

HOW FARE THE CZECH HOUSEWIFE?

Housework Still the Woman's Load in Socialist Country

By GEORGE LOHR

BRNO, Czechoslovakia.

HOW FARE Czechoslovakia housewives? This attempt to give some on-the-spot impressions is prompted largely by the recent Worker series of stimulating articles written by Elizabeth Lawson. I feel a special responsibility in this regard since I notice that a recent article of mine, dealing with an apartment hotel for best workers, led to a generalization of a way of living that so far is possible only to a fraction of one percent of Czechoslovak workers.

Of course, I agree with her that the right to work for women, which is inherent in socialism, must have as a logical sequence the substitution of individual housework drudgery by mechanized services, based on a division of labor. But she generalizes what are as yet only beginnings in the People's Democracies to tackle this problem, and this doesn't help our readers to grasp the complexities of obstacles, economically and especially ideologically, that socialism in construction has to face and overcome.

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THERE ARE ALREADY tremendous achievements. A lot of women are working and the number is rising. A wide network of child-care centers and kindergartens—though by no means yet large enough—takes care of the kids of working mothers, and in those best managed they are treated like the small fry of royalty.

Community services like laundries and dry-cleaning establishments which in the past, because of low incomes, were almost never used by workers, are being expanded, and already a large number of housewives can afford to send out at least the heavy laundry for rough-finish.

Repair centers where you can get clothes turned, repaired and re-made also exist to quite an extent and, something our stocking manufacturers would fight tooth and nail, there are many places where you can get runs in your nylons fixed.

But possibly most important, in easing housework, are the work's canteens where, according to latest trade union figures, more than 1,200,000 workers eat a daily meal. This is ten percent of the total population and if you add to that the children and students who get lunch in their institutions the number who eat



Cooperative shop in Czechoslovakia where nylon hose and men's socks are repaired.

one meal regularly away from home is around two million.

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AS TO SHOPPING, the trend is now toward American-style self-service. Right where we live, in a new housing development, modern stores are part of the set-up and our neighbors, used to the still prevalent inefficient old-fashioned shops left over from the old era, inevitable shopping queue and all, are very pleased.

But for the average housewife shopping is still a much-time consuming ordeal and the "ordering system" in factories that Lawson speaks of is only a very partial solution—for one because it's still rare and for another because it's rough, lugging home heavy packages on packed street cars.

But here you have a government and a Communist Party that is aware of the shortcomings and tries to do something to alleviate them. Only last week, when the Communist Party held a national conference, Antonin Novotny, the first secretary, directed attention to the general low level of technical training for women and the lack of attention to this problem by the trade unions. He also took note of the "severe complaints" regarding child-care centers, community services and other such questions and demanded that the party organizations work to bring about improvements.

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THIS BRINGS me to the home gadget. Here the electric mixer, the pressure cooker and the electric washing machine are high on the list of things that every housewife wants, and that an increasing number now can afford. Higher living standards mean also gadgets for the home.

If it's a new flat—and I found out that most of our neighbors came from dwellings where there was no bathroom and no modern kitchen—it understandably gets the dollhouse treatment. If it's an old flat, the electric gadgets help even more to make easier the housework which, given the present circumstances, is still the woman's load.

Some of these circumstances are objective, such as the fact that socialism in construction at this stage cannot yet provide restaurants with prices low enough so that the average family could eat there as a regular occurrence.

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THE OTHER circumstance is in the head. Most men still want their wives to prepare the grub, and not out of cans either. Sweet buns in all varieties grace the Czech table, but the "store

boughten" ones are not in favor with most husbands.

In fact, many of them let their wives work because they like the extra money, not because they recognize it as part of woman's emancipation, and they don't consider sharing the housework as their responsibility. It's the old male supremacy, individual selfishness and prejudice still interfering with the progress of women, in particular and the whole collective in general.

Of course, there is a gradual change for the better, but it's still overwhelmingly the women who stand in the shopping queues, who cook and wash, and as I look across the courtyard this lovely Sunday afternoon into the open kitchen windows, it's the neighbor women, most of whom hold down a job, who are bent over the sink. "The force of habit of millions and tens of millions," said Lenin, "is a most terrible force."

It's the men, with few exceptions, who run the unions, the factories and ministries and they are going to need a lot of needling yet to change old habits, as far as their attitude towards women is concerned. There is going to be a national women's conference within a few days and it is expected that many new and concrete proposals will come out of that.

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THE FORCE of old habits will yield to the forward sweep of socialism, no doubt about that, and eventually the domestic sweatshop is going to disappear completely. But in order to speed up the day, men and women have to push together and this means using the ideological vacuum sweeper to clean away male supremacy.

This is so even in Socialist Czechoslovakia where the economic base for woman's special exploitation has gone into the garbage can, along with capitalism as a whole. Men doing the dish washing is not the final solution, but a lot of Czech women workers would cheer right now if the husbands would lend a hand.

As for our country with its tremendous riches, the achievement of a high level of mechanized social services will undoubtedly be much easier, once the people decide on socialism. In the meanwhile, the program of economic demands to cut the burden of housework, put forward by Miss Lawson, looks good. But I suggest that if the fight for these demands is to be even partially successful, it has to be seasoned with a heavy dose of ideological pepper—anti-male supremacist pepper.

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health officials every year.

Yet despite these still grim figures, the TB picture is one of tremendous medical, surgical and social advances toward the conquest of the disease. The death rate from tuberculosis has been cut by about 95 percent since 1900 when it ranked as the leading cause of death in the United States with rate of nearly 200 per 100,000 population annually. In the last 10 years alone, the TB death rate has been cut by 75 percent thanks to new drugs and surgical techniques.

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THE GREATEST part of the cut in the TB death rate is attributable to improved social conditions. There is no disease which is so much at home in slums and ghettos. Overcrowding, poor housing, lack of adequate medical care—these are the factors which enable TB to continue as a major killer.

An idea of the relationship between deaths from tuberculosis and poor living conditions

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