka, no. 10-11 (1921), p. 43.

113. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 29.

114. Kommunistka, no. 8 (1923), p. 29.

115. See Kommunistka, no. 8-9 (1922), p. 35 on peasant resentment.

"Patronage" (shefstvo) of city communists over village groups sometimes worked out badly and antagonized the peasants. For descriptions of communist irresponsibility and lack of sensitivity to the peasantry, see N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, pp. 107-08.

116. Kommunistka, no. 7 (1920), p. 33.

117. Kommunistka, no. 5 (1920), p. 15.

118. The age of the delegatki was usually 20 to 40. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 29. A report from Penza guberniia is indicative, however, of the underlying mood of the peasant women toward such public work. One "baba" registering herself as a delegate in the hope that she would receive some benefit, crossed her name out when she learned that the delegatka did not receive any special advantages. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 113.

119. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 30.

120. Ibid, p. 30.

121. D.P. Rozit, Proverka Raboty Nizovogo Apparata v Derevne, p. 79.

122. Otchet otдела TsKRRP (b) po rabote sredi zhenshchin za god raboty (Moscow, 1921), p. 28. Hereafter Otchet.

123. Ibid, p. 25.

124. Kommunistka, no. 10-11 (1921), p. 46.

125. Otchet, p. 25.

126. Otchet, p. 21. Praktikants received political indoctrination from the Zhenotdel and they served in Soviet institutions.

127. Kommunistka, no. 5(1920), p. 15. But see N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 112 on backward attitudes toward women in public life in other areas of Penza guberniia.
128. Kommunistka, no. 1-2 (1920), p. 38.
129. Kommunistka, no. 5 (1920), p. 15.
130. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 112.
131. Kommunistka, no. 8-9 (1922), p. 35. On legality of women participating in the Skhod, see V.P. Danilov, "Zemel'nye otnosheniia v sovetskoi dokolkhoznoi derevne," Istoriia SSSR vol. 1, no.3 (May-1958), p. 98. But according to Rosnitskii, writing in the mid-twenties about Penza guberniia, in some volosts women lived as they did twenty years earlier. They still did not know they had rights to participate in the skhod and to participate in elections to the Soviet. Women were treated in the old way. The men did not permit them in the skhod; if they came, they abused and laughed at them. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 112.
132. Kommunistka, no. 1-2 (1920), p. 38.
133. A.V. Chayanov, Peasant Farm Organization, trans. by R.E.F. Smith (Homewood, Illinois, 1966) (Originally printed Moscow, 1925), p.2.
134. K. Samoilova, Krest'ianka i Sovetskaia Vlast', pp. 6-7.
135. Iakov, Korobov, Katja Dolga, pp. 42-43.
136. Kommunistka, no. 1-2 (1920), p. 39.
137. N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, p. 112.
138. Kommunistka, no.8-9 (1922), p. 35.
139. Ibid.
140. Kommunistka, no. 10 (1923), p. 30.
141. Ibid., p. 113.
142. M. Lewin, p. 125. See N. Rosnitskii, Litso Derevni, pp. 84-85

for examples of peasants who once becoming Party members were able to enrich themselves.

143. M. Lewin, p. 125.

144. Kommunistka, no. 8-9 (1922), p. 35.

145. Ibid.

146. Kommunistka, no. 6 (1923), p. 38.

147. Kommunistka, no. 8-9 (1921), p. 55.

148. Aleksandra Kollontai, Polozhenie zhenshchiny v evoliutsii khosiaistva (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), p. 197.

149. Teodor Shanin, The Awkward Class (Oxford, 1972), p.176,

D.P. Rozit, Proverka Raboty Nizovogo Apparata v Deravne, p.77.

150. D.P. Rozit, Proverka Raboty Nizovogo Apparata v Deravne, p. 77.