

The Joy of Painless Maternity: The Reproductive Policy of the Bolsheviks in the 1930s

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Abstract : In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, motherhood was seen as a natural need of women. The masculine Bolshevik state did not see the emancipated woman as free from her maternal burden. In order to support the idea of "joyful motherhood," a medical discourse on the anesthesia of childbirth emerges. In March 1935 at the IX Congress of obstetricians and gynecologists the People's Commissar of Public Health of the RSFSR G.N. Kaminsky raised the issue of anesthesia of childbirth. It was also from that year that medical, literary and artistic editions with enviable frequency began to publish articles, studies devoted to the issue, the goal - to anesthetize all childbirths in the USSR - was proclaimed. These publications were often filled with anti-German and anti-capitalist propaganda, through which the advantages of socialism over Capitalism and Nazism were demonstrated. At congresses, in journals, and at institute meetings, doctors' discussions around obstetric anesthesia were accompanied by discussions of shortening the duration of the childbirth process, the prevention and prevention of disease, the admission of nurses to the procedure, and the proper behavior of women during the childbirth process. With the help of articles from medical periodicals of the 1930s., brochures, as well as documents from the funds of the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR (TsGANTD SPb) and the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology of the NKZ USSR (GARF) in this paper we will show, how the advantages of the Soviet system and the socialist way of life were constructed through the problem of childbirth pain relief, and we will also show how childbirth pain relief in the USSR was related to the foreign policy situation and how projects of labor pain relief were related to the anti-abortion policy of the state. This study also attempts to answer the question of why anesthesia of childbirth in the USSR did not become widespread and how, through this medical procedure, the Soviet authorities tried to take control of a female function (childbirth) that was not available to men. Considering this subject from the perspective of gender studies and the social history of medicine, it is productive to use the term "biopolitics. Michel Foucault and Antonio Negri, wrote that biopolitics takes under its wing the control and management of hygiene, nutrition, fertility, sexuality, contraception. The central issue of biopolitics is population reproduction. It includes strategies for intervening in collective existence in the name of life and health, ways of subjectivation by which individuals are forced to work on themselves. The Soviet state, through intervention in the reproductive lives of its citizens, sought to realize its goals of population growth, which was necessary to demonstrate the benefits of living in the Soviet Union and to train a pool of builders of socialism. The woman's body was seen as the object over which the socialist experiment of reproductive policy was being conducted.

Keywords : labor anesthesia, biopolitics of stalinism, childbirth pain relief, reproductive policy

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