

## Private Matters Become Public: Western European Communist Exiles and Emigrants in Stalinist Russia in the 1930s

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**SUMMARY:** This article looks at the experiences of foreigners in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, focusing on the divide between the public and the private. For Party members it was assumed that nothing could remain private or personal. In sessions of “criticism and self-criticism”, even intimate questions had to be put into the public domain, since a Party member’s private life had to be exemplary. From a gender perspective, it is interesting to note that the leading justification for the public handling of private affairs in Party forums was the equality postulated between women and men, or more precisely between female and male Party members. In that sense, these discussions can be interpreted as potential tools in the hands of women to stigmatize “noncommunist” male behaviour, that is behaviour that degraded women. But the official attention given to private matters also served other means. For the Party leadership, these discussions proved instrumental in disciplining Party members, and in a particularly effective way, inasmuch as the persons concerned participated in the process. Despite the assumed gender equality, however, Soviet notions of private and public were not only constantly changing but also highly gendered. During the Terror, women and men became victims in different ways, thereby also highlighting their different social positions and functions.

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In a letter from Moscow in 1932, Bertolt Brecht’s intimate collaborator, Margarete Steffin, told him about the public trial of a man who had raped and hit his wife after she had returned from an abortion. The man was condemned to five years in solitary confinement. A short time before the trial the Party had expelled him. The audience welcomed the announcement of the verdict with enthusiasm. Of over 1,000 persons assisting in the trial, Steffin wrote with compassion, 90 per cent were women.<sup>1</sup>

The reported case was in no way unique. More exemplary trials were

1. Margarete Steffin to Bertolt Brecht, Moscow, 23 June 1932, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Literatury i Iskusstva (Russian State Archive for Literature and Art), Moscow: Fond 631, Soiuz pisatelei SSSR, opis 14: Inostrannaia komissii, delo 392; recently published in Stefan Hauck (ed.), *Margarete Steffin. Briefe an berühmte Männer. Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Zweig* (Hamburg, 1999), pp. 56–57.

staged in the first half of the 1930s to publicize the policy of the Stalinist regime, discursively and judicially condemning men who abused women.<sup>2</sup> These trials provoked the intense astonishment of foreign observers and visitors to the Soviet Union.

Sheila Fitzpatrick has recently argued that

[...] the family propaganda of the second half of the 1930s is even more notable for being anti-men than for being anti-revolutionary [...]. In the inevitable conflict between the women's interests, construed as altruistic and pro-family, and men's interests, read as selfish and individualistic, the state was unquestionably in the women's corner.<sup>3</sup>

Men were regarded as the potentially destructive element of family life and women as the pillars of the family. By the mid-1930s, the (socialist) family was ascribed a value as the basic element of the socialist society. As a consequence, "polygamy" and associated behaviour, like abandoning a wife and children, became important "cases" in Party life. The German historian, Robert Maier, in addition, claims that the period following the First Five-Year Plan, from 1932 to 1936, cannot simply be termed as a "repatriarchalization" of Soviet society. On the contrary, he asserts, the regime followed a genuinely new prowomen policy. As in other spheres of societal life, Stalinism demonstrated its capacity to amalgamate elements of the life style and intellectual ideas of the Bolshevik Party elite with elements of the traditional Russian rural world. The important role of women in the family, as well as in the economy, was officially recognized. Thus, "in the eyes of many women, Stalin became the spiritus rector of policies in favour of the female sex".<sup>4</sup>

Such interpretations throw new light on Stalinist women's policy, respectively gender policy. Earlier studies focused on the abandoning of a woman-specific concern in Soviet society, institutionalized through special Party organs like the *Zhenotdel*, followed in 1936 by the new family law prohibiting abortion and putting legal restrictions on divorce.<sup>5</sup>

2. Further examples are given by Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York [etc.], 1990), pp. 143–147.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

4. Robert Maier, "Von Pilotinnen, Melkerinnen und Heldenmüttern", in Matthias Vetter (ed.) *Terroristische Diktaturen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M., 1996), p. 69; cf. Igor Kon, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today* (New York, 1995), p. 79.

5. The decree "In Defence of Mother and Child" was published in *Pravda* on 26 May 1936. See Janet Evans, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defence of Mother and Child'", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (1981), pp. 757–775; Wendy Z. Goldman, "Women, the Family and the New Revolutionary Order in the Soviet Union", in Sonia Kruks et al. (eds), *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism* (New York, 1989), pp. 59–81; Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge, 1993). On the history of the *Zhenotdel*, see Barbara Evans Clements, "The Utopianism of the *Zhenotdel*", *Slavic Review*, 51 (1992), pp. 485–496.



Figure 1. “Katja, die jüngste Pilotin” (Katia, the youngest female pilot). The heroic representations of the Stalin era included women as equals according to the official claim that female emancipation was now realized in the Soviet Union.

From *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ)*, 17 June 1936

When the “women’s bureau” was closed in 1930, the “women’s question” was defined as “solved”, since capitalist conditions of production were considered as overcome. Women were thus the equals of men in the production process.<sup>6</sup> As usual, Stalinism aimed at mastering the future by

6. On this official line of argument see Anna Köbberling, *Das Klischee der Sowjetfrau: Stereotyp und Selbstverständnis Moskauer Frauen zwischen Stalinismus und Perestroika* (Frankfurt a. M., 1997), p. 42.

declaring that the future was already realized in the present. In fact, women were far from having achieved equality in the work sphere and, as the trials against violent men demonstrated, the same was true in the family. But with forced industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture in the First Five-Year Plan, women became a highly requisite labour force. Between 1926 and 1940, the number of female industrial workers multiplied, reaching over five million towards the end of the 1930s. In 1940, women formed 41 per cent of the industrial labour force.<sup>7</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that the state proved ready to meet their needs and interests in the disciplining of their husbands and lovers regarding family and parental duties.

But there was also another side to the penal repression of male brutality and sexual abuse towards women. During the Great Terror of 1937/1938, accusations of such behaviour could become “signifiers” to designate a generally dissolute person. That meant that the person could be labelled as a “counter-revolutionary element”, or “Trotskyite”, or simply an “enemy of the people”. As a Party candidate wrote to the regional Party committee, her husband was leading a “dissolute life”; he had infected her with gonorrhoea and then left her for another woman while attempting to throw her out of the apartment. “He is a double dealer as a Trotskyite”, she emphasized in reporting the case.<sup>8</sup> This example shows the ambivalent significance of denunciations during the Terror, and the diverse use that could be made of them. Although the initiative of the Terror came from upper Party levels, it unleashed a vindictive dynamic where denunciations could be turned into a personal tool to get rid of a competitor at the workplace, an occupant of a bigger room in the communal apartment, or a tyrannical husband. On the other hand, official Soviet conceptions about morality and normality also left their marks on the perceptions and reactions of Party members. In a party meeting of “criticism and self-criticism” of German writers in September 1936, Gustav von Wangenheim conceded that he had not quite understood the political significance of a case of “personal dissolution”. Speaking about an arrested communist, he said he had wondered indeed how this fellow could “degenerate” in the Soviet Union, albeit without suspecting his “Trotskyism”. Nevertheless,

7. Susanne Conze, *Sowjetische Industriearbeiterinnen in den vierziger Jahren. Die Auswirkungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges auf die Erwerbstätigkeit von Frauen in der UdSSR, 1941–1950* (Stuttgart, 2001), p. 17; Marcelline Hutton, *Russian and Soviet Women, 1897–1939: Dreams, Struggles and Nightmares* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1986), pp. 5–6; Manfred Hildermeier, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion 1917–1991. Entstehung und Niedergang des ersten sozialistischen Staates* (Munich, 1998), p. 513, gives a higher percentage (43.3 per cent for 1939), presumably because Hildermeier includes more professions and activities in his category of “workers”.

8. Citations from Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p. 143.

“he and others had warned him that the NKVD would get him for his pornographic drawings”.<sup>9</sup>

From the beginning, Soviet Russia, “the workers’ state”, exerted a great attraction for the (communist) Left in western Europe (and the United States). Communists from all over the world came to work in the central apparatus of the Communist International, the Comintern, living for a time in Moscow. In the 1930s, political events in Europe brought several waves of migration towards the Soviet Union – Germans in 1933, Austrians in 1934, Spaniards in 1938/1939 – while at the same time closing the return option to Poles, Czechs, Slovaks etc. For the First Five-Year Plan, several thousand foreign “specialists” (engineers and skilled workers) were recruited. Their number began to decline by the mid-1930s. Moreover, the entry into the country permitted up to then to refugees – called “political emigrants” once legally accepted – became more and more severely restricted. This was an effect of the increasingly xenophobic policy of the Soviet government. Nevertheless, considered as a whole, the number of communists, political emigrants, and artists with Bolshevik sympathies comprised an estimated average of several thousand, despite a rather high fluctuation.<sup>10</sup>

Their experiences in the Soviet Union were not always the ones expected. It seems that one of the greatest surprises arose from the Soviet conception of private matters. What foreigners from western Europe considered as *personal* or *private* questions, in particular familial and gender relations, were treated in public as highly political issues. Such questions were subjected to public discussions and decisions in the Party and in some cases, as mentioned, forwarded to the judicial authorities. The Party meetings were, in fact, often staged like trials. During the time of the Great Terror, the person-related material generated in those sessions could also be used by the NKVD.

This article will be concerned with examples in which foreigners – mainly communists or new members of the Communist Party – found themselves confronted with such new cultural practices where

9. Reinhard Müller (ed.), *Die Säuberung. Moskau 1936: Stenogramm einer geschlossenen Parteiversammlung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1991), p. 404.

10. On the German and Austrian emigration to the Soviet Union see Carola Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung. Deutsche Emigranten im sowjetischen Exil 1933–1945* (Munster, 1996); Reinhard Müller, *Menschenfalle Moskau. Exil und stalinistische Verfolgung* (Hamburg, 2001); Barry McLoughlin and Hans Schafranek (eds), *Österreicher im Exil. Sowjetunion 1934–1945. Eine Dokumentation* (Vienna, 1999); Barry McLoughlin and Hans Schafranek, “Die österreichische Emigration in die UdSSR bis 1938”, in Traude Horvath and Gerda Neyer (eds), *Auswanderungen aus Österreich. Von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart* (Vienna [etc.], 1996), pp. 163–185; Barry McLoughlin, Hans Schafranek, and Walter Szevera, *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation. Österreicherinnen und Österreicher in der Sowjetunion 1925–1945* (Vienna, 1997).

“traditional” male behaviour was publicly deliberated and repressed.<sup>11</sup> It will look for moments of cultural conflict – which will also prove to be class or milieu conflicts – when differing gender norms collide. Finally, it will ask how foreign men and women adapted, complied to or made use of the new cultural expectations and prescriptions. If the gender and family order stand at the centre of our concern – there were, of course, other conflicts, too – this is on the premise that, furthermore, what was at stake when debating gender relations was the order of Stalinist society as a whole.

#### THE “GREAT FAMILY” AND THE SMALL FAMILY

Even at the height of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, the separation between private and public was never as strict as asserted by political theory, if only for the state’s regulation of such private matters as divorce, role division in the family (which was until then regulated in most states by law), or children’s schooling through civil law. The practice of the Soviet Union did not differ in this sense, although during the initial years of the formation of the regime the tendency was towards a liberal retreat of the state from such matters. In 1918, besides the introduction of civil marriage, divorce became a “private” matter, since it was possible upon mutual consent or just by leaving the common flat. This retreat of state ruling was also true for abortion, which became legal.

By the mid-1930s however, the state’s reframing of its authority over “private” life was apparently welcomed by large segments of Soviet society. At that time, family disintegration became a topic of public debate, and it seems that particularly women from rural and working-class backgrounds asked for tighter legal and judicial controls of men’s responsibilities as fathers and husbands.<sup>12</sup> The new family law of June 1936 did just this, increasing the penalties for nonpayment of alimony, making divorce more difficult, prohibiting abortion, and promising the expansion of the number of childcare facilities. As demonstrated by the above quoted denunciations, it was often women who demanded the Party’s (if the man was a Party member) or the state’s intervention against their husbands or lovers. Women asked the Party to get their men *kul’turnii*, i.e. to educate them as decent, “civilized” husbands and lovers.

11. For a wider discussion of the political communist emigration from western and central Europe to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and its experiences of cultural practices in the Soviet Communist Party, see Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, *Der stalinistische Parteikader. Identitätsstiftende Praktiken und Diskurse in der Sowjetunion der dreißiger Jahre* (Cologne [etc.], 2001).

12. See e.g. the collective letter from the women of Dnepropetrovsk Oblast to the Central Committee of the Party on “alimony and libertinism”, 1936, in Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven, CT, 2000), p. 199. Wendy Goldman also stresses this point in *Women, the State, and Revolution*, pp. 327–331.



They thus seized the opportunity offered in the middle of the 1930s by state policy to implement cultural standards – which from being considered middle-class or “bourgeois” had become “Soviet” – into the lower strata of Soviet society in order to articulate their interests. A reasonable family life as “Soviet” citizens, where husband and wife are faithful, where the husband does not drink nor beat his wife, but treats her in a comradely manner, was defined as the new norm.

The contours of the model can be read in a didactic form in the leading Soviet newspaper in the German language, *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* (*DZZ*), which addressed the German-speaking Soviet population as well as foreign German-speaking communist immigrants. In the mid-1930s, it interviewed on gender relations a number of German and Austrian communists and “political emigrants” – the appellation then common – living in the Soviet Union. The ideal marriage was portrayed through ten interviews with German-speaking or Russian women married to German-speaking husbands. The women had to answer questions about the kind of help their husbands gave them in the household, in furthering their education and their work.<sup>13</sup> From the answers it is clear that the socially expected attitude of the “Soviet” husband was one of participation in the household chores, sometimes even doing the washing. Some had not yet got that far. As one woman says, she would like her man to stay at home more often rather than going to political meetings. But now she accompanies him, and in turn she will persuade him to help her in the house. This, as the paper makes clear, stands in contrast to the traditional attitudes of these foreign workers. However, the message was that in the Soviet Union, where according to official doctrine socialism had been achieved, living conditions were much better than, for instance, in conditions of illegality or under the hostile conditions of “capitalist production”. The paper concluded that on the whole, “after arrival in the Soviet Union, where all conditions were present for a comradely union in marriage and family”, the relationship between men and women amongst the “foreign workers” “had fundamentally evolved”. It was only on the basis of the total legal equality of women, social insurance, and the protection of motherhood that “a comradely marriage was possible, where love, work and mutual help and consideration for one’s spouse form the common ground”. Also, the “new man” was in the making, and foreigners had the duty to follow. Furthermore, the paper made it clear that it was in no way shameful for a man to learn from his Russian wife, since she was often more advanced in her consciousness.

Intercultural marriages between Soviet women and immigrant men could have seemingly civilizing effects on workers coming from the West.

13. “Kameradschaft in der proletarischen Ehe. Durch sozialistische Produktionsverhältnisse zur sozialistischen Lebensweise. Zehn Frauen antworten”, *DZZ*, 3 July 1935.

As one *Schutzbündler*, a member of the Austrian social-democratic militia who emigrated to the Soviet Union after its defeat in the civil war of 1934, now married to a Russian, recorded, he had had “strange views about marriage” before he came to the Soviet Union. He had thought that “he had to be the master” in “his” home. But his wife taught him what “Soviet marriage” meant: she was his comrade, not his cleaning lady. And contrary to his earlier opinion, behaving that way made him in no way “hen-pecked”. It was the understanding of “Soviet marriage” that made him a “comrade of his wife”. He concluded that “now we lead the beautiful life of a happy couple, united by friendship”.<sup>14</sup> Another shared a similar experience. He needed the help of the young worker, Klavdija, his Russian wife, to open his eyes about a “comradely, Soviet marriage”. In the course of a long night’s work she explained to him how the October Revolution had changed Soviet reality for the better and she urged him to join the political circle. Now, the paper wrote, he has learned to speak Russian and has become one of the best workers of his collective.<sup>15</sup>

Not everyone proved receptive to the new cultural norms. Apparently the group of Austrian *Schutzbündler* led to problems that were linked, in terms of official ideology, with their “petty-bourgeois” social-democratic background. Their heroization and adulation on their arrival in the Soviet Union seems to have contributed to giving them a sense of particularity. This feeling was undoubtedly enhanced by the fact that these foreign men were particularly attractive to Russian women, as many testimonies agree.<sup>16</sup> One of the reasons was material, since as foreigners they had access to particular shops and were generally entitled to privileged living conditions.<sup>17</sup> Venereal diseases apparently spread fast. One historical actor claimed that as many as 34 per cent of the men in the hotel where he was staying were infected after a short time.<sup>18</sup> But prostitution was not the only problem. The easy Soviet marriage and divorce formalities enticed some to engage in a Russian marriage although they already had a wife and children in Austria. Others led a “dissolute” life, as the newspaper *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* wrote, divorcing repeatedly or keeping several lovers, refusing to pay alimony, beating and abandoning their wives, and hitting their children. Some claimed that the Soviet Union was the land of “free love” which they interpreted “liberally” as polygamy.<sup>19</sup> Because of the

14. “Die Frau als Kamerad. Meine Ehe im Lande des Sozialismus”, *DZZ*, 21 June 1935.

15. “Ein guter Kamerad”, *DZZ*, 1 April 1936.

16. McLoughlin, Schafranek, and Szevera, *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation*, p. 181.

17. Rosa Puhm, *Eine Trennung in Gorki* (Vienna, 1990), p. 76.

18. McLoughlin, Schafranek, and Szevera, *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation*, p. 271, quoting the *Schutzbündler*, Alois B.

19. “Menschen, die nicht umgelernt haben. Schutzbündler-Ehen, wie sie nicht sein sollen”, *DZZ*, 21 June 1935; *DZZ*, 3 July 1935; McLoughlin, Schafranek and Szevera, *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation*, p. 272.



high “market value” of foreign men, marriages of foreigners were apparently under stress in a general way. As an Austrian woman recorded, she felt very lucky that her husband was not interested in other women, since it was “so difficult in a big city like Moscow to look after one’s husband all the time”. For that reason, she added, many marriages broke up.<sup>20</sup>

“Why is such behaviour possible in the Soviet Union?”, the paper asked its readers rhetorically, “where totally different, new socialist human beings emerge together with the growth of socialism?” The answer was simple, but it contained an essential trait of Stalinist society. They do not consult books, they have not read and studied Stalin’s speeches on the cadres and the way to treat human beings. They treat them simply like “a piece of wood”, was the paper’s opinion. Therefore, these men should go to political education circles, “where the Soviet worker receives the moral foundation for a socialist life”.<sup>21</sup>

These stories of “how I became a better communist” make sense only if one considers the role of the metaphor of the family in the Stalinist representation of social reality, understood as a system of values and beliefs, which orientates interpretations and practices. In the Stalinist society of the 1930s, besides the more or less formalized unit of different individuals living together, the notion of family is extended to the Party collective, the “Great Family”.<sup>22</sup> Speaking about “private” matters, in particular about the “small family”, therefore does not really invalidate the boundaries of the private by propelling it into the “public”. What appears to us as genuinely “public”, the forum of the Party, forms part of the societal spheres where the individual owes complete openness and honesty to the others – like in the normative conception of the family. Furthermore, in official representations, the “Great Family” ranges even higher in terms of loyalty than the “small family”. Putting the interests of the Party before the interest of one’s family was considered as a moral imperative.

The centrality of Party membership in a communist’s life meant that all his or her activities, even those in private life, were relevant to the Party. And since every Party member was a representative of the Party, all personal flaws mattered to the Party. The projected ideal of the relationships between Party members (ideally husband and wife) were

20. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 270.

21. “Menschen, die nicht umgelernt haben. Schutzbündler-Ehen, wie sie nicht sein sollen”, *DZZ*, 21 June 1935.

22. On the importance of this metaphor see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, IL [etc.], 1981), pp. 115–124. Despite the unity suggested by this family image of the Party, this was far from being the case. Cf. J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov (eds), *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven, CT [etc.], 1999).

“comradely”. Party cadres could be men or women. As Party members, as “comrades”, they were equal. A Party member who mistreated a woman acted against the Party. A husband who restricted his wife to the private sphere of the household prevented her from doing her Party duties, if she was a Party member, and he neglected his duty of politically educating others if he was a Party member. Such attitudes, which countervailed Party morals, were thus discussed in Party sessions of “criticism and self-criticism”.<sup>23</sup> Indeed such sessions could turn into trials where “non-communist behaviour” against women stood at the centre. Even in the times of the Great Terror, a certain analogy can be drawn to the sessions where “criticism and self-criticism” was directed against the abuse of power by superiors and could thus be transformed into a weapon “from below”.<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, in certain cases these aims could have beneficial effects for women, since they rested on the model of equality as Party members. It therefore legitimized claims against those who did not comply with it.

#### SPEAKING OF “PRIVATE AFFAIRS” BEFORE THE PARTY CELL

At a Party meeting of the Comintern section of the CPSU in 1933, the case of “Bobkov”, who was probably of Chinese origins, came forward. The *partkom*, which was responsible for the Party section, draws a portrait of the accused. He is described as an “element” that is “politically and

23. More specifically on the various aspects of “criticism and self-criticism”, see Berthold Unfried, “Die Konstituierung des stalinistischen Kaders in ‘Kritik und Selbstkritik’”, *Traverse*, 3 (1995), pp. 71–88; Studer and Unfried, *Der stalinistische Parteikader*, pp. 149–191; Berthold Unfried, “Selbstkritik im Stalinismus. Erziehungsmittel und Form des Terrors”, in Wladislaw Hedeler (ed.), *Stalinischer Terror 1934–41* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 159–178.

24. This aspect of the “purges” is analysed for the Russian province by Sheila Fitzpatrick, “How the Mice Buried the Cat: Scenes from the Great Purges of 1937 in the Russian Provinces”, *The Russian Review*, 52 (1993), pp. 299–320. Fitzpatrick’s interpretation of 1937 rural “purges” as upside-down “carnivals” that gave peasant “mice” the opportunity to attack local bureaucratic “cats”, has been firmly questioned by Michael Ellman in “The Soviet 1937 Provincial Show Trials: Carnival or Terror?”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 8 (2001), pp. 1221–1233. Among other things, he argues that “the peasants were merely minor characters in a play written by someone else” (p. 1226). This is not the place to give an appraisal of this debate, although we agree that recent evidence shows the central planning and organization of the Great Terror. However, Ellman’s critique does not touch the core of our argumentation, situated on micro-levels: that Party practices like “criticism and self-criticism” opened a margin to criticize abuses of superiors and, in certain circumstances, have them toppled. Examples of such hierarchy-toppling effects are found in Berthold Unfried, “L’autocritique dans les milieux kominterniens des années 1930”, in Claude Penneret and Bernard Pudal (eds), *Autobiographie, autocritique, aveux dans le monde communiste* (Paris, 2002), pp. 58–61. Evidence on the use of centrally initiated terror to reverse hierarchies in local power conflicts is given by Alexandr Vatlin in “Stalinischer Terror im Rayonmaßstab. Das Beispiel Kunzewo”, in Hedeler, *Stalinischer Terror*, pp. 51–68.

morally dissolute". He had given false information about his social origins and his Party membership. He had also lacked discipline at work; he had embezzled funds and had demonstrated a "noncommunist behaviour" towards his wife. A female member of the Komsomol, the organization of young communists, adds some details: "Bobkov" forced his wife to quit her job and to have an abortion only to abandon her afterwards. He hit her and she is afraid of him. The woman concludes that such a person has nothing to do in the Party. "He uses his Party book only as a shield". "Bobkov" admits to his "egocentric and self-righteous behaviour" in his self-criticism. He asks the commission to look again at his faults and to indicate to him the methods he should use to overcome them. But "Bobkov's" regrets and self-criticism does not help him. He loses the status of a Party candidate.<sup>25</sup>

Another typical case: The fourth – and like her predecessors also abandoned – wife of a German communist complained about her husband in a letter to the Party Committee in the Frunze District of Moscow. The man had already received a reprimand from the Party because of promiscuity and neglecting his family. In his "self-critical" statement, the German admitted to "petit-bourgeois" behaviour in family life. The Party official in charge of the investigation (*partsledovatel*) found that the delinquent had such an attitude to all women, and only the positive Party record of the accused over fifteen years saved him from expulsion. The Party cell in Hotel Lux was directed to support the aggrieved wife and integrate her into voluntary political activity. Her husband, sacked from Comintern employment, was given an official warning and a reprimand by the Party committee.<sup>26</sup>

Protocols of sessions of "self-criticism" often bring to light a reality of "private life" somehow different from the communist model. These sessions are commonly interpreted as an element of repression and terror. However, concerning the male party members, they could be turned into tribunals for being drunk or "polygamous", i.e. promiscuous, for neglecting and abandoning their families, beating their wives, not caring for their children, refusing to pay alimony; in short, for acting in a "non-Bolshevik manner" as a husband and as a father. Another topic addressed at a Party level, when the accused was a Party member, was sexual harassment. In the 1933 purge in the film studio, Mezhrabpom Film, a sub-director was expelled from the Party because of his "morally dissolute" manners. It was accepted as proved that he had organized "orgies" with the actresses attached to his department, "compensating" their services with

25. Purge October 1933, RGASPI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi archiv social'noi i politicheskoi istorii), 546/1/228.

26. Complaint of 24 June 1932, RGASPI, 546/1/252; other colourful cases in Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 144–146.

film castings. An instructor got the same verdict for “dirty pawing” of his female pupils.<sup>27</sup> These cases are far from unique.<sup>28</sup>

Such infractions of Party norms could be denounced at a “party forum”, or at factory courts.<sup>29</sup> The protocols of these sessions demonstrate that the publicity given to “private” matters in such practices was foreign to communists coming to the Soviet Union for the first time. A collective accusation like a “noncommunist attitude towards women” was a charge which often surprised the foreign communist, who still believed private and party agendas should not impinge on one another.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless all Party members, western European emigrants as well as all members of the CPSU, were subjected to the same forms of “publicizing” family matters.<sup>31</sup> As these practices were mostly unusual in Western communist parties, adopting them was a main element in the process of acculturation of Western communist emigrants in the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup>

Cases of outright refusal to discuss the matter were rare. One example, where bringing private problems into the sphere of Party examinations was challenged by communists from western Europe, occurred at the International Lenin School. When a Russian official attacked a member of the Austrian student group in late 1937 for having had three girlfriends in a row and not having obtained permission for the last of these liaisons, he addressed the rhetorical question, “Is it correct to raise this matter here?” to the students. The students, who had refused to put the matter on the agenda of an earlier meeting, answered in unison, “No!”.<sup>33</sup> In some cases,

27. Protocol no. 15 of the purge commission of Mezhrabpom Film, September 1933, RGASPI, 538/3/156.

28. Other cases in Lisa Granik, “The Trials of the *Proletarka*: Sexual Harassment Claims in the 1920s”, in Peter Solomon (ed.), *Reforming Justice in Russia, 1864–1996: Power, Culture, and the Limits of Legal Order* (Armonk, NY [etc.], 1997, pp. 144–150. Granik concludes, however, that such women’s complaints generally had weak tangible results.

29. The tribunal in the above cited letter of Steffin to Brecht may have been a factory (or comrades’)-court. Those lay courts had been established in 1928 in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and in order to relieve ordinary courts of minor disputes. See Peter Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 66–67; cf. also Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Soviet Russia: A Study of Background Practices* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 282–285.

30. Examples in Unfried, “Die Konstituierung”; Studer and Unfried, *Der stalinistische Parteikader*, pp. 149–167.

31. Cf. Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, “‘Das Private ist öffentlich’. Mittel und Formen stalinistischer Identitätsbildung”, *Historische Anthropologie*, 6:1 (1999), pp. 83–108.

32. On this disposition to change one’s *habitus*, to “work on oneself”, see Brigitte Studer, “L’être perfectible. La formation du cadre stalinien par le ‘travail sur soi’”, *Genèses*, 50 (2003), pp. 92–113.

33. Minutes of Sector “Ya” meeting, 27–28 November 1937, RGASPI, 531/1/227:56–61. As the assembly took place in connection with the dismissal of Klavdija Kirsanova as school rector, the students used the opportunity to take revenge on her and her officials, condemning in particular the “high-handed and bureaucratic” nature of her rule.

the foreign Party members expressed scepticism or mere passive resistance. A resolution of the purge commission of the International Lenin School of 1933, for instance, urged for a better compliance with the rules of the “criticism and self-criticism”-practice. There was to be an end, it said, to “the feebleness of Bolshevik self-criticism”, and to “the elements of family spirit and groupism”, which favoured “the tendency to individualism” and “the fear of making public personal matters”.<sup>34</sup>

More typically, foreign communists complied with the practice and promised to do better. Cases like the following were quite common. A German student of one of the Comintern schools was accused in the debate about his *samoothbët* (self-report) of behaviour unworthy of a communist in family matters. After some efforts to justify himself, he admitted to “bad-tempered flare-ups” towards his wife, a fellow student, and to having struck their child. The ensuing discussion reads like the minutes of a psychological self-help group: “We must try to help both of them [...]. We expect a higher standard from married student comrades who are Party members [...]. Hitting a child is a crime [...]. We have to inculcate in him a higher cultural standard.” The delinquent “capitulated” fully before the collective’s criticism: “I make the solemn pledge before the Party group to change my ways, especially in regard to my wife, and not to strike my child again. But the comrades should come to my home and see for themselves whether I have changed or not. Support me!”<sup>35</sup>

As women equalled men on the Party level as comrades, not only brutality but also patriarchal family hierarchies were considered as “nonsocialist”. In particular, it was frowned upon when men hindered women from Party activities. Accused of forbidding his wife to go to union meetings at a session of the German Party sector, a young German communist replied:

Köln [the pseudonym of another Party member] accuses me of beating my wife. But my wife has refuted this and protested at the party cell meeting. He also says that I do not let her join the union. [...] But she is a union member. I demand an enquiry of the Party sector and that the Party takes a closer look at how Köln treats his wife.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, before the Great Terror of the mid-1930s, the practice of publicizing “private” matters before the Party cell could have a twofold aspect. It could serve as a means of Party education. The exposure of family problems and the ensuing dialogue of criticism and self-criticism in cases like that of the just

34. Resolution of the purge commission of sector “I” of the International Lenin School, 23 November 1933, RGASPI, 531/2/67.

35. Protocol of German sector meeting of the Communist University of National Minorities of the West (CUNMW), 13 April 1935, RGASPI, 529/2/454.

36. Protocol German sector meeting CUNMW, 28 September 1933, Discussion, RGASPI, 529/1/544.

mentioned student can be interpreted as a device to instil the right gender and family roles as a specific form of correct Party behaviour. Party members, especially women, could also bring the Party to investigate their personal family life and use it for their purpose, e.g. to mediate male dominance and violence in the “private” sphere. “This is not your private affair”, was the Party message to men in matters of family and gender relations.

#### MOTHERHOOD AND ABORTION

In 1935, *Rabotnica*, the women’s party paper, instructed its readers: “The Soviet state defines motherhood as something definitively not *private*, but as a normal societal duty of a healthy woman.”<sup>37</sup> In order to redress the birth rate, the Soviet state put new value on motherhood as part of the officially promulgated life-styles in the mid-1930s. The image of the comrade as mother was propagated as a high value in the life of a woman, and men were officially criticized for neglecting their family duties.

The German-speaking newspaper *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* took up the campaign like others. Articles on the centrality of motherhood in a woman’s life appeared, sometimes with very explicit titles as for its aim, like “Longing for Motherhood”.<sup>38</sup> The articles made clear that without children the “Soviet” marriage was incomplete. Using the same methodological device to bring the message home to its readers as with the campaign for equality and morality in couples, the paper usually quoted different women who expressed the idea of how important a child was. In one’s words, endowed with an ideally caring and politically conscious husband, “for complete happiness, only a child is missing”. Others explained that, yes, now that they were living in the Soviet Union there was no obstacle any more and that they were happy to conceive a child now. The famous German actress emigrant, Carola Neher, was quoted with the following statement: “I wished to have a child for a long time, but over there [in Germany], I did not have the courage. It was only in the Soviet Union that I could see this desire fulfilled”.<sup>39</sup> Or, as another woman said: motherhood was now possible, “when she did not have to worry for the next day and was not obliged to give up her job”, thus incidentally mentioning that the Soviet motherhood campaign was not meant to make women leave their employment.<sup>40</sup>

37. *Rabotnica*, 6 (1936), p. 4, cited in Maier, “Von Pilotinnen”, p. 74.

38. “Sehnsucht nach Mutterschaft”, *DZZ*, 3 July 1935.

39. *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, 6 February 1936. Ironically, Neher’s child grew up as an orphan, his mother and his father being arrested “enemies”. The father was shot shortly thereafter, while Neher died in a camp.

40. “Sehnsucht nach Mutterschaft”, *DZZ*, 3 July 1935. For this particular model of femininity combining motherhood and employment see Brigitte Studer, “La femme nouvelle”, in *Le siècle des communismes* (Paris, 2000), pp. 377–387.





Figure 2. “All over the country, discussions and party meetings were convened to discuss the new legislation on abortion”. Officially, the overwhelming majority voted for it. From *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ)*, 17 June 1936

One side effect of the motherhood campaign was the introduction of a ban on abortion in 1936. This new law was strongly resented by foreign women, especially by those who had fought against the criminalization of abortion in their countries of origin. For many of them, this law was a critical moment in their relation to the Stalinist state. Could a system that issued such a law be on the way to socialism as imagined by the Western-style communists? It was a shock for female doctors like Martha Ruben-Wolf, who had been a leading militant in the campaign for the freedom of abortion and had practised it.<sup>41</sup> Especially physicians and intellectuals – for whom the right to abortion had been an unquestioned element of their convictions – could hardly conceal their astonishment.<sup>42</sup> Many foreign communists did not restrain their criticism of the law on abortion. It was

41. Anja Schindler, “Mit der Internationale durch das Brandenburger Tor”; Martha Ruben-Wolf (1887–1939), in Ulla Plener, *Leben mit Hoffnung in Pein: Frauenschicksale unter Stalin* (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1997), p. 47. Ruben-Wolf’s and her husband’s fate is somehow emblematic for a whole stratum of progressive emigrants to Soviet Russia who had hoped to see their ideals realized in the society in construction there. Her husband was arrested as a participant of a “physicians’ conspiracy” and perished in a camp. Finding herself in a desperate situation, she committed suicide; *ibid.*, p. 50.

42. Ervin Sinkó, a Hungarian writer in residence at the Soviet Union noted (1935) in his diary that, to his utmost astonishment, Friedrich Wolf, a well-known German communist physician, who had some days before proudly presented his Moscow abortion clinic, now publicly demanded its ban in a *Pravda* article; Ervin Sinkó, *Roman eines Romans. Moskauer Tagebuch 1935–1937* (Cologne, 1962, repr. Berlin, 1990), p. 108.



Figure 3. Scene from the film “The Party Card”, showing a party meeting at a factory. Archives of the Gorki Film Studios, Moscow

incompatible with the Malthusian convictions of most female communist emigrant women. At the “Thälmann Klub”, a meeting place for foreigners in Moscow, the opinion went generally against it in discussions. Arguments were voiced concerning the lack of space in apartments, and the deficit in day-care facilities for small children and kindergartens.<sup>43</sup> Opposition to the law was also expressed by foreign workers at workplace meetings.<sup>44</sup> Foreign automobile factory workers in Gorky sent a letter to Moscow protesting against a law “existing in the Soviet Union that we have fought against in capitalist countries”.<sup>45</sup>

But such public declarations often bore consequences when repression was unleashed during the Great Terror. In the case of the Gorky automobile workers, the man in charge of the office for foreigners was blamed for not having prevented the resolution, and the leader of the meeting was arrested on these grounds a few years later.<sup>46</sup> During the years 1937/1938, criticism against the new law was interpreted as an “anti-Soviet” attitude which was a charge often leading to arrest or voiced to justify arrest. Under interrogation, a Polish (feminist) emigrant confessed

43. Examples in McLoughlin, Schafranek, and Szevera, *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation*, pp. 273–274.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

45. Puhm, *Eine Trennung in Gorki*, pp. 74–75.

46. *Ibid.*.

to the NKVD that she “had anti-Soviet feelings concerning some measures of the Party and the Soviet government law on the ban on abortion, the arresting of foreigners”.<sup>47</sup> Repression turned also against those who did not denounce women having abortions. This happened to the Party Secretary of the International Lenin School when a student had an abortion about which he knew but did not report.<sup>48</sup>

### GENDERIZED TERROR

Women, although declared equals at Party level, were less affected by the Terror than men or, at least, differently. For one thing, in representations, women were generally considered less harmful and dangerous than men. “The enemy” was undoubtedly a *male* figure (cf. films like *Partijnii bilet*, where the enemy is male throughout).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, even in a society like the Soviet, in which it was insisted that equal opportunities be granted to men and women, there were also fewer women having functions with responsibilities which put the occupant of such a position in danger.

Those women who did occupy such posts, however, were also subjected to accusations, expulsion from the Party, arrest, and execution. A prominent case within the circle of Comintern was that of Klavdija Kirsanova, who in November 1937 was dismissed as Director of the International Lenin School.<sup>50</sup> Her case is also a perfect example of the prevalent interpretative scheme in Stalinist society of suspecting political objectives behind personal relationships. Their public declaration as “personal” was presumed only to hide their real meaning. At the party meeting which decided on Kirsanova’s expulsion, her close and probably intimate relationship with a Chinese communist, considered to be an “enemy of the people”, was one of the chief motives put forward in her “case”.<sup>51</sup>

According to the usual causes of arrest – guilt by association, membership of opposition factions, or upper-class family origins (the latter being particularly prominent in conjunction with the former causes) – women, on the whole, were direct victims of the Terror of the 1930s to a lesser degree than men. They made up 11 per cent of all those prosecuted

47. Quoted in Ulla Plener, “Eine brach mit der zähen Hoffnung. Wanda Bronska 1911–1972, in Plener, *Leben*, 95 (21 May 1938).

48. Report on the situation and Party work in the ILS, 19 December 1936, RGASPI, 531/2/42.

49. There were exceptions. In 1937, propaganda brochures warned against women in secret services, see e.g. L. Zakovskii, *Shpionov, diversantov i vreditel'ei unichtozhim do konca!* (Moscow 1937), pp. 22–24.

50. Protocol general assembly ILS, 22/23 November 1937, RGASPI, 531/1/120.

51. Protocol of closed Party assembly ILS, 19 November 1937, RGASPI, 531/2/45.

formally by the court system in the late 1930s and 8.1 per cent of the prison population in 1940.<sup>52</sup>

But from the summer of 1937, they were often victims in a gender-specific, indirect way as wives or a “member of the family” of arrested “enemies of the people”. This meant that they themselves could get arrested for complicity with their husbands’ treacherous activities, or for not unmasking them, and undergo banishment or imprisonment in one of the special camps for “wives”.<sup>53</sup> At best, they would be socially ostracized, lose their jobs, be expelled from their apartments.<sup>54</sup> But they could also be expelled from Moscow, Leningrad, or Kiev to the “nonindustrial regions of the Union”, as a decision of the Politburo from 23 May 1937 stipulated with regard to those and their families expelled from membership of the Party.<sup>55</sup> In many cases, repression would go further. Indeed, a *prikaz* (order) of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) from 15 August 1937 even stipulated the arrest not only of the wives from “a legal marriage or a comradesly marriage” of those already arrested, but also divorced wives if they “had known of the counterrevolutionary activities of their former husband without informing the authorities about them”.<sup>56</sup> This kind of repression concerned foreigners as well as Soviet citizens. A rather typical story is the one of Eva Tivel, whose husband had been arrested in March 1937. Immediately afterwards, she was fired from her job “for political motives”. Such a note on her record made it impossible for her to find any other work. Shortly thereafter followed the eviction

52. Numbers of victims broken down by sex are still sparse. See J. Arch Getty, Gábor T. Rittersporn, and Viktor N. Zemskov, “Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence”, *The American Historical Review*, 98 (1993), pp. 1017–1049, here 1025. During the war years the number of female victims rose to more than 40 per cent; *ibid.* On the fate of old Bolsheviks, see Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 280–281.

53. Numerous tragic examples are to be found in the life stories of female German emigrants collected by Elfriede Brüning, *Lästige Zeugen: Tonbandgespräche mit Opfern der Stalinzeit* (Halle [etc.], 1990). For a typical case, cf. the memoirs of Trude Richter, *Totgesagt* (Halle [etc.], 1990). A well-known example is the case of Bukharin’s wife. See her memoirs for an account of the internment in a “wives’ camp”; Anna Larina, *That I Cannot Forget: The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin’s Widow*, Introduction by Stephen F. Cohen (New York [etc.], 1993), pp. 43–44.

54. There are many examples of this. To mention just one, the diary for the years 1937 and 1938 of the Leningrad artist Lyubov Vasilievna Shaporina is filled with cases of female friends identified as “wives of an enemy of the people”; Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen (eds), *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York, 1995), pp. 354–358.

55. Oleg Khlevnyuk, “The Objectives of the Great Terror”, in Julian Cooper, Maureen Perrie, and E.A. Rees (eds), *Soviet History 1917–1953: Essays in Honour of R.W. Davies* (New York, 1995), pp. 158–176, here 160.

56. The order is published in Müller, *Menschenfalle Moskau*, pp. 448–454, here 449. It also contains the instructions concerning the children who were to be put in an orphanage. An order issued by Berija in October 1938, according to which wives could only be arrested if they themselves were suspected of counter-revolutionary activity, marked a turning point.

from her Moscow flat. In May, after the above-mentioned order of the Politburo, Eva Tivel and her son were banished from the city and exiled to Siberia. Her mother, who had provided Eva Tivel with refuge, lost her apartment, too, and followed her daughter to the Far East. But in October 1937, Eva Tivel herself was arrested. She was sentenced to eight years in a labour camp for being a “member of the family of a traitor to the Motherland”. Her son was taken to an orphanage. Only in 1953 was she allowed to return to Moscow.<sup>57</sup>

Between 1938 and 1940, the NKVD observed the formation of several informal “women-centres” in Moscow. One of them was formed by wives of arrested German specialists of the “Elektrozavod”-factory. Although discontent and so-called “anti-Soviet agitation” were notorious in these circles, the NKVD waited until the war to “clear out” this “wasps’ nest” and send the German wives into Siberian exile or to forced labour. A leading organizer was arrested. She “confessed” to having “gathered the wives of persons who had been repressed due to counter-revolutionary activity and systematically carried out counter-revolutionary agitation among them”.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in the turmoil of the Stalinist society of the 1930s, women could be left alone with their children in a different sense than is commonly assumed. Indeed, in the foregoing case, it was not the husband who abandoned his wife and children but the state which took away the husband without showing care for what would become of his family, thereafter destroying its structure.

Especially in the post-1935 period, amicable relations with friends or relatives who had been “unmasked as enemies of the people” were grounds for condemnation. Westerners tended to view such contacts as personal matters, but the Party did not. Women, it was often alleged, infringed the rules of “class vigilance” because they were “sentimental petit bourgeois” who continued to have contact with male “enemies” and had hid this from the Party Committee. A staff member of the Marx-Engels Institute, the wife of an arrested German, had concealed his arrest from the Party. This was termed as “non-Party (*nepartiinyi*) behaviour”.<sup>59</sup> Another one, Stepanova, admitted to long standing “political blindness” towards her “Trotskyite” husband.<sup>60</sup> The “correct” attitude in such eventualities was expressed by the wife of a German Party functionary: “It is an

57. The story is told by Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, pp. 4–5. On the treatment of the children of the arrested see Corinna Kuhr, “Children of ‘Enemies of the People’ as Victims of the Great Purges”, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 39 (1998), pp. 1–2, 209–220.

58. Sergej Zhuravlev, “*Malenkie liudi*” i “*bol’shaia istoriia*”: *Inostrancy Moskovskogo Elektrozavoda v sovetskom obshchestve 1920ch-1930ch godach* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 322–333, 333.

59. Protocol no. 11 of the meeting of the Party Committee of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (IML), 17 May 1937, TsAOD (Tsentral’nyi archiv obshchestvennykh dvizhenii), 212/1/42.

60. Protocol no. 9 of the general closed meeting of the Party Committee of IML, 20 July 1937, TsAOD 212/1/41.

indescribably hard blow for me to learn that I supported an enemy of the Party for so many years. After I heard yesterday that the charges levelled against him are valid, I broke off all contacts with him.”<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Foreign communists, political emigrants from western Europe, artists, workers, and “specialists” hired for the industrialization drive and the “building of socialism” encountered a reality where the boundaries between “public” and “private” were not the ones they were familiar with. What they considered as genuinely private matters had in fact a high political significance in the Soviet Union. The state was interested and intervened in their reproductive behaviour, the Party and the state in their personal relationships and personal behaviour. While some aspects of this “intrusion”, like the legislation on abortion, provoked some outward criticism, others met only with very isolated open reactions from western European communists. The ban on abortion colluded particularly with their mental attitudes and political opinions. For them, the decriminalization of abortion was not only a political objective, it was also part of the progressive system of beliefs based on an individual’s right of choice over the main design of his or her life. This is not to say that in the end they were not ready to comply with the change of the “political line”, as the European communist parties demonstrated by their mostly unconditional defence of the “motherland of socialism”. A more complex matter was the demand of the Soviet Party to lay open all personal relationships on the basis of forming a better, “new human being” or, in this case, primarily the “new man”. The normative discourse and practices were enshrined in the Stalinist mechanisms of repression, with its struggles about the definition of the enemy. Although they had growing lethal consequences until 1938, at the same time they opened up sites of conflict over gender definitions and hierarchies.

The process of adaptation to Soviet cultural practices was further complicated by the fact that the norms legitimizing women to claim that men changed their behaviour was aimed at a proletarian *habitus* and based on “traditional” assumptions about family. Our above cited examples mostly come from a proletarian background (*Schutzbündler*). Party functionaries and intellectuals who came from a so-called *bohème*-milieu in Europe certainly had different life styles. Some still had in their minds the out-dated “progressivist” maxims of sexual freedom abandoned by the Soviet Communist Party at the end of the 1920s. The German communist immigrant, Nelly Held, for example, describes in her memoirs her collection of Comintern men, a happy reminiscence of her multiple sexual

61. Letter from A. Heinrich, 29 January 1935, RGASPI, 546/1/252.



encounters although married. She refused to express any shame about such condemned “libertinage” termed by the Party at best as “petit-bourgeois individualism”. Years later, she asserted: “Of course, one could say that I was immoral as a married woman. But it was my standpoint. Kollontai would not have thought differently.”<sup>62</sup> Many of those working for the Comintern lived in free marriage, and changes of lovers seem to have been frequent, as Ruth von Mayenburg, who lived at the Hotel Lux in Moscow during the 1930s, and others writing about this time remember.<sup>63</sup> But in the Great Terror such life styles, termed “bohemian”, became another motive of accusation and arrest. Prominent in the process of the dismantling of cultural Comintern organizations like Mezhrabpom Film (1935), such accusations also appear in denunciations in the personal dossiers of arrested emigrants.<sup>64</sup> This fact points to one of the crucial mechanisms of the Great Terror: foreigners were suspect simply because of their cultural difference. Thus the whole emigration milieu was put in jeopardy.

62. Nelly Held, *Ohne Scham*, Marianne Krumrey (ed.) (Berlin, 1990), p. 124.

63. Ruth von Mayenburg, *Hotel Lux* (Munich, 1978).

64. Only one example: the case of the leading German communist Werner Hirsch, who was not only accused of a sinister political past and present, but also of a bourgeois life-style, doubtful personal networks, and affairs with women. See Müller, *Menschenfalle Moskau*, p. 363.