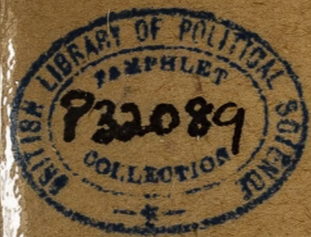


The Nationalisation of Women.

HQ/A 16



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**THE**  
**NATURAL**  
**HISTORY**  
**OF A**  
**LIE.**

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(Being a Study in Bourgeois Frightfulness)

By  
**C. M. ROEBUCK.**

**3d.**

British Socialist Party,  
21a Maiden Lane,  
Strand, London, W.C.2.

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THE NATIONALISATION OF WOMEN.

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## FOREWORD.

This study has two objects, and two only :

1. To present to the public an accurate picture of the origin and development of the most outrageous lie which has ever been circulated against the Russian Communists.
2. To shed some light upon the methods by which the contemporary Press of all countries—"democracies" or otherwise—misleads and inflames the opinion of the people.

While the title will show that the writer does not pretend to have been above forming an opinion, it is hoped that the documents reproduced in the following pages will prove that that opinion is not the outcome of prejudice or unsupported by the firm buttress of fact.

## 1. The Origins of the Lie.

1. On April 14th, 1918, the Moscow anti-Bolshevik newspaper *Svoboda Rossii* printed the following note :

### ANARCHISTS AT SARATOFF.

A private letter has been received at Moscow from Saratoff, stating that the Saratoff Anarchists' Club has published a "decree" according to which "all women from 17 to 32 are declared the property of the State, the rights of husbands are abolished, the women are to be distributed amongst those who require them," and "are to receive 232 roubles per month from the resources of the State."

2. On April 19th, 1918, the same newspaper *Svoboda Rossii*, in its column devoted to a review of the Press (a usual feature in Russian newspapers), printed the following statement :

One of the members of the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups, addresses the following letter to us: "Sir. In No. 4 of your paper there was printed a note on the Anarchists at Saratoff, repeating the wild and absurd report of a decree, supposed to be issued by the Saratoff Anarchists, and proclaiming the socialisation of women. We are astounded that your paper could repeat this *piece of news* without considering it necessary to cast doubt upon it and add any comments. The facts are as follows: The Black Hundred (the 'League of the Archangel Michael'), traducing Anarchism, and with the object of *discrediting it in the eyes of the great mass of the population* published—at Samara, not at Saratoff—this 'decree', in the name of the Anarchist Federation. The Samara Federation of Anarchists immediately printed a denial of this patent act of provocation. The original of this denial was in our possession, but was lost during the raid on the Anarchist premises at Moscow. I am confident that your paper will publish these comments.

One of the members of the  
Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups.'

The Editor remarks that he very gladly prints the above letter. He did not add any comment to the note referred to because, speaking frankly, he did not see anything essentially incredible in the facts it quoted, in these times of unprecedented projects of all kinds. The fears of his correspondent are quite groundless, however; no Bolshevik would dream of using this story against the Anarchists during the present disputes, for the following excellent reasons:

According to *Zarya Rossii* (another anti-Bolshevik Moscow newspaper), the *Izvestia* of the local Soviet of Khvalinsk has published the following *proposal* (my italics, C. M. R.) for "a decree socialising women," coming from the pen of a certain comrade Feodorova:

1. Every girl up to the age of 18 is guaranteed complete personal immunity by the local Commissary for Social Welfare.
2. The use of obscene language in the presence of a girl under 18, or an attempt to violate her, to be punishable with all the severity of revolutionary justice.
3. The violator of a girl under 18 to be considered a State criminal, and to be liable to 20 years' penal servitude if he does not marry the injured person.
4. An insulted or dishonoured girl to be free not to marry, if she so prefers.
5. Above the age of 18, every woman to be declared the property of the State.
6. Every young woman who has reached the age of 18 and is not married to be bound, under threat of severe pains and penalties, to register at the bureau of "Free Love" at the Commissariat for Social Welfare.
7. Persons registered at the bureau of "Free Love" to have the right of selecting a husband from amongst the male citizens between the ages of 19 and 50.

NOTE—(a) The consent of the man is not essential.

(b) The wife of the man so chosen has no right to bring forward complaints of such action.

8. In connection with the bureau of "Free Love" a permanent "League of Men free for Selection" to be constituted.
9. Men to have also the right of selecting a wife from amongst the young women who have reached the age of 18.
10. The selection of a husband or wife to be permitted only once a month.
11. The bureau of "Free Love" to be autonomous.
12. Men between the ages of 19 and 50 to have the right of selection amongst the women registered at the bureau even without the consent of the woman, in the interests of the State.

13. Children born of such marriages to pass into the possession of the State.

The duty of the Council of Commissaries is to work out this project as comprehensively as possible, and in this way to destroy the age-long evils of prostitution and vice.

FEODOROVA.

The Editor of *Svoboda Rossii* remarks that he could not, of course, guarantee the genuineness of this "project"; but considers comment in this case also to be unnecessary. Especially as this "project" is accompanied by a comment by comrade Feodorova herself, to the effect that "such (temporary provisions) are already in existence at Luga, Kolpino, and elsewhere."

## 2. The Lie Reaches Western Europe.

3. The *New Europe*, in its issue of October 31st, 1918, published a note entitled "The Bolsheviks and the Status of Women," and described as "a lurid supplement" to an article in the same number by Professor Rostovzev, on "The Practice and Aims of Bolshevism." The note contains what is declared to be the translation of a *decree* "issued by the Bolsheviks of Vladimir and published in the official Soviet organ *Izvestia*." "It would be superfluous," the note adds, "to comment upon this and similar measures to substitute prostitution for marriage."

The actual *decree* is an incomplete summary of Feodorova's proposal, given in full above (§ 2).

The note proceeds to give Feodorova's postscript concerning the issue of similar *decrees* elsewhere, and states that, according to the decree, a similar project of "provincial rights in connection with the Socialisation of Women" has been published in the *Local Gazette* of the Soviet of the City of Hvolinsk.

4. The *Daily Telegraph* seems to have been the first daily newspaper to reprint the above note. This it did in its issue of November 4th, 1918, under the heading "Latest Bolshevik Infamy."

The story rapidly gained publicity, both in the rest of the Press and at public meetings. The following paragraph affords an illuminating example of its effect.

5. On January 4th, 1919,\* *The Times* printed, in a prominent position, a letter from Lord Denbigh, drawing the attention of the newly enfranchised woman voters to

The Bolshevik ideas of sex-relations and the position of women. . . . Attention may well be called again to a recently published translation of a Bolshevik decree issued by the Bolsheviks of Vladimir and published in the official Socialist organ *Izvestia*. This may be objected to as being merely a local decree, but it is an interesting example of Bolshevik ideas.

Lord Denbigh gives the summary of Feodorova's proposals mentioned above, and continues:

Under such Bolshevik ideas, in short, it may be said that the position of a woman seems to be little different from that occupied by a breeding animal on a stud farm. These facts should be published in every paper in the country and brought home to the mind of every woman . . .

### 3. The First Denial.

6. During the first fortnight of February, 1919, the People's Russian Information Bureau published a penny leaflet entitled "The Law of Soviet Russia Concerning Marriage and Parentage," which prefaced the text of the law (dated 18.12.1917) by a short rejoinder to the *New Europe*:

Numerous conflicting and absurd reports have been widely circulated in this country to the effect that marriage as hitherto known has been virtually abolished in Soviet Russia.

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\*On the same day, the *Daily Telegraph*, in its principal news page, found room for a note dated from Stockholm, which stated that "according to advices from Petrograd," the government of the Northern Commune had worked out and would shortly publish a decree "nationalising" women between 18 and 45. Nothing more has ever been heard of this story—except that it was repeated as a piece of evidence by Senator Sherman, of Illinois, in an attack on the Prinkipo proposal (*Daily Telegraph*, January 27th, 1919). If I mention it, it is only as one single illustration of how the main current of mendacity was constantly being swollen by little wandering rivulets. A similar instance, with a similar conclusion, might be found in a Helsingfors message to *The Times* of March 12th, 1919, which "learnt from Riga" that Stuchka, of the Lettish Soviet Government, had issued a proclamation nationalising women.

It is alleged on the one hand that women are socialised and that a woman may be seized by any man who desires her. On the other hand it is said that any woman of 21 may have any man she chooses. *New Europe* for October 31st, 1918, appears to have set the ball rolling by an article entitled, "The Bolsheviks and the Status of Women." This article contained what is stated to be a translation of a decree issued by the Bolsheviks of Vladimir and "published in the official Soviet organ, *Izvestija*." Neither the date of the decree nor that of its publication in the *Izvestija* was given by the *New Europe*. The *New Europe* also referred to a "project of the provision rights in connection with the socialisation of women in the city of Hoolinsky and vicinity," which, it says, has been published in the local 'Gazette of the Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Again no dates are given. There is no such city in Russia as Hoolinsky.

The origin of these fables can be traced to Maxim Gorky's paper, the *Novaya Zhizn*, which was at one time a violent and unscrupulous opponent of the Soviets, though Gorky has since recanted and issued to the world a glowing eulogy of the Bolsheviks and joined the Soviet administration. In the early summer of 1918 the *Novaya Zhizn* republished an article written by a woman on freer sexual relationships which had been published in the *Izvestija*, or news, of a small, local Soviet at Vladimir, in a far Eastern province. Each local Soviet has its news sheet and under the Soviets the workers are encouraged to the fullest self-expression, and free discussion of all problems is welcomed. Gorky's paper, instead of treating it as a freak, quoted it as an instance of Bolshevik rule.

### 4. The New Attack.

7. On February 11th, 1919, *The Times* published the translation of a proclamation stated to have been posted in Saratoff, East Russia, and in Ekaterinburg, in both of which towns it was given effect a few days before the Czech occupation. "There need be no hesitation," it was added, "in accepting the decree as a genuine document.

It will be seen that it is the "decree" referred to in 1 and 2.

This decree is proclaimed by the free association of Anarchists of the town of Saratoff. In compliance with the decision of the Soviet of Peasants', Soldiers' and Workmen's Deputies of Kronstadt, the private possession of women is abolished.

### Motives.

Social inequalities and legitimate marriage having been a condition in the past, which served as an instrument in the hands of the *bourgeoisie*, thanks to which all the best species of all the beautiful have been the property of the *bourgeoisie*, the proper continuation of the human race has been prevented. Such arguments have induced the organisation to edict the following decree :

1. From March 1 the right to possess women of the ages of 17 to 32 is abolished.
2. The age of women shall be determined by birth certificates or passports, or by testimony of witnesses, and, on failure to produce documents, their age shall be determined by the Committee, who shall judge them according to appearance.
3. This decree does not affect women having 5 children.
4. The former owners may retain the right of using their wives without waiting their turns.
5. In case of resistance by the husband he shall forfeit the right under the former §.
6. All women according to this decree are exempted from private ownership, and declared to be the property of the whole nation.
7. The distribution, and management, of appropriated women, in compliance with the decision of the above said organisations, are transferred to the Saratoff Anarchists' Club. In three days from the publication of this decree all women, given by it to the use of the whole nation, are obliged to present themselves to the given address, and to supply the required information.
8. Before the Committee is formed for the realisation of this decree the citizens themselves will be charged with such control. N.B.—Any citizen noticing a woman not submitting herself to the address under this decree is obliged to let it be known to the Anarchists' Club, giving the address, full name, and father's name of the woman.
9. Men citizens have the right to use one woman not oftener than three times a week for three hours, observing the rules specified below.
10. Each man wishing to use a piece of public property should be a bearer of a certificate from the Factories Committee, the Professional Union, or Workmen's, Soldiers', and Peasants' Council, certifying that he belongs to the working class.
11. Every working member is obliged to discount 2 per cent. from his earnings to the fund of public general action. N.B.—This Committee in charge will put these discounted funds with the specifications of names and lists, into the State banks, and other institutions, handing down these funds to this popular generation.

12. Male citizens not belonging to the working classes, in order to have equal rights with the proletariat, are obliged to pay £10 monthly into the public fund.
13. The local branch of the State Bank is obliged to begin reserve payments to the National Generation Fund.
14. All women proclaimed by this decree to be national property, will receive from the funds an allowance of £23 per month.
15. All women who become pregnant are released from their State duties for 4 months, up to 3 months before, and 1 month after, childbirth.
16. The children born are given to an institution for training after they are 1 month old, where they are to be trained and educated until they are 17 years at the cost of the public funds.
17. In the case of the birth of twins the mother is to receive a prize of £20.
18. All citizens, men and women, are obliged carefully to watch their health.
19. Those who are guilty of spreading venereal disease will be held responsible, and severely punished.
20. Women having lost their health may apply to the Soviet for a pension.
21. The chief of the Anarchists will be in charge of the temporary technical measures relating to the realisation of this decree.
22. All refusing to recognise, and support this decree will be held enemies of the people and counter-Anarchists, and will be held strictly responsible.

(Signed)

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SARATOFF, RUSSIA.

Once again, this new form of the story was eagerly taken up by most of the other English newspapers, and, as will be seen, found its way abroad also.

8. Extract from Hansard, *Commons' Debates*, February 20th, 1919 (p. 1104).

LT.-COL. SIR FREDERICK BANBURY asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs if his attention had been called to the decree recently published by the Bolshevist Council of the City of Saratoff as to the treatment of women; and if he will take steps to secure wide publicity for this shocking instance of the result of the present revolutionary rule in Russia in order to assist in counteracting the Bolshevik movement in this country?

MR. HARMSWORTH. Yes, Sir. There is reason to believe that such a proclamation was issued in several centres, and that an attempt was even made to enforce it. But it has not

been established whether the Proclamation was issued by a Bolshevik Council, or by an Anarchist body.

SIR F. HALL. Will the Hon. Gentleman answer the last part of the question, as to whether publicity is to be given to this terrible state of affairs?

MR. HARMSWORTH. I have studied the document myself, and am not quite sure whether it is suitable for general publication. I shall be happy to show it to any Members of Parliament who would like to see it.

COLONEL WEDGWOOD. If it has not been issued by the Bolsheviks, why should it be used by the Government and the Press of the country to run down the Bolshevik Government?

## 5. The New Exposures.

9. On March 1st, 1919, the *Workers' Dreadnought* printed a letter which had been refused publication by the *Times*. It was signed by John Rickman, Esq., M.A., M.B., who had been working in Russia since August, 1916, under the auspices of the Friends' War Victims Relief Committee. He states:

A proclamation said to have been issued by the "Free Association of Anarchists of the town of Saratoff" has appeared in the *Times* and other newspapers. It nearly resembles a proclamation of the "The Anarchists' Club" of Samara issued in the spring of last year. The Bolsheviks utilised a large hoarding for the sole purpose of posting their decrees regarding newly nationalised property. Every day such notices appeared. One day a notice was posted similar to the one said to have been published in Saratoff. It was signed by the "Anarchists' Club" of Samara. I asked a Commissar why the Soviet allowed an irresponsible organisation like "The Anarchists' Club" to put up such notices. He replied that it was all right; people would see it was a parody and it would be quite useful as a matter of fact as propaganda, for the public, by seeing the contrast between notices of nationalising factories and nationalising women, would realise what could be properly nationalised and what not.

He brought up another point I had let escape me, the humour of the situation lay in the fact that the Anarchists who had always opposed the Bolsheviks had pretended to adopt the Soviet attitude to State ownership for the first time. The Anarchists being usually such individualists that they violently opposed the movement for nationalisation. For these reasons the Soviet disregarded the notice as mere foolishness. The American colony in Samara with whom I was closely associated was as much amused as everyone else at the jest.

The proclamation you quote nationalises women, the Constitution of the Soviet Government gives equal rights to

women. "The right to vote and to be elected to the Soviets is enjoyed by the following citizens, irrespective of religion, nationality, domicile, of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, *of both sexes* (the italics are mine) who shall have completed their eighteenth year."—Constitution art. 4, chap. 13, par. 64.

The decree regarding Divorce issued by the Executive Council of the Soviet of Soviets on December 19th, 1917, gives powers of annulment of marriage to both parties equally. The decree concerning Marriage of December 18th, 1917, in paragraph 3 orders that the contracting parties shall sign a statement that they "contract marriage voluntarily." Anyone reading these last two decrees I have mentioned cannot but be struck by the fairness of these ordinances and the equality of the sexes they establish.

In conclusion I may point out the Anarchists in Saratoff quote the Kronstadt Soviet, which of course had no relation whatever to the Volga town. Had the Anarchists tried to put such a "Proclamation" into force I think I should have heard of it, some English people who were in Saratoff last March whom I saw in May never mentioned it to me; it was one of the many Anarchists' tricks which the Bolsheviks and nearly everyone else let slip into oblivion.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN RICKMAN.

10. On March 13th, 1919, the *New Europe* published the following letter from its well-known collaborator, Dr. Harold Williams, under the heading "The Bolsheviks and the Status of Women":

The statement has frequently been made of late in the Press and in public speeches that the Bolsheviks have issued a monstrous decree for the nationalisation of women, and a Women's Society in Paris is reported to have undertaken a campaign against the Bolsheviks on this particular point. Personally, I cannot be accused of any prepossession in the Bolsheviks' favour, but just because I feel so acutely the enormity of their real crimes and the iniquity of their régime I consider it wrong to weaken the case against them by imputing to them crimes they have not committed.

I have made particular inquiries among friends recently arrived from Russia as to the alleged nationalisation of women, and they all assure me positively that they have never heard or read of such a decree. It is certain that the Central Bolshevik Government has issued no order of the kind, and if Anarchists in Smolensk or schoolboys in some other provincial town have printed such abominable productions the Central Government cannot be held responsible. The position of women and of everybody else under the Bolshevik régime is far too tragical to be made the subject of such gross caricature as these reports of the nationalisation of women really are.

The *New Europe* adds that it is glad to publish the foregoing, in view of the accusation made against it by the People's Russian Information Bureau. The article had been supplied by an Englishman "well acquainted with Russian conditions during the war and of unquestionable good faith." It appeared, however, he had confused the official Government organ *Izvestija* with local Vladimir paper of the same name:

As this puts an entirely different complexion on the matter, and as the Central Moscow Government cannot be held responsible for the lucubrations of every local committee, we desire to withdraw unreservedly the imputation and to express our regret for the mistake.

The Bolshevik Agency, however, was wrong in accusing the *New World* of referring to the non-existent town of "Hoolinsky." Hvolinsk, on the Volga, was the town mentioned.

[It will be seen that *Feodorova's letter is still represented as a "decree."*]

11. On March 15th, 1919, the *New York Independent* printed an article entitled "More Light on Russia," by Jerome Davis, Secretary of the International Committee of the Y.M.C.A. Mr. Davis writes:

As one who has but recently returned from Russia after over two and one-half years in that country I have read with tremendous interest the stories of witnesses appearing before the Senate Committee investigating Bolshevism, as reported in the Press.

While I am absolutely opposed to the Bolsheviks and believe that they merit a good deal of criticism, I feel that the testimony presented as reported by our Press is misrepresenting.

After quoting one or two instances of the kind of wild rumour which has been spread by the enemies of the Bolsheviks without any foundation in fact, Mr. Davis proceeds:

When one reads that women have been nationalised for immoral purposes by the Bolshevik Government and that people in great numbers were put to death simply because they were considered of higher intelligence than the leaders approved of, allegations which I believe to be untrue, it naturally has a reaction on the feeling of the American people toward our Russian policy. I shall not attempt to prove that the great mass of this testimony is simply slander and rumour; doubtless much of it is truth, but it is not always easy to distinguish.

Mr. Simmons, as reported by the *New York Times* of February 18th, read a decree of the Saratov Soviet nationalising woman. It so happens that the writer was in the city of Samara not far from Saratov shortly after this decree had been posted up about the city. In order to find out whether it was genuine or not I went to the Anarchist Club in Samara. The leaders of the Anarchists not only denied absolutely that any Anarchist club had ever even proposed such a decree, but they stated that this had been printed by certain forces antagonistic to the Soviets who were doing all in their power to discredit them. On investigating the matter carefully I believe that what they said was true. Not content with denying the decree purporting to come from the Saratov Anarchists in the Press, the Anarchist Club posted up the following decree all over the city. Roughly translated it reads:

FROM THE SAMARA FEDERATION OF ANARCHISTS.

In Reference to the Decree.

The enemy loses strength. The enemy falls lower and lower. In his falling he scoffs at sacred things. In his falling he throws out slanders. And he throws them out in the most loathsome and provocative manner.

The enemy is prest down—he lusts for power, worst of all for him are the Anarchists, bearing aloft the banner of liberty. The enemy circulates disgusting slanders, that freedom stretches out its branches to do violence to women. In our name they circulate with their dirty hands "The Decree of the Socialisation of Women."

What a coarse immoral provocation! For centuries, everywhere far and wide, the Anarchists fight against all decrees and laws of every authority—how can they themselves put out decrees?

As opponents of every power—can the Anarchists demand or even allow forced expropriation of women? How many can there be of such boorish beasts, who will believe such provocation, that harness themselves in the yoke of their own foul hisses? No, No! The enemy does not reckon on us, the unconscious masses, he only unmasks his own dirty heart. Alas, the enemy still does not know all the sharpness of our weapons—but he will know. Death to such provocators! Unmerciful death! Let us sweep them away—without hesitation—with all our power and with all our weapons! And all who—secretly or openly—will support such calumny, turning themselves into ridiculous hobgoblins—will be declared associates with those dark bands. They will be declared provocators. But one disastrous fate will overtake them. All those, that—with us or against us—live and fight for honour, will help us in justice, they will themselves avenge this venomous, foul rising reaction.

For redress we have enough fire.

And all our ways and means will be good enough.

SAMARA FEDERATION OF ANARCHISTS.



However much we may disapprove of the above wild poster, is it not an effectual answer to the charge that they had nationalised women?

Afterwards I met a rich Russian who admitted to me that the decree published by Mr. Simmonds had been prepared as a sort of a joke by some of the younger, formerly well-to-do men of Saratoff. Later the Anarchist clubs and councils were suppressed by the Bolsheviks, not for nationalising women but for lawless stealing.

I never heard of the second decree Mr. Simmons read purporting to come from Vladimir. It may be true. Perhaps most readers learning the real history of the other decree will have serious doubts as to the validity of that of the Vladimir Soviet. In any case I am absolutely certain that leaders of of the Central Soviet Government such as Mr. Lenine and Chicherin would be absolutely opposed to anything so preposterous as the nationalisation of women. I am sure every American Red Cross and Y.M.C.A. worker who knew these two leaders will agree with me in that statement. In all my stay in Russia I never met anyone connected with the Soviet Government, with whom I talked on the subject, who was not only violently opposed to any such immoral doctrine but who did not also think it was too ridiculous a suggestion even to discuss.

The little grandmother of the revolution denies that women have been nationalised and said: "Women have more freedom in Russia now than they ever had before."

One has only to turn to the official Government paper of the Bolsheviks, the *Isvestia*, No. 98, for May 18th, 1918, to see how false it is to charge the Bolsheviks with the fictitious decree nationalising women. Here is the translation:

"THE STRUGGLE WITH THE INVENTIONS OF THE  
BOURGEOIS PRESS.

The following decision was passed by the Moscow Soviet: The Moscow newspaper, *The Evening Life*, for printing an invented decree regarding the socialisation of women, in the issue of the 3rd of May, No. 36, shall be closed forever, and fined 25,000 roubles."

After reading the above official order which any one can verify in the official Bolshevik Government paper, can any sane American believe that "nationalisation of women" has ever been introduced by the Bolsheviks? In reality the Soviet decree for marriage is more like ours in America than was the marriage law under the Czar. Any one can read a translation of it in the International Section of the *Nation* for December 28th. It provides for a compulsory civil marriage, and stipulates that a religious ceremony is optional. The age for marriage all over Russia, except for natives of the Transcaucasia, is eighteen for the male and sixteen for the female. This provision as well as the compulsory registration of births and deaths is an advance over that of some of our American States.

12. On March 15th, 1919, the *New Republic* published an article dealing with the subject, from the pen of Mr. Oliver M. Saylor. He writes:

Whatever else the Russian Bolsheviks must answer for before public opinion to-day and the bar of history to-morrow, they cannot in truth be held responsible for the so-called decree concerning the Socialisation of Women which in one form or another has been printed and reprinted during the last few months in our newspaper press. The origin of the decree, which I saw posted in the city of Samara last spring, is Anarchist, not Bolshevik, and even the authenticity of its Anarchist source may be held in question. Whatever its source, the whole incident of the decree is a sardonic commentary on the inaccuracy and the meagreness of our information about Russia. . . . I spent ten days of March and April last spring in Samara on the Volga, a city of about 200,000 on the Moscow branch of the Trans-Siberian railroad half way between the capital and the Ural mountains. The bitter border warfare between the Bolsheviks and the Czechoslovaks which in more recent months has handed this helpless river metropolis back and forth in bloody exchange had not yet begun, although the Czechs were already there in force and the problem of their disposal was assuming dangerous aspects. For a month, Samara had been the haven of refugees from the German advance—not only Czechs but Serbians, and English and American business men, bankers, and Y.M.C.A. secretaries. But in spite of the novelty of all these guests, the talk of the city was focussed on a proclamation pasted broadcast on bulletin boards and stone walls. Copies of this document were at a premium, and here and there corners were torn away as souvenirs.

Mr. Saylor proceeds to give a translation of the "decree," in all but one or two minor details the same as that published in *The Times*, of February 11th. He goes on:

An astonishing document, inexplicable and incredible anywhere except in Russia to-day! And even in Russia the explanation is difficult and elusive.

In quest of an explanation, however, I dropped into the Anarchists' clubhouse in Samara one morning in company with another correspondent and one of the Y.M.C.A. secretaries. Not so very remotely, the luxurious and commodious building had been the home of one of Samara's millionaires, but the Anarchists had decided it would make an admirable clearing house for their social and political activities, and by virtue of their imposing numbers and power they had been permitted by the Bolsheviks to dispossess the owner and move in themselves. And so here they were, flying their black flag at the front door, just a few feet away from the Roman

Catholic Church of the city! Russia abounds in paradoxes to-day, but I doubt whether a stranger contrast could be found in all that stricken land.

Inside we found reading rooms and study rooms and dispensers of voluminous Anarchist "literature" and propaganda. In one room a group of the leaders, strange-eyed, alert men and women of the fanatic type, gathered to ask us the latest news of Tom Mooney and of America's arch-Anarchists, Emma Goldman, Ben Reitman and Alexander Berkman. One of my companions volunteered the desired information, but I was too overwhelmed by this uncanny reversal of accepted social phenomena to do more than stand agape as I would at an engrossing drama. I had no fear. Instead of brutality, the faces of our hosts reflected a strange spiritual quality akin to madness. But I felt a considerable relief when we reached the street again.

Before we left, a copy of a proclamation in answer to the one purporting to come from the Saratoff Anarchists was thrust into our hands in reply to our questions concerning the document quoted above. This "Reply," translated into English, read:

Mr. Saylor gives a version of the proclamation denouncing the "decree" which we have seen quoted by Mr. Jerome Davis (§ 11). He concludes:

Two solutions of this astonishing situation emerge from a study of these documents and the conditions under which they were posted.

One solution, of course, is that which is suggested in the "answer" quoted above. It is not beyond possibility that the Bolsheviki themselves devised and posted the original "Decree" in the name of the Anarchists in order to bring discredit and opprobrium on their most dangerous political opponents. Equally plausible to me is the supposition that a detached group of Anarchists in the city of Saratoff actually did advocate and promulgate this decree, without possessing the power to carry it out. What authority such a group imagined they had in the matter from the Kronstadt Soviet, I was unable to determine. In the course of six months in Russia I was unable to find record or other allusion to any such document, although it was generally known that the Kronstadt Soviet, a local body, rearranged human affairs periodically and not always seriously and never with the authority of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets.

13. In the appendix to his famous "Report on Conditions in Russia," laid before Mr. Lloyd George about the end of March, 1919, Mr. W. C. Bullitt states:

Family life has been absolutely unchanged by the revolution. I have never heard more genuinely mirthful laughter than when

I told Lenin, Tchitcherin and Litvinov, that much of the world believed that women had been "nationalised." This lie is so widely fantastic that they will not even take the trouble to deny it.

Respect for womanhood was never greater than in Russia to-day. Indeed, the day I reached Petrograd was a holiday in honour of wives and mothers.

Mr. Lloyd George said that "all the reports we get from people we send in there" were in the same general direction as Mr. Bullitt's statement.

The Report was reprinted, as a special supplement, in *The New Statesman* of October 11th, 1919.

## 6. The Lie Dies Hard.

14. Extract from Hansard's *Commons' Debates*, April 3rd, 1919 (p. 1371).

SIR F. HALL asked the Prime Minister if his attention has been called to the publication by Bolshevist agents of statements to the effect that the reports of decrees having been issued by certain of the provincial Soviet governments in Russia, under which women are made common property for sexual purposes, are entirely without foundation; if the Government are in the possession of information concerning the accuracy of such reports; and, if so, whether he will consider as to taking steps to bring to the knowledge of the country generally the results, in this and other directions, of Bolshevist rule, in order to counteract the influence of those who are advocating similar principles of Government in the United Kingdom?

MR. HARMSWORTH. In answer to the first and second parts of the hon. and gallant Member's question, H.M. Government has no information to show, whether the proclamation about the nationalisation of women, published by an Anarchist club in the town of Saratov was or was not approved by the Bolshevik Government in Moscow. In answer to the third part of the question, papers were laid before Parliament yesterday, and will, I hope, be distributed to Members to-night dealing with the present Bolshevist rule in Russia.

[It will be observed that the above statement was made on behalf of the Prime Minister, and the statements quoted in § 15 incorporated in the White Book, some days after Mr. Bullitt's report had been submitted.]

15. Extracts from the *Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia* (Parliamentary Paper, Russia No. 1) published by the British Government on April 4th, 1919:

(a) GENERAL POOLE TO WAR OFFICE (Received January 12th)  
January 11th, 1919.

There is evidence to show that commissariats of free love have been established in several towns, and respectable women flogged for refusing to yield. Decree for nationalisation of women has been put into force, and several experiments made to nationalise children.

(b) Rev. B. S. LOMBARD TO EARL CURZON.

March 23rd, 1919.

When I left Russia last October the nationalisation of women was regarded as an accomplished fact, though I cannot prove that (with the exception of Saratoff) there was any actual proclamation issued.

## 7. Conclusion.

16. The *Manchester Guardian* of May 6th, 1919, published an official wireless message from Moscow which had been sent out on May 1st. *Soviet Russia*, the organ of the Soviet Government Bureau in New York, published, on September 6th, 1919, a practically identical message, sent out on May 22nd, by the Petrograd Telegraph Agency. The message is as follows:

The calumny against Soviet Russia which has had the widest circulation is the most ridiculous and absurd of them all—the baseless lie that women have been nationalised in Soviet Russia. The origin of this fable has been ascertained. In the bourgeois paper *Zarya Rossii*, of April 17th, 1918, a telegram is published from that paper's correspondent in the small town of Chvalynsk, in the Government of Saratov. The correspondent announces that a certain bourgeoisie, Fedorova, had published in the local paper, *Izvestia*, a scheme for the socialisation of women, according to which, on the one hand, prostitution and illicit relations between the sexes are forbidden, but, on the other hand, the celibacy of women is also prohibited, and every woman is bound to marry.

In this scheme of the bourgeois Fedorova, it is asserted that the towns of Luga and Kolpino, in the Government of Petrograd, had already introduced similar schemes. It is hardly necessary to add that this is a figment of the imagination of this worthy but unknown lady, and that the two towns mentioned have never introduced such a scheme or anything resembling it, and neither has any other town in Russia. This ridiculous creation of the imagination of an unknown bourgeois was received and treated as an amusing anecdote, and no serious attention was ever paid to it.

In the paper *Svoboda Rossii* of April 14th there appeared a note according to which a private letter from Saratov stated that an Anarchist club had passed a resolution that the State should nationalise women. Nothing has ever been heard of this

resolution except in this published private letter. The whole matter was also regarded as an amusing anecdote in the "Miscellaneous" column of a newspaper. These two facts—the invention of an unknown bourgeois and a resolution of an Anarchist's club which has never been confirmed—are the only things which set in motion the absurd fairy tales which have gone the rounds of the press of the whole world.

[By comparison with §§ 1 and 2, it will be seen that this summing up is substantially correct].

17. In the course of an article in the *Manchester Guardian*, of October 18th, 1919, Professor W. T. Goode, recently returned from a visit to Soviet Russia, wrote:

Perhaps the belief which most wildly excited feeling against Bolshevism was that due to the stories of the Nationalisation of women. This was supposed to be the last expression of the Socialist intention of breaking up the home and the marriage tie and instituting a state of promiscuous free love. I may remark at once that in no country where I have been did the story create so much astonishment or amusement as in Russia. Even Alexinsky had said that it was a hopeless "canard," due to the action of a self constituted commissary, a *garçon coiffeur*, in the south, who had promptly been sent about his business by the real commissary. Another put the printing of the proclamation at a town still in the south, but farther east than Odessa. Most people treated the story as a malicious fabrication, a piece of propaganda.

### IMPROVED MARRIAGE CONDITIONS.

The best disproof was the visible condition of women. Home life goes on in the country, among the peasants, as before. In towns like Ostrov, Rezhitsa, Velikie Luki, and Moscow family life continues, and one saw constantly whole families taking the air on the boulevards, in the zoological gardens, and on Sunday in the children's theatres. Women are freely employed in the commissariats and Government departments, and their position is improved: leisure, time and pay are both increased. In the great factories at Serpukhof, and at the immense waterworks of Moscow, the greatest possible care is taken for improving the conditions under which the workmen live, just in order that they may lead family life. I went into their houses and into the flats provided, and saw for myself. The nationalisation story, at any rate, can be nailed to the counter, and with it goes the free-love "canard." Marriage is a civil function, but no hindrance is placed in the way of a further religious ceremony, should the parties desire it. The Russian peasant or worker marries young. But the hardest blow is dealt against this "free-love" belief by the following fact—there is, to all appearance, no open prostitution in Moscow. That remark is not singular to me; it had previously

been made by Hunt, an American journalist, who passed from Russia through Helsingfors more than two months before I entered.

The improved conditions and pay of the workers, men and women, remove one of the chief causes of prostitution, the economic; while the presence of members of the Domestic Servants' Professional Union on the committees dealing with the problem has been of the first value in stopping the practice. It may have become secret, that I do not know; what I state about the cleanliness of Moscow streets is the experience of myself and others. In fact, the position of woman under Bolshevism has not deteriorated, it has improved.

## APPENDIX I.

### CRITICAL NOTES ON THE SARATOFF "DECREE."

1. A "decree" is in direct contradiction to the principles of Anarchism, and particularly to those of a "free association of Anarchists," formed to combat the State as a law-making machine.

2. One town authority is not bound to act "in compliance with" the decision of the Soviet of another town.

3. If the authorities of Saratoff were to be bound by the decrees of any Town Soviet, it would certainly not be by those of Kronstadt, an island fortress in the Gulf of Finland, hundreds of miles away on the other side of European Russia.

4. Kronstadt being an island fortress, its Soviet is composed of "Sailors', Soldiers', and Workmen's" deputies. There are no peasant members.

5. The phrasing of certain paragraphs of the "decree," notably of §§ 8, 10, 11, 17, 21 and 22 ("the chief of the Anarchists," and "counter-Anarchists") betray patently the handiwork of the humorist. In point of fact, Mr. Davis ascertained that such was the origin of the document.

## APPENDIX II.

Dealing as I have been with the two main branches of the torrent of falsehood concerning the Bolsheviks and women, I have not thought it necessary to pause to consider such documents as that which *The Times* reprinted on February 20th, 1919, from the *Berne Democrite*, which in its turn had received it from the Lausanne Ukrainian Bureau, which again claimed to have found it in the *Briansk Anarchist*. The document, signed by "the President of the Mursilovka Soviet of Poor Peasants," authorises a "comrade" to recruit 60 women and young girls for the needs of the artillery division, and to "lead them to the barracks." In the doubtful event of the genuineness of such a document it might merely be issued for the comparatively innocuous purpose of forcing the bourgeoisie to try their hand at floor scrubbing. And even if worse befell, an outrage committed by an isolated detachment of guerrilla troops is not sufficient evidence on which to condemn *any* Government.

The same considerations apply to a document in the possession of Admiral Kolchak's agency in London, the "Russian Liberation Committee," which purports to be a "mandate" issued by the "Chief Commissary" of Ekaterinodar, authorising a "comrade" to socialise an illegible number of women. The photograph held by the agency is simply one of a small piece of paper with words on it to the above effect in Russian. There is no Soviet seal, printed heading, date, or other indication that the document is genuine, or indeed is of any value as evidence. In the agency's leaflet on the subject, a statement signed by "the President of the Special Commissions for examining the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks," of Ekaterinodar, purports to give the text of another "mandate" authorising a Bolshevik to "requisition" girls between 16 and 25. In this case also

there is a certain mystery about the attendant circumstances, made still more obscure by its association with the first document.

In any case, the anti-Bolsheviks in Western Europe have chiefly relied, for the success of their campaign, not on these documents, but upon the two stories the development and elaboration of which have been traced in the preceding pages. The first serious attempt to utilise the unverifiable Ekaterinodar tale has come, after the discrediting of the other evidence, in the extraordinary letter from an unknown officer to his unknown lady, written on an unknown date, at an unknown spot, packed with random generalisations and admittedly hearsay "shockers," which was published by *The Times*, of November 14th, 1919, under the title of "The Horrors of Bolshevism."

POSTSCRIPT.—The M.S. of this study had already gone to the Press when the *The Times*, on Christmas Eve, printed an expanded version of the Ekaterinodar story. I will leave the following letter to speak for itself:

#### NATIONALISATION OF WOMEN.

To the Editor of the *Daily Herald*.

Sir,—On December 24th, as a little Christmas box for its readers, *The Times* published yet another wonderful story of socialisation of women. The bourgeoisie lady of Hvolinsk and the Anarchists of Samara have not been disturbed this time from their well-earned rest: the "Bolsheviks of Ekaterinodar" are the scapegoats. Although *The Times* would give one to understand that it is only now that its readers have been able to secure this special information, such is not the case: the "Russian Liberation Committee," Kolchak's and Denikin's agency in London, issued the story in leaflet form quite early this year. They even possess a photograph of the "mandate" supposed to have been issued by a Commissary to one of his bad comrades, authorising him to socialise girls. The interesting thing is that *The Times* prints some fearful and wonderful elaborations thereon:—

1. It is stated once more that the "decree" was published in the Soviet Government's official organ *Izvestia* in the spring of 1918. This can only mean the Moscow *Izvestia*: and, once more, is just a lie. Anyone can verify this by looking up the files in the British Museum. What they will find is a notice, on May 18th, 1918, that a bourgeois paper has been suppressed and fined 50,000 roubles for printing an *invented* "decree."

2. It is stated that Bronstein (Trotsky), "Commissary for Home Affairs," invented the mandates and issued them at Ekaterinodar. This is a lie. Trotsky was Foreign Commissary until Brest-Litovsk, and War Commissary afterwards, and never had any other post. Also, he was never in Ekaterinodar in the spring of 1918, as can be verified from Captain Sadoul's daily letters and from the files of any Russian paper. Also, he is a settled family man with four children.

3. It is stated that the mandates were signed by the Commander-in-Chief, Ivascheff. There never was such a Commander-in-Chief under the Bolshevik régime. It is also remarkable that in the leaflet issued by the Russian Liberation Committee, Ivascheff is spoken of as "Chief Commissary." Possibly there is some dispute as to which costume suits the villain best.

4. I have had the pleasure of inspecting the photograph of the "mandate" to "Comrade Karaseev." The number of women granted him is quite illegible—not 10, as *The Times* states; the age limit is 16-36, not 16-20, as *The Times* informant imagined; and despite the assertion of *The Times*, there is *no* seal, stamp, printed heading, or other indication that the "mandate" is genuine. The photograph is just that of a few Russian words scribbled on a piece of paper which you, or I, or Admiral Kolchak, or anyone else might fabricate (I will not say "did").

There are many horrible details, which the Russian Liberation Committee did not give in its leaflet, but "the names of the victims are not published for reasons which are easy to understand." Easiest of all, Sir, for readers of the *Daily Herald*.

Your obedient servant,

C. M. ROEBUCK.

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