

# The Right to Make Choices About Our Bodies Only Belongs to Us!

## Induced Abortion and the Communist Women's Press in Interwar Czechoslovakia<sup>1</sup>

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This article analyses the discourse of the communist women's press in the First Czechoslovak Republic in connection with the induced abortion. Most radical voices of the time regarding the right to terminate one's own pregnancy can be found in the press of the far left which has been largely neglected in historiography so far, and therefore, this article strives to present these voices, not least because they reflect issues of gender equality and bodily integrity that are extremely relevant nowadays. The article also pays close attention to the heterogeneity of the communist discourse and the radical turn after the abortion ban in the Soviet Union. In addition, the analysis includes medical arguments supporting the communist discourse as well as the most relevant contradictory voices. It also sketches the developments in the communist women's magazine *Rozséváčka* and the related political background, including the bills legalizing abortion. Finally, it problematizes the simple link between proponents of abortion rights nowadays and back then.

**Keywords:** induced abortion, gender equality, bodily autonomy, women's rights, the communist press

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Abortion on demand was first legalized in Russia in November 1920.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of how seriously women's rights were considered<sup>3</sup> when making this decision and the temporal intentions<sup>4</sup> of this act, the Soviet Union for long became an example of a country where women are “truly free”, which was often mentioned as an argument supporting abortion rights at that time. The picture of motherhood in the Soviet Union was rather idealized and it expressed the wishes for equality between men and women, which cannot be achieved without freeing oneself from the “burden of motherhood”. The country itself was portrayed as a paradise for women, at least as far as motherhood was concerned: paid maternity leave including a fixed period of time before childbirth, factory nurseries with professional staff keeping their children safe and well taken care of, breastfeeding during working hours with no restricted time, and even evening nurseries, should the mother wish to go to worker's club to see a film or listen to a lecture. Of course, all medical care was also provided free of charge. And just in case the prospective mother, despite all that, decided not to have the baby, she could have an abortion in a medical clinic, for free, of course, and with paid days for recovery.<sup>5</sup> Such was motherhood in “the first country where a woman is really free”, in the Soviet Union – as the communist women's magazine claimed back

<sup>2</sup> The decree was promulgated on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1920 in Russia, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1921 in Ukraine and later in the whole of the Soviet Union. See ALEXANDRE AVDEEV, ALAIN BLUM, IRINA TROITSKAYA, *The History of Abortion Statistics in Russia and the USSR from 1900 to 1991*, Population. An English Selection 7/1995, pp. 42–43; CLAIRE J. DAVIS, *The Question of Abortion in Revolutionary Russia, 1905–1920*, Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 30/1999, pp. 61–65.

<sup>3</sup> Lenin approved of access to contraceptive and birth control measures (including the right to abortion), but on the other hand expressed great concern about women avoiding motherhood due to mere “laziness” or pursuing personal goals. See C. J. DAVIS, *The Question of Abortion in Revolutionary Russia, 1905–1920*, pp. 61–62; VYACHESLAV KARPOV, KIMMO KÄÄRIÄINEN, “Abortion Culture” in *Russia: Its Origins, Scope, and Challenge to Social Development*, Journal of Applied Sociology 22/2005, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> The question remains, whether this legalization was from the beginning intended as a temporary measure, or such interpretation was only invented when justifying the abortion ban in 1936. For contradictory opinions see PAULA A. MICHAELS, *Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban*, Feminist Studies 27/2001, pp. 307–33; C. J. DAVIS, *The Question of Abortion in Revolutionary Russia, 1905–1920*.

<sup>5</sup> See for example JOŽKA JABŮRKOVÁ, *Svobodné mateřství [Free Motherhood]*. Rozsěvačka 2. 5. 1929, p. 3.

then in Czechoslovakia. It showed a much different picture as well – the motherhood of the local women workers: a pregnant woman could be immediately fired, no (free) medical care, poverty, children dying due to accidents when left alone at home because the mother had to go to work; yet there was no legal and safe way to avoid bringing more and more children into misery that was growing with each childbirth. But the proletarian women did not accept such fate – they sought help of quack abortionists, or they tried to perform the abortion themselves, often with advice from a friend. Because of the non-medical settings and general lack of knowledge about their own body, the procedures often ended with tragic consequences – permanent health impairment or even death. Moreover, they risked imprisonment as well. They were presented as brave warriors, fighting for the survival of their families and putting their lives at stake.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this article is to present the communist discourse on induced abortion during the First Czechoslovak Republic as reflected in the communist women's press as well as to introduce some of the prominent actors of the debate about legalizing abortion together with their argumentation. The communist press represents a place, where even the most radical, unsmoothed voices found their place, and so it provides a valuable insight into the thinking of ordinary working-class women at the time. This article is methodologically based on the critical discourse analysis as introduced by Norman Fairclough, especially in his book *Language and Power*.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, for comprehensive recognition of the discourse, it is crucial to have knowledge and understanding of the background and context relevant to the text that we are to analyse because we have to take into account who produced the text, under what conditions and for which purpose. On the other hand, we need to consider who consumed the text and all the conditions that had influence on how this person interpreted the text.<sup>8</sup> To make my standpoint as a researcher clear, I am strongly convinced that every woman should have the right to

<sup>6</sup> See „*Radostné mateřství [Joyful Motherhood]*“, *Rozséváčka* 10. 4. 1930, p. 7 and *O zdraví a život ženy [The Health and Lives of Women at Stake]*, *Rozséváčka* 22. 3. 1928, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH, *Language and Power*, London-New York 1989.

<sup>8</sup> NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH, *Language and Power*, London-New York 1989, p. 26; NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, London 2009, p. 124.

a free and safe abortion whenever she decides so, without any obstacles or restrictions (including the duration of pregnancy).

The relevant literature on this topic includes many outstanding studies. Šubrtová in her article comprehensively sketched the whole discussion about legalizing abortion during the First Czechoslovak republic with all important actors and their arguments.<sup>9</sup> Žáčková analysed in length the laws regarding induced abortion and the bills legalizing abortion.<sup>10</sup> Feinberg was concerned with the (non)equality of women in Czechoslovakia and offered an insight into thinking of the masses regarding legalization of abortion through readers' contributions of the main periodical of the Czech social-democratic Party.<sup>11</sup> Musilová then introduced women politicians and the question of legalization of abortion that was extremely pertinent to them.<sup>12</sup> Relevant sources about induced abortion, family politics, and the life of working classes in interwar Czechoslovakia can also be found in books by Holubec,<sup>13</sup> and Rákosník and Šustrová.<sup>14</sup> Holubec recently presented a detailed biography of

- 9 ALENA ŠUBRTOVÁ, *Umělé potraty v diskusích meziválečného období v Československu (1918–1938)* [Induced Abortions in Discussions during the Interwar Era in Czechoslovakia (1918–1938)], *Demografie* 44/2002, pp. 233–44.
- 10 ZDENKA ŽÁČKOVÁ, *Boj o paragraf 144. Potraty a legislativa za První republiky* [Fight over the Anti-abortion Law. Abortions and Legislation in the First Czechoslovak Republic], *Acta historica Universitatis Silesianae Opaviensis* 4/2016, pp. 55–78; ZDENKA ŽÁČKOVÁ, *Právo ženy rozhodovat o svém těle. Otázka interrupce a společnost První republiky* [The Right of the Woman to Make Choices about Her Own Body. Abortions and the Society in the First Czechoslovak Republic], *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století* 10/2015.
- 11 MELISSA FEINBERG, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Pittsburgh 2006.
- 12 DANA MUSILOVÁ, *Z ženského pohledu: Poslankyně a senátorky Národního shromáždění Československé republiky 1918–1939* [From the Women's Point of View: Women Members of Parliament of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1939], České Budějovice 2008.
- 13 STANISLAV HOLUBEC, *Lidé periferie: Sociální postavení a každodennost pražského dělnictva v meziválečné době* [People of the Periphery: Social Status and Everyday Life of Prague Workers in the Interwar Era], Plzeň 2009.
- 14 JAKUB RÁKOSNÍK, RADKA ŠUSTROVÁ, *Rodina v zájmu státu: Populační růst a instituce manželství v českých zemích 1918–1989* [Family in State's Interests: Population Growth and the Institution of Marriage in Czech Lands 1918–1989], Praha 2016.

Louisa Landová-Štychová,<sup>15</sup> author of three bills legalizing abortion on demand, whom I will also discuss in this article.

## The First Czechoslovak Republic

The First Czechoslovak Republic was declared on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1918. However, it took as long as eight months to get hold of the complete territory which was designed for this new state. Sometimes it was achieved by diplomacy, sometimes by military force. In Bohemian lands, considerable difficulties resulted from the German minority that lived in the territory, formerly a privileged nation who did not want to accept the new situation. The circumstances were further complicated by the influenza pandemic, post-war economy with rising prices resulting in demonstrations and riots as well as frustration of the ordinary people due to unfulfilled expectations.<sup>16</sup> However, it did not take long before the first bill legalizing abortion on demand was submitted. Prior to introducing it, I would like to briefly present the legislation in force at the time and a further context.

As my research concentrates only on the area of the Czech lands, I will introduce relevant legislation respectively. Induced abortion was restricted by articles 144–148 of the Penal Code from the year 1852. Induced abortion was forbidden with no exceptions under all circumstances, completed abortion was subject to the penalty of one to five years of imprisonment, attempted abortion from six months to one year imprisonment. The novelization from the year 1912 allowed induced abortion in case the pregnancy posed a health risk to the prospective mother, however, this was very tricky, as it put the physicians in great risk as their decisions could later be contradicted by an expert with a different opinion. The health indication has remained problematic in the same way to this day.

<sup>15</sup> STANISLAV HOLUBEC, *Nešťastná revolucionářka: Myšlenkový svět a každodennost Luisy Landové-Štychové (1885–1969)* [*Sad Revolutionary: The Inner World and Everyday Life of Luisa Landová-Štychová (1885–1969)*], Praha 2021.

<sup>16</sup> See ZDENĚK KÁRNÍK, *České země v éře První republiky: Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)* [*Czech Lands in the Era of the First Czechoslovak Republic: Formation, Building-up and Golden Years of the Republic (1918–1929)*], Praha 2017, pp. 33–97.

When performing an induced abortion, physicians applied different methods according to the stage of gravidity. In the second and third month, they used a curette to remove the pregnancy tissue, while the patient could be put in general anaesthesia.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the third and in the fourth month, the physician used his finger or pincers instead, with the mother in general anaesthesia.<sup>18</sup> Means for self-induced abortion included massage, beating or kicking into stomach, hot irrigation of the cervix and penetration of the foetal membranes. “Quack” abortionists generally inserted a tube around 35 centimetres long and 4 millimetres wide into the uterus, then used various instruments (wires, hooks, etc.) to tear open the foetal membranes and pull out the foetus.<sup>19</sup> The major difference between an abortion performed by a physician and a self-induced abortion (or with a help from a friend, neighbour, etc.) was not only in the medical setting and possession of proper and sterile instruments, but also in the skill, and above all knowledge of female anatomy. It was the lack of information about one’s own body that often resulted in a tragic outcome. In spite of that, mechanical means for (self)induced abortion were very popular, as various teas and pills (mainly from medical herbs) were reported to be much less effective. The annual number of illegal abortions in Czechoslovakia at the time estimated by the communist press amounted to 500 thousand,<sup>20</sup> however, current researchers’ estimates are between 70 and 350 thousand.<sup>21</sup>

Contraceptive measures were not forbidden in Czechoslovakia, however, promoting such information in press was sometimes subject to censorship.<sup>22</sup> Animosity against means for preventing conception was also

<sup>17</sup> VLADIMÍR RYS, *Je potrat vraždou? [Is Abortion a Murder?]* Praha 1933, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> V. RYS, *Je potrat vraždou?*, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> V. RYS, *Je potrat vraždou?*, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> See MARIE VOBECKÁ, *Proti kličkám paragrafů [Against Intricacies of the Laws]*, *Rozsévачka* 8. 10. 1931, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> A. ŠUBRTOVÁ, *Umělé potraty v diskusích meziválečného období v Československu (1918–1938)*, p. 238; J. RÁKOSNÍK, R. ŠUSTROVÁ, *Rodina v zájmu státu*, p. 170; S. HOLUBEC, *Lidé periferie*, p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> See for example *Jak se vyvarovat nežádoucímu početí: INTERPELACE posl. Hodinové, Čížinské, Kuhnové a soudruhů ministru vnitra o konfiskaci tohoto článku v časopise Rozsévачka 6. března 1930 [How to Avoid Undesirable Conception: Interpellation of Deputies Hodinová, Čížinská, Kuhnová and Comrades to the Minister of Interior about Confiscation of this Article in Magazine Rozsévачka on March 6, 1930]*, *Rozsévачka* 27. 3. 1930, p. 7. Advertising of any contraceptive measures was formally banned in Weimar Germany. See ATINA GROSSMAN, *Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign against §218 in Germany*, in: *When Biology*

widely spread among physicians,<sup>23</sup> and politicians,<sup>24</sup> including president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk,<sup>25</sup> whose views were held in high esteem. As for the contraceptives, rubber condoms were undoubtedly the most effective means of protection available at that time, yet these were rather costly for the lower working classes, which is the social group that my research focuses on. There were also various balls intended for insertion into the vagina. They created sour environment which was hostile to the sperm. Also, irrigation of the vagina after the intercourse was performed, nevertheless it is no longer recommended nowadays, and the first method was problematized already back then.<sup>26</sup> The physicians sometimes produced devices which closed the cervix, but these were also considered to be rather dangerous because they could cause inflammations<sup>27</sup> and above all, such medical care was much too expensive for the proletarian women. Other “contraceptive measures” included coitus interruptus or calculating of the ovulation timeline, which was, again, problematized even back then.<sup>28</sup> However, unavailability of reliable and affordable means to prevent conception while induced abortion remained illegal did not result in sharply increasing birth rates, as many politicians might have loved to see. Instead, it gave way for abortions being performed in disastrous conditions, without sufficient knowledge and using various “do it yourself” methods. Consequently, women were dying or ending

Became Destiny – Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany, (edd.) R. Bridenthal, A. Grossmann, M. Kaplan, New York 1984, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> See for example ANNA FALISOVÁ, *Remeslo či milosrdenstvo? Kriminálne potraty v medzivojnovom období [Profession or Charitable Work? Illegal Abortions in Interwar Era]*, in: *Storočie procesov: Súdny, politika a spoločnosť v moderných dejinách Slovenska [Century of Lawsuits: Judgements, Politics, and Society in Modern Slovakian History]*, (edd.) V. Bystričský, J. Rogulová, et al., Bratislava 2013, pp. 55–56.

<sup>24</sup> See for example A. ŠUBRTOVÁ, *Umělé potraty v diskusích meziválečného období v Československu (1918–1938)*, pp. 241–42.

<sup>25</sup> ALENA ŠUBRTOVÁ, *Dějiny populačního myšlení v českých zemích [History of Population Thinking in Czech Lands]*, Praha 2006, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> See MAX POPPER, *Ochrana před početím. [Protection against conception]*, Právo lidu 5. 2. 1933, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> See for example *Jak se vyvarovat nežádoucímu početí: INTERPELACE posl. Hodiňové, Čižinské, Kuhnové a soudruhů ministru vnitra o konfiskaci tohoto článku v časopise Rozséváčka 6. března 1930, Rozséváčka 27. 3. 1930, p. 7*, or MAXIM WASSERMANN, *O indikacích eugenických a sociálních k zavedení potratu [About Eugenic and Social Indications for Performing Induced Abortion]*, Praha 1921, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> See I. E. Georg, *Regulace porodnosti [Fertility Regulation]*, Přítomnost 2. 8. 1933, pp. 493–496.

up with serious health impairments, among which permanent infertility was the least to be concerned about.

## Preventing the “catastrophic motherhood”

The first bill legalizing abortion<sup>29</sup> was submitted by Louisa Landová-Štychová<sup>30</sup> and her colleagues in October 1920. The content was simple and proposed to legalize all abortions performed by a physician with a consent of the pregnant woman, or self-induced abortions within three months from the conception. The justification lacked any elaborated arguments, it only stated that it hurts woman’s dignity to force her to have children when her living conditions do not allow for raising them. Further arguments included prevention of impaired health due to lay abortions and reducing the number of children born into poverty. It is worth noting that the bill did not mention covering the expenses for abortion by health insurance, which is usually a crucial point even nowadays. Perhaps it was a compromise at the beginning of the process, yet it did not suffice for the parliament’s committee to pass this bill. This attempt to legalize abortions resulted in strong protests from other members of parliament as well as from the public,<sup>31</sup> with catholic women in the lead.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, as Feinberg put it, “The leading proponents of legalizing abortion identified themselves more as socialists than as women or as feminists”.<sup>33</sup> As the Communists were the most radical of all socialist parties, it comes as no surprise that we can find the strongest rhetoric in the communist press. Members of the women’s organization – the Women’s National Council – were rather conservative and were not

<sup>29</sup> Poslanecká sněmovna N. S. R. Č. 1920, 694. *Návrh poslanců Landové-Štychové, MUDr. Boh. Vrbenského, Dr. Bartoška a společníků na novelisaci ustanovení XVI. hlavy I. dílu všeob. trest. zákona ze dne 27. května 1852 o vyhnání plodu ze života*, [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t0694\\_00.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t0694_00.htm) (accessed on 15 July 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Louisa (Luisa) Landová-Štychová was a member of parliament for the national-socialist Party from 1918 to 1923 and between 1925 and 1929 for the communist Party. She was one of the key persons to stand up for legalizing abortions. See D. MUSILOVÁ, *Z ženského pohledu*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> For more see A. ŠUBRTOVÁ, *Umělé potraty v diskusích meziválečného období v Československu (1918–1938)*, pp. 235–36.

<sup>32</sup> See D. MUSILOVÁ, *Z ženského pohledu*, p. 78.

<sup>33</sup> M. FEINBERG, *Elusive Equality*, p. 131.



in favour of legal abortions.<sup>34</sup> I will now concentrate on the contribution of the communist women's press to this debate and also discuss some of the remarkable arguments from other standpoints.

The women's communist press in the First Czechoslovak Republic begins as *Ženský list* (Women's weekly)<sup>35</sup>. Its chief editor, Marie Majerová,<sup>36</sup> polemized in her article with the first Czech female physician, Anna Honzáková, who wrote a critique on legalization of abortions. Honzáková's position was based on the premise of conception and maternity as being naturally connected with sexuality and therefore not to be artificially separated by any means. Performing abortions on a large scale would then devoid human sexuality of its important part and degrade it to a mere physical activity inducing pleasurable perceptions. She argued, that eliminating the consequences of sex life without restraint "degrades what nature intended as great and pure to a momentary, irresponsible and vulgar entertainment."<sup>37</sup> She was also very concerned with protecting women against health impairments due to induced abortions and made a good point that the safety of induced abortion does not depend solely on the physician but also on the woman. She expressed doubts that ordinary working-class women could afford (or manage) to rest up to 14 days in bed without having to get up to do housework or even go to the factory. Like many others, she criticized the insufficient care for mothers and proposed welfare improvements. She contended that it is not only a right but a duty of everybody to consider if they have the conditions (economic as well as health factors) to become good parents. According to her, it was completely legitimate to decide not to

<sup>34</sup> M. FEINBERG, *Elusive Equality*, pp. 129–58.

<sup>35</sup> At that time, it was still a magazine of the Czech social democracy, which was a major party. In summer 1920, fights for power in the Czech social democracy between more right-wing members (who later won) and left-wing members began. The ultra-leftists did not manage to take over control of the whole Party and therefore set up a new, independent Party – the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – in May 1921. For details see Z. KÁRNÍK, *České země v éře První republiky: Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)*, pp. 130–47.

<sup>36</sup> Marie Majerová was a publicist and a writer, she edited the communist women's press, but contributed also to other magazines, such as *Eva* or *Národní osvobození*. She was one of the founding members of the Communist Party, but in 1929 she was expelled for criticism of the new leadership. See BARBORA OSVALDOVÁ, JANA ČEŇKOVÁ, *Česká publicistika mezi dvěma světovými válkami [Czech Journalism Between the two World Wars]*, Praha 2017, pp. 97–99.

<sup>37</sup> *O vyhnání plodu. [About Termination of Pregnancy.]*, *Ženský list* 21. 4. 1921, p. 1. All translations, if not stated otherwise, are my own.

have, or to postpone having children until the conditions changed. However, the sex life must in such a case be postponed accordingly. On the contrary, Majerová maintains a more “modernist” attitude and pleads for using every means available to regulate all ways, in which the nature affects human life, including woman’s fertility. She ridicules Honzáková’s viewpoint and insists, that “Not to hinder the nature and its processes would mean not to shield oneself against cold or sunstroke, not to erect lightning rods and maybe even not to carry umbrellas!”<sup>38</sup> Majerová also touched on one of the crucial arguments, when she pointed out the miserable situation of many women who simply could not afford to have another child because of their poverty.<sup>39</sup>

Despite not being successful with her first bill, Louisa Landová-Štychová did not give up and submitted another bill legalizing abortions in November 1922. This time, there were only limited reasons for which a woman could demand an abortion: health, eugenic, social, and pregnancy as a result of a rape or when the pregnant girl was only up to 16 years of age. The only indication to give the pregnant woman sufficient freedom in deciding about her pregnancy and so the “right over her own body”, was the social one. However, this was not the point, as the bill says: “If the woman states social reasons, the physician is in case of justified doubts entitled to require relevant proof of her poverty or if a rather large family is the matter, about incomes, expenses, living conditions etc.”<sup>40</sup> As I will show later, the individual women’s rights as we understand them since the last few decades<sup>41</sup> (i.e., to reject parenthood because of personal aspirations) were not in Landová-Štychová’s agenda. The justification of the bill was based on arguments from a brochure by Max Wassermann, published about a year before, which I would like to briefly introduce.

Max (or Maxim, Maxmilian) Wassermann was physician, specializing in gynaecology and spa and internal medicine. He was an author of

<sup>38</sup> *O vyhnání plodu*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *O vyhnání plodu*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>40</sup> Poslanecká sněmovna N. S. R. Č. 1922, 3851. *Návrh poslanců L. Landové-Štychové, dra Boh. Vrbenského, dra Bartoška a společníků na novelisaci ustanovení XVI. hlavy I. dílu všeobec. trestního zákona ze dne 27. května 1852 o vyhnání plodu ze života*, [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t3851\\_00.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t3851_00.htm) (accessed on 15 July 2023).

<sup>41</sup> See for example LINDA GORDON, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Urbana 2002, p. 359.

several medical monographs and was an executive of the Organization of Czechoslovak spa physicians, member of the board of the Central Union of Czechoslovak physicians and State health committee. He also represented Czech physicians in International Society of Medical Hydrology.<sup>42</sup> As we can see, he had a well-established position, which likely enabled him to engage in such a controversial issue without risking his career. In his brochure, he argued that consequences of illegal abortions resulted in 80,000 women with health issues, out of which 20,000 were permanent impairments and 2.600 deceased annually.<sup>43</sup> He also pleaded for eugenic indication of induced abortion that would prevent many individuals with serious hereditary health impairments from being born who are only a burden for the community.<sup>44</sup> Eugenic reasons were widely recognized throughout the whole society at that time (i.e., the inferiority of individuals with hereditary health impairments and the benefits of preventing such individuals from birth), however, some physicians argued that the current knowledge about heredity was still insufficient.<sup>45</sup> Wassermann considered induced abortion performed by a physician as perfectly safe and he also refuted seeing the embryo as a human being, both from the biological point of view and according to opinions of ordinary women: “They value it just like a piece of meat, nothing more[.]”<sup>46</sup> He nevertheless did express concerns about moral decadence, especially in young women, that could still increase the number of abortions when legal.<sup>47</sup> Contrary to Landová-Štychová’s bills, where only a single physician was to decide about the woman’s request, Wasserman would appoint a three-member committee for such a decision, which was also

<sup>42</sup> ANTONÍN DOLENSKÝ, *Kulturní adresář ČSR. Biografický slovník žijících kulturních pracovníků a pracovníc [Cultural Directory of The Czechoslovak Republic. Biographical Dictionary of Living Cultural Workers]*, Praha 1936, p. 611.

<sup>43</sup> M. WASSERMANN, *O indikacích eugenických a sociálních k zavedení potratu*, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> M. WASSERMANN, *O indikacích eugenických a sociálních k zavedení potratu*, pp. 10–20.

<sup>45</sup> See *Zprávy z lékařských spolků a sjezdů [Reports from Medical Societies and Congresses]*, *Časopis lékařův českých* 24. 12. 1921, p. 877.

<sup>46</sup> M. WASSERMANN, *O indikacích eugenických a sociálních k zavedení potratu*, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> M. WASSERMANN, *O indikacích eugenických a sociálních k zavedení potratu*, p. 30.

proposed in the third bill<sup>48</sup> submitted by the German social democrats in 1925. All three bills were not passed by the parliament's committee, yet there was another bill by Landová-Štychová coming soon after. But first, I would like to briefly sketch developments in the communist women's press.

After a split in the Czech social democracy, *Ženský list* became the press of the communist Party and so in June 1922, it was renamed *Komunistka* (Communist). The chief editor first remained Marie Majerová, to be replaced in April 1925 by Helena Malířová – herself also a writer and a publicist. Nevertheless, the popularity of the magazine was rather low, and its name was blamed as one of the reasons. Therefore, from 1926, discussions about a new name and proper content arose.<sup>49</sup> The legalization of abortion became a hot topic that was supposed to attract more women.<sup>50</sup> An article from March criticizes an internal instruction of authorities to strictly deploy midwives of their qualification permits should a serious suspicion of performing illegal abortions arise.<sup>51</sup> Most of the typical rhetoric of the communist press is already present. Motherhood is the supreme joy of women and all of them love their children deeply: “For how many women is motherhood sweet, miraculous event! The greatest in life!”<sup>52</sup> But because of the capitalist system, the poor women have no other way than to get rid of their unborn baby in order to secure the little food they have for the living ones. The article says: “And how many women are there, to whom the realization of the holiest woman's duty brings despair and fear of future ... I would have loved the baby so much, but just because I am aware of my responsibility, they cannot be born! ... Out of love for the ones that are living decide poor women to

<sup>48</sup> Poslanecká sněmovna N. S. R. Č. 1925, *Původní znění. 5300. Antrag der Abgeordneten Dr. Holitscher, Blatny, Kirpal, Deutsch und Genossen auf Neuregelung der strafrechtlichen Bestimmungen über die Fruchtabtreibung*, [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t5300\\_00.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t5300_00.htm) (accessed on 15 July 2023).

<sup>49</sup> See for example *K diskusi o tisku. [Concerning the Discussion about Press]*, *Komunistka* 14. 1. 1926, p. 4 and *K diskusi o tisku. [Concerning the Discussion about Press]*, *Komunistka* 28. 1. 1926, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> See also S. HOLUBEC, *Lidé periferie*, p. 86. For comparison with The Weimar Republic see JULIA SNEERINGER, *Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany*, Chapel Hill-London 2003, p. 148.

<sup>51</sup> BETINA KANINSKÁ, §§ 144–148 [*Articles 144–148*], *Komunistka* 11. 3. 1926, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> B. KANINSKÁ, §§ 144–148, p. 3.

destroy the human seed...”<sup>53</sup> The rhetoric has a very strong emotional potential and is based on essentialist<sup>54</sup> concepts of motherhood. The critique goes on to show that poor women not only lose happiness but also risk their health and lives, and on the contrary, rich women easily pay for an illegal abortion in safe environment of luxurious medical clinics.<sup>55</sup> The author then denounces other socialist women’s press (presumably social-democratic) for not criticizing this new instruction and calls for all working women to unite with the communists in the demand: “Abolish articles 144–148 immediately!”<sup>56</sup>

In May 1926, the magazine changed its title to *Rozsévačka* (Sower) in order not to deter women readers that liked the content but did not identify themselves as communists.

I would like to concentrate on the articles promoting Landová-Štychová’s third bill<sup>57</sup> to legalize abortion. She submitted the bill in June when she had already joined the Communist Party. The articles published in succession explained the content of the bill together with a commentary for the readers. I would like to share the beginning of the justification part of the bill that stands for the core of the arguments. It was also cited in the article and reads as follows: “Motherhood is a social function that demands utmost responsibility, and therefore it should be, if possible, based on a voluntary decision of the woman to undertake this responsibility, should the conditions comply with what we state here as indications for induced abortion. Abortion is an evil, but even greater evil is the birth of a child from unhealthy parents or into unsuitable conditions. Abortion is an evil, that cannot be fought as other evils with imprisonments and severe penalties.”<sup>58</sup> The bill is based on the presumption

<sup>53</sup> B. KANINSKÁ, §§ 144–148, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> KATEŘINA ZÁBRODSKÁ, *Variace na gender: Poststrukturalismus, diskurzivní analýza a genderová identita [Poststructuralism, Discursive Analysis, and Gender Identity]*, Praha 2009, pp. 98–99.

<sup>55</sup> Compare J. SNEERINGER, *Winning Women’s Votes*, pp. 105–52.

<sup>56</sup> B. KANINSKÁ, §§ 144–148, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>57</sup> Poslanecká sněmovna N. S. R. Č. 1926, 535. *Návrh poslance L. Landové-Štychové a soudruhů na novelisaci ustanovení hlavy XVI., I. dílu všeobecného trestního zákona ze dne 27. května 1852 o vyhnání plodu ze života jakož i § 284–286 z r. 1878: V.*, [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535\\_01.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535_01.htm) (accessed on 15 July 2023).

<sup>58</sup> *Odstraňte potratový paragraf. [Abolish the Anti-abortion Law.]*, *Rozsévačka* 2. 9. 1926, p. 4. Compare the bill legalizing abortions, available on-line: [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535\\_01.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535_01.htm)

that in certain conditions, the birth of (another) child may be undesirable for the society (e.g., child with health impairments or a childbirth that unacceptably worsens the economic situation of the family). In that case, a woman should have the right to terminate her pregnancy. The bill therefore does not comply with the right to abortion as understood nowadays.<sup>59</sup> Another argument is based on the fact that criminalizing abortions does not solve the problem, as they are still performed in vast numbers, but in dangerous ways that cost the lives and health of many women.<sup>60</sup> The bill itself was similar to the previous ones, i.e., abortion is not illegal when performed at a request of the prospective mother for health, eugenic or social reasons, or when the pregnancy is a result of rape or when the pregnant girl is under the age of 17. Time limitation for performing a legal abortion was defined as “when the embryo is still not capable of life outside of the uterus”.<sup>61</sup> The justification contained many examples of hereditary diseases as well as specific cases of mothers who suffered a life in bad conditions due to poverty and a lack of birth control, or cases of women who had no other choice but undergo illegal abortions. The intimate confessions might be rather unusual for an official document; however, they are very consistent with (especially) later articles in the communist press:<sup>62</sup> “After the sixth child, being just 28 years old, I was skinny, decrepit, yellowish in the face, almost without hair and had to walk with a stick. My husband began to chase other women and it went so far that he even confessed to it repeatedly... I gave birth to children one after another even though we’d tried our best to keep it at bay. We were poorer and poorer, and we had to move to a cheaper and smaller apartment although our family had grown bigger. My husband began to hit the bottle. He was no longer the man I used to know. When

<sup>59</sup> Nor did Landová-Štychová promote such abortion rights in her first bill (although the bill was quite simple without any restrictions, and may have seemed like that), as I will argue later in this article.

<sup>60</sup> This made also a very important argument when legalizing abortions later in communist Czechoslovakia. See for example RADKA DUDOVÁ, *Interrupce v České republice: zápas o ženská těla [Abortions in the Czech Republic: Fight over Women's Bodies]*, Praha 2012, pp. 47–51.

<sup>61</sup> Poslanecká sněmovna N. S. R. Č. 1926, 535. *Návrh poslance L. Landové-Štychové a soudruhů na novelisaci ustanovení hlavy XVI., I. dílu všeobecného trestního zákona ze dne 27. května 1852 o vyhnání plodu ze života jakož i § 284–286 z r. 1878. V.*, [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535\\_01.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535_01.htm) (accessed on 15 July 2023).

<sup>62</sup> Compare J. SNEERINGER, *Winning Women's Votes*, p. 152.

he came home at night, he beat me and the children ... when I defended them, he almost killed me. And when he ran out of strength, he cried and blamed me for ruining him with my damned fertility.”<sup>63</sup>

The previous sentences open the question of the right to sexual life and physical satisfaction. However, I will get back to that later with more examples from the communist press and now I would like to return to the article. It informs the readers that the bill was not even passed by the initial committee to the Parliament and indignantly points out the heartlessness of the politicians and experts who show no sign of empathy with working women because they deny the social cause of abortion. The article argues that no criminal restrictions can prevent women from seeking induced abortion, if their social conditions do not allow for bearing children. Until satisfactory social benefits are in place and care in motherhood secured, the only solution is a safe induced abortion performed by a physician. It also criticizes the article by Honzáková that I mentioned earlier and quotes parts of other articles which also disapprove of sexual restraint as the only form of contraception and anti-abortion measure: “This awful tragedy is above all and in its roots a social tragedy. Tens of thousands of women risk their lives every year not to become mothers and they do so only because the social conditions created by the capitalist order turn their blessing of motherhood into a disaster... Nowhere is the criminal hypocrisy and outward rudeness of bourgeois society so clearly manifested towards the crushing misery of the oppressed as here, towards the poor women who do not want to give up their right to love, but are unable to bear the fruits and blessings of love...”<sup>64</sup> In the above quote, the position of motherhood in communist discourse is very clear – motherhood as the ultimate source of joy and fulfilment for women. Yet there were also alternative conceptions (though rarely) which I will discuss in the following paragraph. The article concludes by making an appeal to female readers (men were apparently not counted on), “We have selected only a few passages from the bill proposed by MP Lando­vá-Štychová and her comrades in order to explain to female readers that in this country, we must fight for things as obvious as a woman’s right to

<sup>63</sup> Poslanecká sněmovna N. S. R. Č. 1926, 535. *Návrh poslance L. Lando­vé-Štychové a soudruhů na novelisaci ustanovení hlavy XVI., I. dílu všeobecného trestního zákona ze dne 27. května 1852 o vyhnání plodu ze života jakož i § 284–286 z r. 1878: V.*, [https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535\\_01.htm](https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0535_01.htm) (accessed on 15 July 2023).

<sup>64</sup> *Odstraňte potratový paragraf*, p. 5.

her own body, the right to control her motherhood” (s. 3).<sup>65</sup> Although the rhetoric seems to be identical with the present abortion rights campaigns, further analysis of the sources reveals the differences in the (not only) communist discourse of the time<sup>66</sup> as I will show later.

However, just two months later, we can see a strong contrast to the praise of motherhood as a joy and a woman’s greatest task in the same magazine. The author points out that because of reproductive function, the quality of life for women is much worse than that of men: “It is not only the painful menstrual period (menstrual cycle) that leaves you, women, feeling like dragging, exhausted, worthless and nervous beings, it is also the not-quite-healthy condition, the organism all the time ready to serve for the continuation of humanity, which lasts a lifetime.”<sup>67</sup> The article continues with comparing an embryo to a parasite which “sucks the nutrition out of the mother’s body”<sup>68</sup> and regarding childbirth as a sacrifice. The author then goes on to criticize the unfairness of nature, which manifests also in the very act of sexual intercourse: “The man, whose task of creating new life is completed by fertilization during the sexual act, greatly enjoys the act. A woman, on the other hand, who is so heavily burdened by sex because of her passive role, never achieves comparable pleasure, and most women feel no pleasure at all, often only pain and disgust. Fairly assigned tasks, indeed.”<sup>69</sup> Finally, the article warns women against devoting all their energy to their children who will not be grateful to them in adult life. It urges women to join the communist movement and to work for the whole proletariat and its struggle for a better future, which it sees as the true, spiritual fulfillment of women’s potential. It concludes: “In this way you will fulfill not only your biological duties but also your human duties; only then will you become a human being!”<sup>70</sup> This example clearly shows the heterogeneity of the communist discourse at the time. Obviously, notions of motherhood as blessing and joy exist side by side with realistic complaints about the burden that

<sup>65</sup> *Odstraňte potratový paragraf*, p. 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>66</sup> Compare J. SNEERINGER, *Winning Women’s Votes*, pp. 148–49.

<sup>67</sup> *Život pohlavní a mateřství* [*Sexual Life and Motherhood*], *Rozsévka* 18. 11. 1926, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Život pohlavní a mateřství*, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Život pohlavní a mateřství*, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Život pohlavní a mateřství*, p. 7.



motherhood means and about unsatisfactory sexual life.<sup>71</sup> The propagandistic part – agitating to join the communist movement while utilizing concepts of finding satisfaction in life (be it “anti-motherhood” as in this case, or strongly “pro-motherhood”<sup>72</sup> as in other articles) – is also typical for communist press at that time.

The above article was most likely inspired by a brochure<sup>73</sup> by a Swiss physician, Fritz Brupbacher, published in Czech language in the same year. Brupbacher’s ideas, however radical, were not opposed to motherhood as such, but pointed out the devastating effects of successive motherhood on woman’s body and life, especially in poor conditions where adequate nutrition and time for rest are not provided. He was highly libertarian for his time and acknowledged the need of satisfying sex life, which could be achieved by masturbation if necessary.<sup>74</sup> Yet the extreme nature of his views may be almost startling, as he concludes the brochure by saying, “Man will strive to limit the number of his children – if this can be predicted – even in a classless society because he does not want to be a slave to the unreasonable fertility of nature. A man<sup>75</sup> will defend himself against being eaten by his children, just like against lions, bears and bugs.”<sup>76</sup> No matter how deteriorating effect successive motherhood had both on the woman and on the welfare of the whole family, comparing children to wild animals and insect seems to reveal a rather hostile attitude to reproduction and possibly a masculinist viewpoint from which it was written (regardless of the influence that his wife, also a doctor, might

<sup>71</sup> Regardless how far away from ideals the real sex life may be nowadays, the situation of proletarian women back then was far worse and often rather tragic, not only due to poverty and unavailable contraception, but also because of very different gender relationships, where domination and violence from men presided over mutual understanding. Therefore, some therapists at that time even thought about a crisis of heterosexual relationships. See KIRSTEN LENG, *Sexual Politics and Feminist Science: Women Sexologists in Germany, 1900–1933*, Ithaca 2018, pp. 264–306.

<sup>72</sup> To join the communist movement in order to overthrow the capitalist system and gain suitable conditions for childrearing.

<sup>73</sup> FRITZ BRUPBACHER, *Mateřské štěstí a vyhnání plodu [Maternal Happiness and Termination of Pregnancy]*, Praha 1926.

<sup>74</sup> See CHRISTIAN KAISER, „Freiheit Der Geschlechtsbetätigung“ – *Gesundheit Und Sexualität Bei Fritz Brupbacher Und Anderen Sozialistischen Ärztinnen Und Ärzten*, Virus – Beiträge Zur Sozialgeschichte Der Medizin 18/2019, p. 174.

<sup>75</sup> Although the meaning of “man” in the original stands for a mankind and would be therefore nowadays more suitable to translate as “people” (without the gender connotations), I kept this expression, because I believe it is rather revealing.

<sup>76</sup> F. BRUPBACHER, *Mateřské štěstí a vyhnání plodu*, Praha 1926, last page.

have had on the brochure). A man jeopardized by poverty due to too many children seems to be compared to the fight of man against nature, where in this case the nature materializes itself in the shape of a woman threatening the man with her “unreasonable” (again rational masculine vs. irrational feminine) fertility.<sup>77</sup>

Fight the anti-abortion law! Out into the streets, proletarian women! – campaigning for legal abortion as a key topic.

In 1929 a major change in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia took place, as Klement Gottwald (later the first communist president) became the leader and Moscow gained greater influence over the Party’s politics.<sup>78</sup> As a result, many Party members that disagreed with the new course were expelled and the chief editor of *Rozséváčka* was replaced by Magdalena Bosáková, only to be replaced again in June by Jožka Jabůrková, who as a former worker herself, well represented the communist “woman-revolutionary” concept of the time.<sup>79</sup> She wrote many articles herself and also paid much more attention to campaigning for legalization of abortions.<sup>80</sup> In less than two years, she managed to raise the number of subscribers by two thirds and the magazine could increase its

<sup>77</sup> For association of masculine with culture and feminine with nature see for example CLAIRE M. RENZETTI, DANIEL J. CURRAN, *Ženy, muži a společnost [Women, Men, and Society]*, Praha 2003, pp. 212–15.

<sup>78</sup> See Z. KÁRNÍK, *České země v éře První republiky: Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)*, 397–98; ZDENĚK KÁRNÍK, *České země v éře První republiky: Československo v krizi a ohrožení (1930–1935) [Czech Lands in the Era of the First Czechoslovak Republic: Czechoslovakia in Crisis and under Threat]*, Praha 2018, pp. 155–56.

<sup>79</sup> B. OSVALDOVÁ, J. ČENKOVÁ, *Česká publicistika mezi dvěma světovými válkami*, p. 95.

<sup>80</sup> PETR ŠÁMAL, *Beletrie, ženský komunistický tisk a problémy kontinuity (na příkladu Rozséváčky) [Fiction, Women’s Communist Press and the Problem of Continuity (with Rozséváčka as an example)]*, in: Povídka, román a periodický tisk v 19. a 20. století. Sborník příspěvků ze symposia pořádaného oddělením pro výzkum literární kultury ÚČL AV ČR v Praze 13.–14. října 2004 [Short Story, Novel and Periodical Press in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Proceedings from the Conference Held by The Department for Research of Literary Culture of The Institute for the Czech Language and Literature of The Czech Academy of Science in Prague on October 13 and 14, 2004], Praha 2005, pp. 145–58.

volume from eight to twelve pages.<sup>81</sup> The aggressiveness of the rhetoric increased as well and slogans like “Bourgeoisie is trying to reduce women to baby-machines” and “Working women will fight and get their right to free and joyful motherhood”<sup>82</sup>, which dominated an article Jabůrková published shortly after starting her new position, appeared frequently. Many articles presented an idealized picture of motherhood in the Soviet Union, while stressing that a woman can feel completely free because apart from all the care and benefits she can get as a mother, she may also apply for a free induced abortion.<sup>83</sup> As Jabůrková claims, “The yoke of forced motherhood crushes equally all women workers in the capitalist world, and all of them are asking with great interest how the issue of motherhood was solved in the only homeland of the liberated woman, in the Soviet Union.”<sup>84</sup>

Many articles in *Rozsěvačka* that are supposed to be contributions by the readers, describe the suffering that women must endure due to the anti-abortion law. In one of them a 29-year old mother of one, married for 9 years, underwent 7 abortions and says: “I think it is not a crime to have an abortion but it is a capital crime to bear a child if one cannot feed them.”<sup>85</sup> She then shares her own experience with illegal abortion: “I think many women will agree that abortion itself and the related pain are not as horrible as pleading with the midwife and what comes next. You have to work so that no one notices anything, trying to manage the hard work as before, while your legs shake with weakness. You sweat for a while, only to shiver with cold a few minutes later. When you can’t take it anymore, your last refuge is the toilet, where, if you’re lucky and no one else is there, you can at least wash yourself.”<sup>86</sup> In another article, named “Slave’s Slave”<sup>87</sup> (title obviously inspired by a poem by Josef Svatoopluk Machar describing domestic violence) a woman speaks of her suffering in marriage. She confesses to have had 16 abortions apart from giving birth to 5 children and perceives a large family as one of the main

81 MARTA PILNÁ, *Reportáž o novinářce: O životě a díle Jožky Jabůrkové* [Reportage about a Journalist: About Life and Work of Jožka Jabůrková], Praha 1959, pp. 77–80.

82 J. JABŮRKOVÁ, *Svobodné mateřství*, p. 3.

83 J. JABŮRKOVÁ, *Svobodné mateřství*, p. 3.

84 J. JABŮRKOVÁ, *Svobodné mateřství*, p. 3.

85 *Za 9 let 7 potratů, 1 dítě* [7 Abortions and 1 Child in 9 Years], *Rozsěvačka* 2. 11. 1932, p. 3.

86 *Za 9 let 7 potratů, 1 dítě*, p. 3.

87 *Otrokyně otroka* [Slaves’s Slave], *Rozsěvačka* 6. 2. 1930, p. 7.

causes of trouble that ruin marital relationships of poor couples: “I do not wonder that my husband is angry with me. Between 19 and 28 years of age, I gave birth to 5 children. As he approached me with love after his daily hard work, I had to push him away, hold him off with evil words, in order not to get pregnant again. While making love, he saw just terror from the consequences instead of a smile. Often, as that was the only way, he even used force to get what he needed. I am also a healthy human who wants and has the right to live and, believe me, my fertility ruined all the happiness in my life.”<sup>88</sup>

Although these articles certainly fitted in well with the communist press propaganda and should be taken with a grain of salt, the published content needed to represent forms of suffering that proletarian readers were all too familiar with and could identify with. They clearly show the communist discourse in which all the ills of life stem from the capitalist system. Yet, apart from the propaganda, there are reflections of more general (and still relevant) problems connected with equality of men and women, such as the triple burden of work, household and motherhood, domestic violence and the inequality in consequences of sexual life – too well represented by an almost iconic picture of an exhausted woman cleaning herself at the factory toilet from the pregnancy tissues with blood running out, but also very delicate articulations of hope for a meaningful life with satisfying partner relationships with sexual gratification as its assurance and its indispensable part. There are certainly more explicit statements, like “Those who don’t want to have children shouldn’t make love. And that is supposed to be clever? Good thing they didn’t say that who can’t afford to buy food should not be hungry.”<sup>89</sup> Yet the very slight hints, half-concealed in resignation, when the woman speaks of the “missing smile” and the “right to live”, express so well the sadness and longing for a fulfillment in life that she could not get despite all the sacrifices and effort – 16 induced abortions, giving birth to 5 children and enduring anxiety of a dilemma – to give her husband “what he needs” poses a great threat to the family she is trying to preserve. She excuses her husband’s violence and blames the capitalists instead – it is the capitalist system that exploits not only the proletariat’s work but their very existence, from the flesh to the spirit: muscles work for

<sup>88</sup> *Otrokyně otroka*, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Otázka populace [The Problem of Population]*, Rozsévačka 13. 12. 1928, p. 3.

low wages during the day, sex organs<sup>90</sup> of men and women then produce a new labour force, and all potential pleasure is suppressed by terror. Partner relationships that should be a source of deep satisfaction and fulfillment, are reduced to interactions of exhausted, frustrated individuals with ever-present violence, due to the conditions (including laws) created by capitalists. Moreover, intimacy is eliminated, private space colonized and the very closest entities – mother and child – are turned into enemies, as Brupbacher ingeniously put it: “Even if still in its mother’s womb the proletarian seed of capitalist society belongs to the industrialists and big landowners as a future wage slave, to the imperial army as a future recruit. The watchful eyes of the police and the prosecutor monitor them in the womb and keep an eye on them – through their mother’s bloodstream, they partake in the misery of the proletariat...”<sup>91</sup>

However far-fetched the above quotes were, this was the discourse of the communist press. The articles were certainly produced in order to incite indignation and gain more support, including willingness for participating in strikes supporting the Communist Party. The anti-abortion law represented an entity against which women could unite and fight. If the goal of the political system had changed (as the communists intended), the magazine would have been under censorship and could no longer publish such content.<sup>92</sup> But since the anti-abortion law became the goal, even a rather militant rhetoric could get around censorship. Strong proclamations urging to unite and fight against the anti-abortion law began to fill the pages of *Rozséváčka*: “This fight must be initiated everywhere. In factories and camps, even louder calls for abolishment of this whip of a law must be heard everywhere. Proletarian women and girls must realize that sitting at home crying won’t help: they must go out in the streets and factories and fight. Fight the anti-abortion law! Out

<sup>90</sup> The capitalist system “exploits the proletariat not only economically, but sexually as well.” See *Svobodné mateřství [Free Motherhood]*, *Rozséváčka* 12. 10. 1932, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> F. BRUPBACHER, *Mateřské štěstí a vyhnání plodu*, p. 16.

<sup>92</sup> See for example MICHAEL WÖGERBAUER et al., *V obecném zájmu: Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře: 1749–2014 [In the Public Interests: Censorship and Social Regulation of Literature in Modern Czech Culture: 1749–2014]*, Praha 2015, p. 745; JAKUB KONČELÍK, PAVEL VEČEŘA, PETR ORSÁG, *Dějiny českých médií 20. století [History of Czech Media in 20<sup>th</sup> Century]*, Praha 2010, p. 35.

in the streets, proletarian women! The right to make choices about our bodies only belongs to us!”<sup>93</sup>

## Trust in God, mother! Voices from the other side

As calling for abolishment of the anti-abortion law intensified in the 1930s, contradictory voices began to be heard with even greater urgency. I would like to briefly introduce some of them to illustrate the polemic nature of the discussion and broaden the picture that this article presents. First, a brochure by Bedřich Vašek, a catholic priest and writer, who confidently states: “Trust in God, mother! ... God never asks to do impossible things.”<sup>94</sup> Not surprisingly, Vašek’s arguments are based on the Commandments and stress the absolute necessity to protect the unborn life from the moment of conception. Without the benefit of baptism, the embryo will be devoid of salvation and so will be the parents as a consequence. He strongly criticizes the effort to legalize abortions on social and eugenic grounds and maintains that once the child is conceived, the mother must do all she can to give birth to them. In *Rozséváčka*, a self-proclaimed physician and non-communist ridicules Vašek’s brochure and argues: “It seems that the author has not seen the countless mothers whose heart is breaking, when each day, they cannot give a single piece of bread to their ill, gaunt children crying of hunger. Mothers who are so poor that they end their own and their children’s lives by throwing themselves desperately into water or by other form of suicide.”<sup>95</sup> However, such accusations did not reveal a weak point in Vašek’s argumentation: that behind the right to life, one’s willingness to “bear the cross” should be even stronger. The parents are expected to welcome any hardships and sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children and the suffering which comes with it seems to be perceived as precisely the core part of human life. Vašek stresses that “Christ demands of his followers fidelity reaching the point of martyrdom”<sup>96</sup> and praises

<sup>93</sup> MARIE VOBECKÁ, *Boj proti Šu 144 [Fight Against the Article 144]*, *Rozséváčka* 22. 5. 1930, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> BEDŘICH VAŠEK, *Kdo nás obhájí? Paragraf 144 [Who Will Defend Us? Article 144]*, *Hlučín ve Slezsku* 1932, p. 34.

<sup>95</sup> *MUDr Keller: Kdo nás obhájí? [Doctor Keller: Who Will Defend Us?]*, *Rozséváčka* 14. 9. 1932, last page.

<sup>96</sup> B. VAŠEK, *Kdo nás obhájí? Paragraf 144*, p. 33.

“a mother, who will have such immense courage that she will be ready to face the brink of death just to keep the once conceived child alive.”<sup>97</sup> Apart from the asceticism and extremity that his views represent, they also remind us that life is not only about pursuing joy and entertainment but about responsibility and generativity as well. Yet in the end, no matter how desperate the circumstances may be and how impossible to feed another child may seem, Vašek offers the mother a sole piece of advice: “It is necessary to have unwavering faith in the Providence of God.”<sup>98</sup>

Another influential brochure that I would like to introduce here is by Emanuel Rádl, a well-known biologist and philosopher.<sup>99</sup> Rádl shows greater sympathy for the women who aborted their child and acknowledges the necessity to reform the law and reduce the penalty, but he strictly refutes legalizing abortions. He maintains that law must not set rules for “killing”, just like it does not set rules for suicide (no matter how outdated this is nowadays) and accuses the proponents of legal abortion for being guided only by their lust in a pursue of unlimited sexual pleasure. His arguments are based on viewing the embryo as an independent being with a potential to develop all human qualities from the moment of conception.<sup>100</sup> Rádl criticizes all the indications for induced abortion except when there is an eminent danger to the mother’s life. As for the indication in case of rape, he doubts as to how many women get pregnant as a result and says: “I often heard that the probability of conceiving a child during forced intercourse is not very high; I also heard that lawyers may have difficulties deciding what is and what is not a forced intercourse.”<sup>101</sup> He maintains a similar position as Vašek and stresses that „the only right a mother has ever had is to sacrifice everything for her child.”<sup>102</sup> Rádl maintains that calling for legal abortion stems only from immoral lifestyle and he states in another brochure: “Especially German Jewish women are morally corrupt. The so-called psychoanalysis, movements for sexual

<sup>97</sup> B. VAŠEK, *Kdo nás obhájí? Paragraf 144*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>98</sup> B. VAŠEK, *Kdo nás obhájí? Paragraf 144*, p. 17. Emphasis in original.

<sup>99</sup> EMANUEL RÁDL, *Proti takzvané sociální indikaci [Against the So-called Social Indication]*, Praha 1932.

<sup>100</sup> Compare REVA SIEGEL, *Reasoning from the Body: A Historical Perspective on Abortion Regulation and Questions of Equal Protection*, *Stanford Law Review* 44/1992, pp. 287–92.

<sup>101</sup> E. RÁDL, *Proti takzvané sociální indikaci*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>102</sup> E. RÁDL, *Proti takzvané sociální indikaci*, pp. 17–18.

reform and for induced abortion are mostly led by Jews.”<sup>103</sup> He indignantly speaks of the dangers that such activities pose to the society and quotes an example of a medieval sect whose members were put to death in order to protect the community from their heresy.<sup>104</sup> Obviously, Rádl is very apprehensive about any change in the social order and anxiously insists on the rights of the unborn child or rather, on the duties of the mother. In this discourse, the mother has an objective instead of a subjective position<sup>105</sup> and is perceived as an entity whose main purpose is to serve as an incubator for the embryo, or a baby-machine, as was popular to say back then, instead of a human being who can pursue aspirations of their choice. To see Rádl as racist and misogynist would certainly be justifiable although popular gender and racial discourses (at least) of the time should be also taken into consideration. His ultimate demand that a mother sacrifice herself for her child might seem rather extreme, however, it stems from the same hegemonic concept as the communist campaign that justifies legalizing abortions – glorifying the martyrdom of mothers. The difference is in the voluntary, active position of women in communist campaigning<sup>106</sup> and on the contrary, a passive, inferior role in Rádl’s view. Nevertheless, the extent to which the women in the communist discourse offer themselves while risking their lives with lay abortion in order to save their living children is by no means less altruistic than Rádl’s, as an article in *Rozséváčka* conveys: “A poor woman loves her child. She loves them so deeply that she would rather sacrifice her health, her blood, freedom as well as life than to see her baby slowly die of hunger ... Goose quills, wood chunks, rusty wires, dirty rags – all that finds its way into the body of an unfortunate woman whom poverty drove to the threshold of despair.”<sup>107</sup> And the concepts like this one, prescribing a social role for women as mothers (no matter how actively or passively they are supposed to accept it) are at the core of gender inequality,<sup>108</sup> regardless of the plausible or noble forms they might be refined into.

<sup>103</sup> EMANUEL RÁDL, *O ženském hnutí [About the Women’s Movement]*, Praha 1933, p. 57.

<sup>104</sup> E. RÁDL, *O ženském hnutí*, p. 54.

<sup>105</sup> NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS, *Gender and Nation*, London 1997, p. 47.

<sup>106</sup> For epic depiction of women warriors fighting in the civil war after the communist revolution in Russia see J. JABŮRKOVÁ, *Svobodné mateřství*, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> *O zdraví a život ženy*, *Rozséváčka* 22. 3. 1928, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Compare R. SIEGEL, *Reasoning from the Body*, p. 342.



Whether women's rights gradually came to be taken more seriously, or whether it was more of a political decision, in 1932 the Czech Social Democracy submitted its own bill on the legalization of abortion, known as the Meissner draft because it was drafted by its Minister of Justice Alfréd Meissner.<sup>109</sup> The bill was very similar to the previous ones and so it was again grounded in health, eugenics, social conditions, pregnancy of a girl up to 16 years of age and cases of rape.<sup>110</sup> Its 3<sup>rd</sup> article was of great importance, it guaranteed coverage of the procedure from health insurance for women insured for childbirth and also full or partial coverage for poor women.<sup>111</sup> However, the Communist Party, which promoted legal abortions so vehemently, opposed this bill because they demanded unconditional legalization this time (contrary to Landová-Štychová's previous bill).<sup>112</sup> Whether the uncompromising stance of the Communist Party reflected a stronger advocacy of women's rights or it was simply a result of political rivalry, as Sneeringer similarly argues when analyzing why the Social Democrats in the Weimar Republic did not support the Communist bill legalizing abortion a year earlier, it represented an important factor that caused this bill to fail to pass through the parliamentary process again. I would like to concentrate now on the discourse in the brochure of Betty Karpíšková, a social-democratic member of the parliament. She wrote it to promote Meissner's draft,<sup>113</sup> and analyze its attitude to the concept of individual rights.

Betty Karpíšková might be viewed as a vanguard of the later activists for abortion rights, as it was her who had tirelessly persuaded her colleagues about the necessity to legalize abortions until Meissner was allowed to prepare his draft.<sup>114</sup> The rhetoric in her brochure often contains the same phrases as the ones used later to promote women's rights about a woman having a "right to her own body". However, at the same time Karpíšková assures the readers that every woman wants to be a mother

<sup>109</sup> See also M. FEINBERG, *Elusive Equality*, pp. 146–54.

<sup>110</sup> Z. ŽÁČKOVÁ, *Boj o paragraf 144*, pp. 73–74.

<sup>111</sup> BETTY KARPÍŠKOVÁ, *Kontrola porodů a Meissnerova osnova [Childbirth Regulation and the Meissner's Draft]*, Praha 1932, p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> See for example § 144–148, *Rudé právo* 21. 7. 1932, or § 144 a osnova nového zákona [Article 144 and the New Penal Code], *Rozsěvačka* 27. 7. 1932, last page.

<sup>113</sup> B. KARPÍŠKOVÁ, *Kontrola porodů a Meissnerova osnova*, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> D. MUSILOVÁ, *Z ženského pohledu*, p. 80.

because it is her “biological task”<sup>115</sup>. She only demands that women have the privilege to accept this task voluntarily and have the right to decide about a suitable time.<sup>116</sup> She states: “In a cultural society, who would dare to force a woman to this service? Who would like to turn this beautiful reproductive function of a woman, which every woman wishes to complete most passionately, into a biological yoke?”<sup>117</sup> As I will argue similarly about Landová-Štychová later, the concept of individual rights was not completely articulated yet,<sup>118</sup> and a woman who did not wish to have children in spite of suitable circumstances was subject to criticism even from the side of the social-democratic or communist women that fought for legal abortion. Karpíšková maintains that they do not want to promote induced abortion and that it is necessary only because the contraceptive measures can fail and a woman needs to control her fertility, which would otherwise make her bear children for the whole time of her reproductive capacity and in this way hinder her from developing all her other talents and abilities.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, still in 1935 Vobecká argues in *Rozsévačka*: “Give people work, ensure wages, bread, living, care for the young ones, put into practice the broadest protection of mothers and women will not be refusing to fulfill their very important social role designated by nature – ‘motherhood’.”<sup>120</sup> But important changes were to come soon as I will argue in the next part.

## Children are my pride: the major turn in the communist discourse

In July 1936 a new anti-abortion law came into effect in the Soviet Union and the period of legal induced abortion ended.<sup>121</sup> Needless to say,

<sup>115</sup> B. KARPÍŠKOVÁ, *Kontrola porodů a Meissnerova osnova*, p. 20. Emphasis in original.

<sup>116</sup> Compare D. MUSILOVÁ, *Z ženského pohledu*, p. 77.

<sup>117</sup> B. KARPÍŠKOVÁ, *Kontrola porodů a Meissnerova osnova*, p. 20. Emphasis in original.

<sup>118</sup> Or rather, was suppressed by other concepts promoting motherhood and prescribing a social role for a woman which were hegemonic (at least) back then.

<sup>119</sup> B. KARPÍŠKOVÁ, *Kontrola porodů a Meissnerova osnova*, p. 6.

<sup>120</sup> MARIE VOBECKÁ, *Teď přijdou s § 144 [Now They come up with the Article 144]*, *Rozsévačka* 16. 1. 1935, p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> For more details see A. AVDEEV, A. BLUM, I. TROITSKAYA, *The History of Abortion Statistics in Russia and the USSR from 1900 to 1991*, pp. 43–45.

arguments for legalizing abortions in Czechoslovakia suffered a major blow, as the Soviet Union always served as a role model of a county, where “a woman is truly free” and so, those who condemned legal abortions could be expected to rejoice. Emanuel Rádl writes in triumph: “Does any of those women with whom I have argued so vehemently now imagine, what I think of the new Soviet law?”<sup>122</sup> And he characterized the time when he was fighting against legalizing abortion as “when the world succumbed to madness”<sup>123</sup>. However, the articles in the communist magazine *Rozséváčka* did not seem to be rejoicing any less – they spoke passionately about the dangers of induced abortion and “the wish to have a child that presides in every woman”<sup>124</sup> A woman reader wrote in her letter: “I am firmly convinced that the women in the Soviet Union would say: ‘We are the state and when the government, our beloved Stalin, proposes such law, then it is only for our own benefit and we, instead of one soldier, worker, engineer, etc. will give the state five, because we are the state.’”<sup>125</sup> They spoke enthusiastically about young Soviet men approaching girls with greater cautiousness now<sup>126</sup> and about many women realizing how egoistic they were and giving up the thought of terminating their pregnancy.<sup>127</sup> The article of the woman reader continues: “Most Soviet women welcome the bill and do not perceive it as restricting their individual rights but above all as manifesting the care of the Soviet government about their health.”<sup>128</sup> They state firmly that they will also stand up against induced abortion in Czechoslovakia when there will be decently paid work available for everyone<sup>129</sup> and that when the care for mother and child will be as good as in the Soviet Union “then also our women will complete the obligation that nature bestowed upon them.”<sup>130</sup> Another woman reader expressed an opinion that banning abortions “gives people their real humanity”.<sup>131</sup> The standpoints of

<sup>122</sup> EMANUEL RÁDL, *Vzpomínka na t. zv. pohlavní svobodu [Recollection of the So-called Sexual Freedom]*, Křesťanská revue 15. 10. 1936, p. 6.

<sup>123</sup> E. RÁDL, *Vzpomínka na t. zv. pohlavní svobodu*, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství [For a Joyful Motherhood]*, *Rozséváčka* 1. 7. 1936, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství*, *Rozséváčka* 1. 7. 1936, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství [For a Joyful Motherhood]*, *Rozséváčka* 24. 6. 1936, p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství [For a Joyful Motherhood]*, *Rozséváčka* 15. 7. 1936, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství*, *Rozséváčka* 15. 7. 1936, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství*, *Rozséváčka* 24. 6. 1936, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství*, *Rozséváčka* 1. 7. 1936, p. 7.

<sup>131</sup> *O lásce, manželství a rodině [About Love, Marriage, and Family]*, *Rozséváčka* 24. 3. 1937, p. 3.

Czech women readers seemed to be identical to those attributed to Soviet women that showed enthusiasm and passion for motherhood: “Children are my pride ... I was happy to bear children and I will bear them with even greater joy now.”<sup>132</sup>

The discourse of the communist press underwent a major change, which could be seen as a turn of 180 degrees. The ban of abortions in the Soviet Union was surely a crucial factor, but behind it the prevalent naturalization<sup>133</sup> of many concepts, such as about a woman’s role in the society and about a woman and motherhood had a major effect as well. Although before the abortion ban the articles in *Rozséváčka* promoted the right to abortion, they often utilized arguments that a state (society) that does not provide economically for the mother, has no right to control her fertility.<sup>134</sup> Conversely, it means that restricting abortions would not be perceived as unjust or violating individual rights, if the mother were provided for economically.<sup>135</sup> However, the rhetoric in *Rozséváčka*, which mostly rather indignantly called for the right to abortion, also seemed to contain (at least) hints of the desire for freedom from motherhood, without which the equality between men and women can hardly be achieved. By utilizing the Critical discourse analysis, we can identify the discourse types<sup>136</sup> that the communist discourse drew upon: motherhood as a supreme joy for women (and their highest self-realization) was present since the beginning till the end of the period, however, other types were influential only during a certain time – the discourse type of individual rights that guarantees the right to make choices about one’s own body for every woman,<sup>137</sup> sometimes even supported by types that reject pregnancy as suffering for women and emphasize the inequality between men and women in reproduction, vanished completely with the abortion ban in the Soviet Union, when the discourse type of mother-

<sup>132</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství*, *Rozséváčka* 17. 6. 1936, p. 4.

<sup>133</sup> N. FAIRCLOUGH, *Language and Power*, p. 91.

<sup>134</sup> Compare ATINA GROSSMANN, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950*, New York 1997, pp. 35–36.

<sup>135</sup> Compare A. GROSSMANN, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950*, p. 95.

<sup>136</sup> N. FAIRCLOUGH, *Language and Power*, p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> This discourse type could be regarded as “feminist”, but only in the modern sense of the word. Feminism back then was associated with the right to vote and equal employment opportunities, not with the right to abortion. Moreover, the communist discourse denounced feminism as a bourgeois ideology – see for example *Život pohlavní a mateřství*, *Rozséváčka*, 18. 11. 1926, p. 6.

hood as joy regained its hegemony, supported by types that stress the crucial role of a woman in reproduction of the communist community. Calls for individual freedom and emancipation in political work of women as well as highlighting the hardships that come along with pregnancy disappeared abruptly and the essential role of women was reduced only to their reproductive role. The surprising ease which accompanied the whole process reveals the strength of the concepts that perceive motherhood as the highest joy and foremost task of women. The discourse type emphasizing injustice in economic conditions between classes, which was used vehemently to justify the right to terminate one's pregnancy before the abortion ban in the Soviet Union, also helped contradictory discourse types – motherhood as joy and individual rights – to coexist in the communist discourse.

Finally, I would like to present Louisa Landová-Štychová, the author of the three bills legalizing abortions, as she is indispensable for the insight into the discussions at the time. In her article, which comments on the discussion about the anti-abortion bill that was taking place in the Soviet Union, she maintains that “we have always regarded abortions as evil which threatens the health and life of a woman.”<sup>138</sup> Inconsistent, as the discourse of the communist press before and after the abortion ban in the Soviet Union was,<sup>139</sup> this was not the case with Landová-Štychová and her statements. Though she demanded vehemently legal abortions before, she had always stressed that this is only because of the “catastrophic motherhood” as a result of the insufficient child and mother care in the capitalist system. Yet, there was a slighter inconsistency – after the ban, although the capitalist system in Czechoslovakia had not changed, she gave up campaigning for legal abortions completely, stressing only sexual restraint instead. A closer look at her rhetoric reveals significant frustration, which is not surprising considering all the effort she had made and her inflexibility in changing opinions: “Our women and girls have no choice but to work towards solving this problem within the limits that our current system allows. Firstly, it is necessary to educate not only the female, but the male part of youth as well!”<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> *Za šťastné mateřství*, Rozséváčka 17. 6. 1936, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

<sup>139</sup> For articles maintaining the absolute safety of induced abortion performed by a physician see for example *Lékařka Reni Begunová, Berlín: Jest potrat nebezpečný? [Doctor Reni Begun, Berlin: Is Induced Abortion Safe?]*, Rozséváčka 21. 9. 1932, p. 5.

<sup>140</sup> LOUISA LANDOVÁ-ŠTYCHOVÁ, *Mateřství a lidská láska [Motherhood and Human Love]*, Rozséváčka 10. 6. 1936, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

She stresses resignedly the importance of responsibility in romantic relationships as well as the dangers of induced abortion to women's health. Nevertheless, she does speak bitterly of the unsuccessful bills legalizing abortions, because "millions from state budget are wasted on prolonging poor crippled lives of those who had better never be born. Only those who have not seen the victims of hereditary disease can be so indifferent."<sup>141</sup> We can get more insight into the context of Landová-Štychová's words through her recent biography<sup>142</sup> by Stanislav Holubec. Holubec shows that she did express great concerns due to the abortion ban in the Soviet Union, but only in private.<sup>143</sup> He reveals her passion for eugenics, and also for science and technology, which she praised as bringing much more excitement than any sexual experience. She condemned homosexuality,<sup>144</sup> and later in 1950s, also the "the cult of sex", which according to her poisoned the society. She argued that "male monkeys" (as she would sometimes call men since her childhood), guided solely by their sexual desire, have to be turned into humans by means of culture. She was disgusted with couples kissing on the streets and the nudes created by artists of the period. She maintained that western countries' invasion with decadent art is a part of the Cold War and thought the Soviet Union to be happy to be protected from this "cesspool" by the Cyrillic script. Not surprisingly, she did not rejoice when abortion was legalized in Czechoslovakia in 1957 since she did not perceive the individual rights of a woman as a sufficient reason if the prospective mother was healthy enough to carry the child to term.<sup>145</sup> In her letter from 1942 to Albína Honzáková, sister of Anna Honzáková, the first Czech female physician, she explains the circumstances of her first bill legalizing abortions that would have entrusted the prospective mother with an unlimited freedom (in the first trimester): "Because of the insufficient articulation of the first bill, I was unjustly regarded as a proponent of induced abortion ... And I was so enormously lucky that Doctor Anna Honzáková was such a fastidious opponent ... She was extraordinarily fair-minded and recognized

<sup>141</sup> L. LANDOVÁ-ŠTYCHOVÁ, *Mateřství a lidská láska*, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>142</sup> S. HOLUBEC, *Nešťastná revolucionářka*.

<sup>143</sup> S. HOLUBEC, *Nešťastná revolucionářka*, pp. 188–89.

<sup>144</sup> On the contrary, the communist Party in Weimar Republic demanded legalization of homosexuality together with abortions. See A. GROSSMANN, *Reforming Sex*, p. 92.

<sup>145</sup> S. HOLUBEC, *Nešťastná revolucionářka*, pp. 302–5.

my pure intentions.”<sup>146</sup> Landová-Štychová’s viewpoints contrast sharply with the contributions from ordinary readers of *Rozséváčka* (or possibly its redaction), as hers were rather smoothed out and expressed emotionality strictly controlled by reason. And so, as Anna Honzáková and Louisa Landová-Štychová opened this short picture of legalizing abortion in the first Czechoslovak Republic, they are also going to close it. The last bill legalizing abortions was prepared by the Ministry of Justice in 1937 as part of a new penal code but did not proceed through the parliamentary process due to the political crisis in 1938.<sup>147</sup> And with the Munich Agreement on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1938 comes the demise of the first Czechoslovak republic.

## Induced abortion back then and nowadays

I tried to present the communist discourse with as many details and depth as the extent of this article allowed. Its major change after the abortion ban in the Soviet Union was especially remarkable and revealed the power of the prevailing concepts about motherhood that were utilized simultaneously by both standpoints (pro vs. anti-abortion) and the way they shaped otherwise incompatible discourses. I paid close attention to the contexts that were relevant for critical interpretation of the sources, such as the political developments in Czechoslovakia and situation around communist women’s press at the time. Therefore, I believe this article can also help to get more insight into one historical epoch – the first Czechoslovak republic, apart from induced abortion as the main theme. As for the discussion about legalizing abortion on demand, I wanted to avoid being too schematic. Thus, because of the limitation of this article, I could not aspire to give by any means an extensive picture, not to mention a complete one. The picture I present here could be regarded as a cutout, however, I believe a very thought-provoking and enabling a certain insight into the discussion well into the very bottom revealed by the contributions of the women readers of *Rozséváčka*. Since the focus was on the communist women’s press, I did not devote much space to eugenics, as the topic would otherwise surely have deserved;

<sup>146</sup> Cited in EVA UHROVÁ, *Anna Honzáková a jiné dámy [Anna Honzáková and Other Ladies]*, Praha 2012, p. 79.

<sup>147</sup> J. RÁKOSNÍK, R. ŠUSTROVÁ, *Rodina v zájmu státu*, p. 171.

eugenics was popular among elites and was not reflected in the contributions of the ordinary readers of *Rozséváčka* who were out of necessity concerned more with their own bodies (at risk of poverty and lay abortions) than with the health of the national body. With keeping in mind that the sources presented here reveal discourses but not necessarily true daily life (for which the sources are to be analyzed critically – compared to other sources and available scientific knowledge and weighing all circumstances), they still present an important key to people's thinking in that epoch. Three main attitudes to induced abortion stand out: a woman as a reproductive entity – devoid of any subjectivity – where induced abortion is strictly prohibited because childbirth is the very purpose of her existence, a woman as a responsible mother – with limited subjectivity – where termination of pregnancy is possible in case of unsuitable living conditions, and finally, a woman as a human being – with full subjectivity – where she is granted the right to realize her human potential according to her own decisions through the possibility to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. As I have also shown, putting up a simple link between the pro-choice activists at present and Betty Karpíšková or Louisa Landová-Štychová back then would be rather problematic; however, that does not by any means devalue the merit they had in trying to improve living conditions of women back then and take the next step towards true equality of men and women.

Moreover, apart from the historiographical level, the arguments and standpoints that appear in this article, and their analysis, can help perceive current discussion about abortion on demand in a more extensive and complex way. In search for the golden mean, the identification of extremes is crucial. The fact that I did not present the discussion in its completeness does not necessarily make it inconsistent. The extremes differ in the same way that the arguments, and above all the circumstances at the time differed from the current ones, as I hope I have demonstrated. But it is all about being able to look without prejudices and ready conclusions, critically analyze, understand, and finally take own standpoint, yet still refrain from making any categorical judgements. I believe that this is precisely what is most essential, no matter where exactly one stands. All the standpoints I have shown here have their own value, for they always reflect a coherent argumentation line and, however extreme or idealistic they are, trying to understand the actors that held them can broaden our view and our capacity to appreciate alternative opinions and acknowledge circumstances which may change the values we would



usually respect. I believe, (un)equality, or rather (in)justice is then a crucial factor that should be examined, for some arguments might sound pleasant or grand but may be disastrous for women when put into practice – demanding sexual restraint whenever a potential pregnancy would be unwelcome could be hardly respected by most men and women, not to speak of the impossibility to know precisely one’s partner’s intentions and the fact that they themselves may also change over time. I think the way a friend of mine summarized it is revealing: “Cannot one also feel remorse sometime?” And so, I believe, in the end it is all about tolerance, empathy, and ... a chance.