children often differ greatly from general
behaviour in our country. In the Soviet
Union older parents and their married
children, even with families, often still
live together. This can be explained not
only by our housing problem — though
that is very relevant — but also by the fact
that we tend to have much closer relation-
ships. The extended family is still very
much alive in our society. Mutual assist-
tance and co-operation between the gen-
erations is an everyday set of arrange-
ments.

From what I read, it seems to me that the
generations in Canada are far more torn
apart, at least physically if not always
spiritually. The characters in Alice
Munro’s stories have mostly abandoned
their homes early in life, left to study or
begin working, and then face a similar
situation with their own children.

Of course, reading Munro, like other
authors who write simply and frankly
about life, leads you to analyze and con-
template your own lot. Since two cultures
are represented in my own family —
Canadian and Soviet — I would like to be
able to take the best and kindest features
of each. This relates to the family as well
as life in general. I hope that, thanks to the
steadily widening contacts between people
different countries, many of our women
will also have the opportunity to learn
something from you, to see things in new
ways, and perhaps also to make you re-
consider some of your views. Time will
tell!

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**IS THE FUTURE FEMALE?**


**Denise Russell**

Is the future female? Lynne Segal’s
answer is ‘no’ — her vision is for a human
future in which the balance between the
sexes is equalized. Feminism is needed to
reach such a future, but it must be a
feminism with a socialist bent, a femi-

nism that is tied down to the social prac-
tices of women and men, in and out of the
home. She criticizes “cultural feminism”
that stands aloof from social practices and

fosters thought and practice.

The weaknesses of cultural feminism in the
analyses of sexuality, motherhood and
peace are fully explored; in particular, she
points out how this direction in feminism
can lead to a very reactionary politics.

Cultural feminism is represented by au-

thors such as Mary Daly and Dale

Spender, who claim that there are essential
biological differences between the sexes
which have a profound effect on our psychol-

ogies. Segal links the French feminist Kris-
teva and Irigaray in with this trend, and

accuses them of “psychic essentialism.” I

find the latter a confusing and perhaps
contradictory notion — in that essential-

ism usually gets its meaning in relation to

some type of biological imperative — and

hence her critique of French feminism

rather poorly developed. Yet in other femi-

nist debates, (e.g. in Australia, where

I teach) it is the French feminists rather

than Daly and Spender who are more

often set in opposition to socialist femi-

nism. The former attempt what they see as

a ‘higher-level’ challenge — a challenge
to the structures of thought that we use to
give meaning to ourselves and our lives.

This is of course very abstract, usually

removed from particular social practices.

But many believe that if you don’t change

underlying conceptions, then oppressive

social practices will be perpetuated. As

this is a complex, long-term project it’s a

bit unfair to demand that such a feminism

have an effect on social practices here and

now. I don’t believe that this direction in

feminism need be incompatible with the

socialist feminism that Segal supports, a

feminism which

stresses the social and economic disad-

vantages of women and seeks to

change and improve women’s imme-

diate circumstances, not just in the area

of paid work and family life, but by

providing funding for women’s cultural

projects, increasing women’s safety in

the streets or meeting the special needs

of particular groups of women.

It is true that women rarely support or

work in both alternatives, but this may be
due more to opportunity and interest rather

than any deep theoretical incompatibility.

In attempting to promote an exclusively

socialist feminism Segal may be restrict-
ing the avenues for liberation. Yet I

strongly support her emphasis on chang-

ing social practices, and the need to form

close alliances with men on the left in-

volved in struggles against sexual and

non-sexual forms of oppression.

In the end it is more a ‘reformist socia-

lism’ that Segal supports rather than a

‘revolutionary’ one, in that she advocates

involvement in traditional government

structures. Some might see this as defeat-

ist and not really socialist, but as we see in

our local struggles, the choice often re-
duces to either doing nothing outside the

structures or achieving a little within them.

We don’t have time to wait for the revolu-

tion.

**Is the Future Female?** gives us an

important warning against certain direc-
tions in feminist thought and a reminder

that there is still much to be done to make

the future human.

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**MOTHERS IN THE
FATHERLAND: Women, the
Family and Nazi Politics**

Claudia Koonz. New York: St. Martin’s


**Louise H. Mahood**

“The Nazi Revolution will be an en-
tirely male event,” Adolf Hitler was fond

of saying. While few women were inti-
mately involved in the death-oriented

regime, Hitler’s policies invaded the pri-

cate lives of the majority of German

women. Claudia Koonz’s work has bro-

ken the silence of the abuse suffered by

women during the Nazi era. Her work is

innovative but painful to read. The quality

of rigorous feminist scholarship makes

her book a worthy addition to our librar-

ies.

Koonz does not relieve women Nazis of

their part in Hitler’s master plan. She tells

stories of how female Nazi guards were

more cruel to the women than the male SS

guards. Yet, her work does focus on the

stories of a few women and the cost of

Hitler’s policies to all women. Nazism

was one reaction to the Weimar Republic.

The Weimar Republic had welcomed

women as citizens though not equals in

work or wages. The “New Woman” earned

her keep but was a target too. To Nazis the

“New Woman” was either the “girl” type

who seduced men or the “third sex” who

competed with them. They blamed this