

**“MAGAZINES “RABOTNITSA” AND “KRESTJANKA”
DEALING WITH “WOMEN’S QUESTION”
IN THE USSR IN 1920-1930S:
MODEL OF PROPAGANDA SUPPORT TO SOCIAL
REFORM” : REVIEW OF THE MONOGRAPH
BY O.D. MINAJEVA**

**«ЖУРНАЛЫ “РАБОТНИЦА” И “КРЕСТЬЯНКА”
В РЕШЕНИИ “ЖЕНСКОГО ВОПРОСА”
В СССР В 1920-1930-е гг.: МОДЕЛЬ
ПРОПАГАНДИСТСКОГО ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЯ
СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ РЕФОРМЫ»:
ОТЗЫВ НА МОНОГРАФИЮ О.Д. МИНАЕВОЙ**

*Alexander A. Grabelnikov, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor,
Chair of Mass Communications,
Faculty of Philology, Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia,
Moscow, Russia
grab@mail.ru*

*Александр Анатольевич Грабельников, доктор исторических наук,
профессор,
Кафедра массовых коммуникаций,
Филологический факультет,
Российский университет дружбы народов,
Москва, Россия
grab@mail.com*

The monograph by O.D. Minajeva performs a deep comprehensive analysis of domestic women periodical press in 1920-1930s, which played an important role in forming a “new” human for the life in communist society. The author attempts to explore the activity of party magazines in dealing with so-called

“Women’s question” in the USSR during this period. It should be mentioned that this attempt was rather successful. The work presents the history of establishment and functioning of central party magazines for women, their role in the process of women’s emancipation during pre-war years, translation of new values and gender concepts, new life scenarios for women.

The first chapter “Central party magazines for women: goals and work during pre-war period” is quite saturated with historical material. It describes in detail the work of the CC RCPb Women’s Section as founder and ideologist of mass magazines for women, the role of I.F. Armand, A.M. Kollontaj, N.K. Krupskaja in building women’s party press which was to attract women part of society to the communist party and provide for their participation in social development. During the pre-war period, there were over 90 newspapers and magazines for women, which were issued by local party committees.

The author discusses certain tasks which were identified for mass propaganda magazines of the CC RCPb Women’s Section “Krestjanka” and “Rabotnitsa”: translate the bolshevist ideology to certain groups of women readers; every possible increase of the number of women supporting soviet power; explain the party policy in general and in “Women’s question” in particular; propaganda of new communist values.

The work pays considerable attention to the Women’s question publications of the CC “Women’s Section” workers in 1918-1922 – A. Kollontaj, I.F. Armand, K.N. Samojlova. A lot of attention is given to the journalist activity of N.K. Krupskaja who could use simple words to explain big and important questions, link high goals with clear practical steps which can be done today. O.D. Minajeva stresses that the ideological heritage of Krupskaja is significant and in her publications contents is always more interesting and important than the form. Among “Women’s Section” columnists

(I.F. Armand, A.M. Kollontaj, L.I. Stal, etc.) it was Krupskaja who was the most active in promoting her views.

The analysis of the readership of women's magazines and specific approaches to work with them during pre-war period is quite interesting. The charts provide key mass magazines for women and their circulation in 1922-1941. The author introduces a large set of archive materials. She also shows that the readership was illiterate and functionally illiterate, poor, with limited intelligence.

It should be mentioned that the work presents in detail content, genre and typographic characteristics of "Krestjanka" (1922-1941) and "Rabotnitsa" (1923-1941) magazines in separate sections. It shows the huge efforts of "Krestjanka" staff to distribute the magazine in 1920s, the circulation grew very slowly. The attempts to increase the circulation steeply, dramatically were not successful – the circulation inevitably went back to the previous level or even lower. Therefore, it is even more surprising, as the author mentions, that the fight for the circulation did not prompt the staff to make the magazine more readable, diversified and useful for the readership, less political. Such functions of "Krestjanka" as cooperation with local party propagandists, "recruitment" of "rural journalists", "engagement" of women into social and party life, propaganda of soviet policy related to "Women's question" etc., are not typical for traditional women press. As is truly mentioned by O.D. Minajeva, "Rabotnitsa" and "Krestjanka" played an important role – provided materials to party propagandists corrected their work, identified relevant objectives for propaganda work among women. This function also makes them different from common entertainment women press. The journalists did not follow the needs and tastes of the target audience but tried to "ensure" this audience to politically correct materials of "Rabotnitsa".

The second chapter "Key thrusts in the translation of

communist ideology for women audience” explores rather deeply the main objectives of “Rabotnitsa” and “Krestjanka”: attract women to labor and social activity, “retain” them at the production and support changes in their life style, common life scenario. There is a serious analysis of general and specific objectives of industrial propaganda for women in 1920s. It includes conscientious attitude to labor, understanding of its necessity and constructive character, fight again absenteeism, labor productivity improvement, labor safety, women training and retraining, nomination of women to managerial positions, stimulation of their participation in social work etc. Together with that, they were developing a negative understanding of traditional family relationship and mother duties. They were to be “abandoned” for the sake of liberation, which was waiting for the women at the industrial unit, and in the village – at the post of village council chair or delegate.

This, as O.D. Minajeva aptly notes, is a propagandist preparation to industrialization and collectivization when the woman’s life scenario changes drastically.

The author of the monograph competently explores the arguments of the industrial propaganda in women’s magazines during the period of industrialization and collectivization – politicization of industrial labor, description of heroine attractive appearance, opposition of the industrial labor to home one, adding the topic of the industrial labor to the topic of personal happiness, love.

The women’s magazines of 1930s give a significant attention to the cult of “udarnitsa” and “stakhanovka” (super productive workers), demonstration of the new life practices, education privileges, and improvement of professional mastership. This supported the rapid deconstruction of gender stereotypes offering the women generations new life scenario, attractive and desired by

the government.

Military propaganda was not forgotten in the women's magazines during the pre-war period.

The author comes to consistent conclusions that the processes that happened in 1930s had a huge significance for the equal rights of women. The government policy, industrialization needs brought to the change in the gender composition of the working class – women were attracted to those industrial spheres that were traditionally considered as “masculine” and they became half of the proletariat. And here a significant role was played by “Rabotnitsa” and “Krestjanka” magazines.

A revolution in society conscious happened: a woman should work. She got a broad choice of occupations. Propaganda formed a positive relationship to industrial labor among women, suggested “scenarios” of its implementation, and supported overcoming challenges in this ways, showed advantages. At the same time, the author notes negative consequences: due to the errors in the labor payment policy, women massively went for “masculine” occupations, which were obviously harmful for their health.

In the third chapter “Transformation of women's private life in the context of social reforms in 1920-1930s” the author of the monograph discusses the daily life reform and deconstruction of patriarchal family, explores the women's press publications related to parenting. The work uses a large set of newspaper and magazine publications, which provide a holistic view on the situation.

O.D. Minajeva concludes that women had absorbed from the press the pathos to fight for women's rights, new value orientations, and new life scenarios. However if these life scenarios hadn't corresponded the government interests and hadn't been supported by economic, social and other measures, the process of women involvement into the industrial activity wouldn't have gone that

fast. The propaganda influence and organizational work of the government went in parallel. The press combined the information about the real state of art in the social sphere – lack of places in nurseries and kindergartens, lack of maternity hospitals and polyclinics, low standards of life, lack of hygiene etc. – with a generally optimistic view at rare “new life sprouts”. A significant amount of fiction (essays, short stories, poems) supported this mixture of reality and fiction and embarrassed the readers. Marvelous palace sanatoriums, factories with polyclinics and nurseries, canteens and recreation rooms, new commune houses with a full set of communal services, seamless kindergartens etc. – this was performed as a common thing or at least the nearest future. The experience of social reforms, which were performed by the government together with active propaganda and measures of economic and other stimulation, is unique and is successful to some extent. The reforms went fast, within the life of one generation.

In general, I should conclude that the level of scientific and research work done is high. The monograph can be of interest to both experts in this topic, and the broad audience as well.