

Commenting on the election results one Moscow journalist gave these grim predictions: "The election campaign confirmed that the country's policy, essentially, is shaped without women's participation. Therefore, it is hardly possible to forecast for the near future an increase in the influence of women deputies in shaping... a policy corresponding to the ideals of socialism, in settling the 'women's question,' that would seek not only for women to perform a reproductive function, but also seek their equal participation in managing all the fields of state and public life in our country."

The election outcome also exposes the weaknesses of plans to develop a grass roots women's movement, through the establishment of local women's councils. It was Gorbachev who called for the councils to be formed, and called on the Party at last year's important June conference to ensure "the door to be open wide for them to governing bodies at all levels, and that questions directly concerning women's interests not be solved without their participation and decisive judgement."

But if these formal arrangements haven't taken off there are spontaneous groups emerging, intent on launching an ideological challenge against women's place in Soviet society.

One such group is the recently formed LOTOS, the League for Society's Liberation from Stereotypes. The brain child of a group of Moscow scholars, it holds lectures and small group discussions inviting women to question: "why is society unfair to them? How long will women go on being regarded as second rate citizens?" Still, LOTOS member Olga Voronina ruefully recognizes that the western women's movement has a twenty year head start on them.

But regardless of the outcome, the situation of Soviet women requires some examination by Canadian socialists and challenges some of our own strategies for achieving equality. For example, the agenda of reforms advanced by the women's movement in Canada, while quite far-reaching and in some respects a direct challenge to capitalism, is largely in place in Soviet society, but it has not resulted in equality — even within a socialist system.

The question of the double burden remains regardless of how it is shared. Have we underestimated the social, economic and time pressures of child rearing? Does the current level of economic development, either here or in the Soviet Union, make it feasible to advance realistically the socialization of child care or the industrialization of the household as a solution

within the realizable future?

In our demand for an equal division of labour in the family, have we underestimated the pressures of job success and how this impacts on the economic well being of the family?

Don't we need to take another look at the nuclear family as the basic societal unit? A number of socialists in Canada have stressed the advantages of the extended family or modified family forms, such as communal households, but women in many societies, including many Soviets, now live in an extended family situation. What can we learn from this?

How do socialist governments respond to popular demands? If masses of women are pressing for the "choice" of full-time child rearing, should the option not be made available?

I don't presume to have the answers to these questions; hopefully they can form the basis for an ongoing debate in the Canadian women's movement.

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Hostel Women

J. DIDIER-KING

She used to fit
inside of him.
Curved 'round knuckles,
the back of his hand.

And they'd walk
around (or under things)
spray painting words
on rock walls.

Dancing
beneath skin.

She knows of things
harder than this.

How hands get
cold in pockets.

How they snap
against the cheek.

And how it's easy
to speak of hiding.
Losing yourself
in the underside.

This is the third move
she's made. Sleeping
in rooms with other women,
their broken noses, bruised minds.

But she is safer now.
Her blanket
soft as the lining
in a pocket. And

at night her room fills
with life sounds.
The sounds
of women breathing.

Drunken Praise

J. DIDIER-KING

Your actions speak
the drunken praise
of true spirit.

(distilled fluid,
mashed grain)

I'd prefer
you'd remember
touching me.

Hands touch other
hands. Reach
for things,
like feet
under a table.