



Rabotnitsa (The Woman Worker) and *Krest'ianka* (The Peasant Woman) are published monthly and have a readership of approximately 20 million each.

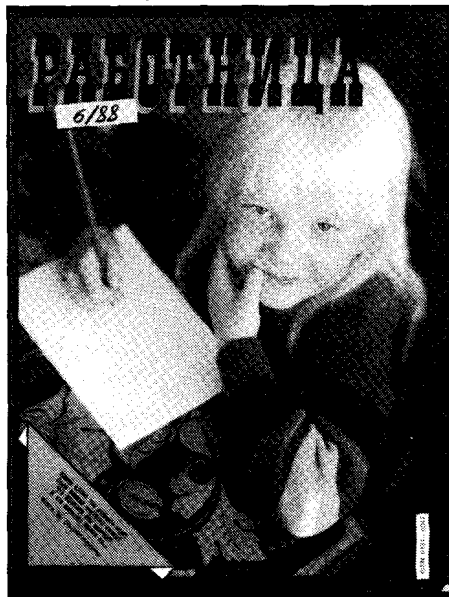
Rabotnitsa, August 1989

I have five children to feed. We live in an apartment with a wood stove. Firewood is a problem. You can only buy it from speculators, who ask 70 to 100 rubles for a carload. I receive 60 rubles (12 rubles for each child) from the family assistance program and a 50 ruble allowance to care for my youngest. If I buy the fuel, how can I feed five mouths? Winter is coming — I will freeze together with my children.

N. Sharkova

A lot of people today talk about charity. They write in the newspapers and journals that, in this country, we have millions of people living on the verge of poverty. At the same time, we have an endless series of contests — "Moscow Beauty Queen," "Miss Ural," "Miss Charm," "Miss USSR," etc. The beauty queens are given crowns worth eleven thousand rubles, cars, mink coats. Next door are our impoverished hospitals, lacking in the most basic facilities, and I'm not talking about disposable syringes. Why does the government find money to finance these contests, but not to help sick people?

Eighteen months ago my husband suffered from paralysis. Do you think he received any treatment? No. We had neither money nor medicine — nothing. He was given a pension of 120 rubles and told to live and not to complain. We are supposed to clothe two young children with these 120 rubles. I am not complaining and I am not asking for anything from the state. But where is the justice in all of this? Of course the contests are a lovely thing, but only when we don't need to talk about people whose income is below 60 rubles



Women Tell Their Story

Letters to the Editor from Rabotnitsa and Krest'ianka

TRANSLATED BY JANET HYER

a month. After all, these are two extremes. They are incompatible.

E. Melikhova

Rabotnitsa, June 1988.

The state grants many privileges to mothers. I won't run through them — everyone knows them. Something else is worrying me. Two young mothers work in our brigade at the factory. One

is the mother of a pre-schooler, the other has a school-aged child. The children often get sick and their mothers take time off work to look after them. As a rule, our busiest days at work are when the finished products are shipped out. We have to work for the mothers on leave, even though we don't get paid for it. I know that leaving the child at the nursery is not a solution, since the child will get sick there more often. And you cannot count on grandmothers for everything. But all the same, we have to come up with something. After all, this doesn't happen only at our enterprise.

Maybe we could look more closely at a woman with young children when she is hired to see if she could work somewhere where she wouldn't become a burden to the labour collective.

N. Pyzhikova

Dear editors! We are a group of workers at a factory which makes souvenirs.

Your magazine wages a constant struggle against the infringement on women's rights in the workforce. We ask you to help us. At our enterprise, almost every Saturday is a workday. When the factory does not fulfill its plan, management comes and tells us that we can't have Saturday off. There is no way around it. If you do not come, they will take away your bonus and they will threaten to reduce your pay and to take away your time off for summer vacation.

It's impossible to fulfill the plan because of the unsatisfactory way the work is organized (poor supply of materials and instruments). Alcoholism still persists — at a recent Party meeting the behaviour of several supervisors, who came to work drunk, was looked into. Of course, all of this affects the results of the enterprise's activity, and it takes its toll on us, the workers.

Zaitseva, Moiseeva, Larionova, and others



You often discuss cosmetics, exercises, etc. on the pages of your magazine. I am sure that very few women follow your advice systematically. Why? There's no time. I recently conducted an experiment. I asked several friends a series of questions. Three of them had two children. Two of them had three children, and two more had one child. And here are the results. Each one got up no later than six in the morning and went to bed after midnight. "Do women exercise and have a massage?" "No," they replied in chorus, except for one who said very rarely. "Do you go to the theater or to the movies?" "Only with the children, and not often," they answered unanimously. I asked them how much time they spend with their children — "15-20 minutes." Only one answered "I try for 30 minutes." Lastly, I wanted to know how my friends amused themselves. "I sew and knit a little," answered two. The others categorically said "I don't attempt anything other than the most important housework."

So, try to be charming, fascinating, bewitching, and mysterious!

The proposal to give women the opportunity to work flexible hours, with a shortened workday (for example, up to

six hours), is a good idea. There will be a loss in pay, but for women the two extra hours are more important. There would be time for the children, and for massages and exercise.

And it would also be good to organize more co-operatives like "Nanny" with hourly rates. Then it would be possible to go to the theater or a concert peacefully, knowing that the children are being looked after.

I have not talked about the role of husbands. In most of the families I have been talking about, the husbands are not bad helpers. But, after all, they are also busy 8-9 hours at work.

Elena Liubimova

Krest' ianka, June 1988.

"I have tried all channels, but with no luck," wrote N. Iu. Zakharova to the editors. "I work as the head of a kindergarten. Our kindergarten is affiliated with the local village council, on the same territory where the Voskhod collective farm is located. The farm is building a well-appointed house. There is enough room for everyone. But the collective farm does not want to give apartments to 'outsiders.' And the 'outsiders' are us, the workers at the kindergarten."

The editors approached the executive committee of the local soviet of people's deputies. The head of the executive committee announced that the collective farm management had decided to give Zakharova a two-room apartment in the new house.

"Dear Krest' ianka," wrote T.M. Bologova, a single mother from a state farm. "I worked as a store manager. Last year, when a conflict arose, I decided to change jobs, but I was not given my work book for several months. As a result, I could not get a job before going on maternity leave. [In order to receive the benefit, a woman needs at least one year's job seniority.] I recently had my second child. How can I support two children if they will not pay me any maternity benefits?"

As the secretary of the local trade union council explained to the editors, Bologova was reinstated in her former job with payment of wages for the time she was forced to take off. She went on maternity leave and received the benefit.

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anonymity

JOANNA KAFAROWSKI

I like striding along with my jeans that sag in the bum,
And my father's old sweater with the holes patched up
And not too well either because I can't sew.

But most of all, best of all, I like to move unencumbered,
My arms free to swing in time with whatever half-remembered,
Half-forgotten song I happen to be singing at the moment.

The simple fact is — I don't like purses or wallets
Or anything that hangs on the shoulder, tucks under the arm,
Fits neatly into the palm of the hand,
Contains money, credit cards, license, keys and of course,
An untidily organized Everywoman's Almanac.

My greatest fear in any dire public emergency
Is not whether I'm wearing the underwear I was given
At age 12 — with the pink elephants and broken elastic,
But that I'll be found lying unconscious in the street,
Aided by someone who searches my pockets for identification,
Trying to name me, trying to pin me down.

Canadian Returnee

LILIANE WELCH

Sunday curls noiseless over Luxembourg,
Sunday without work, fleeing into bells,
candles waning skyward. And I, Canadian
returnee, conquer engraved stone, until
the riven citadel spews fireballs again,
their comet-tails scanning the ramparts.
And touching broken frescoes, my hands
stumble no more blind through speechlessness,
I find words warm like a goose-down shirt,
a comfort seductive against the vetoes
from a past reborn slowly as foreign tongue.
My fingers walk willing through my childhood,
long Sunday afternoons infatuated
by an atlas with Indian campfires
and pencilled somewhere a way toward them.