

## "The New Woman" in the Finnish Communist Women's Periodicals in the 1920s

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# 'The New Woman' in the Finnish Communist Women's Periodicals in the 1920S

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Elina Katainen

299

When I, many years ago, was writing my master's thesis on the Finnish Women's Democratic League that was founded in December 1944, I got to know the concept "the new woman" for the first time – it was the title of the women's own magazine. It took some time until I realized that the title had some other meaning than some neutral slogan of the time. And that led me first to the discussions of the 1920s and later to the earlier roots of the concept.

"The new communist woman" – the idea in the form it could be found in the texts of the 1920s – was somehow very familiar to me and is perhaps to many Finnish women. The new woman had a full-time job and her children were at a daycare centre while she was working. She took part in social activities, she was well educated and was active and financially independent in her relations with men. She was not bound to a life-long marriage but cohabitated and separated as she pleased.

The question that makes this theme somehow interesting is whether it was inevitable that the modernization process in Finland should follow that line. And whether it was because Finland was economically a part of the poor, agrarian Eastern Europe which meant that the worlds of the two genders were not separated as in the more industrialized countries.<sup>1</sup>

My main interest is whether all this had anything to do with a certain policy backed by a certain ideology. And what role the new woman – or the gender system that became prevalent in the Soviet Union and later in the other socialist countries – had in this process.

When I was hunting the new woman I noticed that she was totally missing in the histories the Finnish Communists themselves have written. The position of women was not a question in these surveys: according to them men and women had acted side by side and the woman question was nothing but a bourgeois leaven. But, as I try to show, if one then reads the women's own magazines one sees immediately that the debates were actually lively – and contradictory. And I suppose the new woman also had for many readers some appeal, which had to do with the Finnish Civil War in 1918.

This article is based on the Finnish socialist/communist women's periodical, *Työläisnainen* (Working Woman), that was published in the first half of the 1920s. In 1920 and in early 1921 the future Social Democratic women were editing *Työläisnainen*, too.<sup>2</sup> I have also gone through the newspaper of the Socialist Workers' Party (SSTP), *Suomen Työmies* (The Finnish Workman), trying to find out if there was any discussion on the new woman, family, or sexuality.

In *Työläisnainen* there were articles written by Finnish communist and socialist women and men living in Finland, as well as by those who had fled to Russia after the Civil War in 1918. There were also translations from foreign periodicals, and articles by such leading Bolshevik women as Alexandra Kollontai.

After 1918 some communist booklets on the woman question and family were also published – such as Lyyli Latukka's *Köyhäinhoidosta yhteiskunnalliseen huoltoon* (From Poor Relief to Social Care, 1919), and Alexandra Kollontai's *Perhe ja kommunistinen valtio* (The Family

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1 As, for example, historian Irma Sulkunen has put it.

2 *Työläisnainen* (Working Woman) 1920-23, *Naistyöläinen* (Woman Worker) 1925 and *Työläis- ja Talonpoikaisnaisten lehti* (Working and Rural Women's Periodical) 1925-30. These periodicals were printed and edited in Finland. *Työläisnainen* was published already between 1906-14 and again right before the Civil War.

and the Communist State, 1920). Kollontai's book *Uusi moraali* (New Morality) was published in Finnish in 1926.

The circulation of the periodical was about four thousand copies at its best.<sup>3</sup> The number of potential readers was larger. In the illegal Finnish Communist Party (SKP) there were only a few hundred female members but in the legal SSTP the number of women was more than six thousand in 1922. Besides these activists there were tens of thousands of sympathizers. In the parliamentary elections in 1922 the SSTP got almost 130 000 votes. Out of the 27 Socialists/Communists elected to the Parliament six were women.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the communist papers, information about Soviet Russia was supplied by the Finnish refugees. Many of them returned after conditions in Finland had calmed down. Many stayed in the Socialist Fatherland but tried to keep in contact with relatives and friends in Finland. Some of those who returned were very critical of what they had seen in Soviet Russia; the one who most likely had authority among women was Hilja Pärssinen, a former Member of Parliament and one of the leaders of the old working women's movement. Thus the information that was available was contradictory and, no doubt, confusing.

301

### *The collectivization of household labour and love*

After the October Revolution the Bolsheviks declared they would change the whole gender system of the Russian society. According to historian Wendy Goldman, the Bolshevik vision was based on four primary precepts: free union, women's emancipation through wage labour, the socialization of housework, and the withering away of the family.<sup>5</sup> Soon after the revolution the Government made some radical legal reforms and tried to create public services that would emancipate women.

In Finland these aims could only be proposed since the Communists had no real power. The aim of the Finnish communist movement in the 1920s and 30s was to organize people and prepare them for revolution.

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3 Pirjo Koivumäki, 'Suomen työläisnaisliikkeen lehdistö vuosisadan alusta 1920-luvun loppuun' (The Press of the Finnish Working Women's Movement from the Turn of the Century to the End of the 1920s), *Kommunisti* 1980 p. 467.

4 Tauno Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin synty 1918-1923*. (Tampere: KSL, 1996) p. 317.

5 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State & Revolution - Soviet Family Policy & Social Life, 1917-1936*. (Cambridge University Press 1993) p. 12.

In this context one can examine how people, and women especially, were persuaded to support the movement. What were the visions that were intended to convince the Finnish working women of the superiority of the model that was taking shape in Soviet Russia? And how did it differ from the model the old working women's movement had pursued?

The ideas of the 1920s were actually not new. The early socialist theorists confronted the problems created by female labour in the workplace and the home. Particularly the insights of Marx and Engels had enormous impact on the European labour movement, and they provided the framework for Bolshevik thinking. According to Goldman, the Bolshevik Party's concern with "the production and consumption functions of the family, its insistence on the withering away of the family as historically inevitable, and its emphasis on the link between wage labour and women's liberation, were all drawn directly from Marxist theory".<sup>6</sup> But their thinking can also be traced back to the long Russian tradition. The ideas of free love and women's equality were debated in progressive circles as early as the 1830s.<sup>7</sup>

I will now briefly present some ideas of one leading figure, Alexandra Kollontai, because they will indicate the variety of the Bolshevik debates. They were not talking only about socialization of production but housework and love as well. Kollontai was also the figure who was introduced to the Finnish working women through the periodicals in the early 1920s. Perhaps the Finns felt some penchant for her since her mother was of Finnish ancestry<sup>8</sup>.

In her book *New Morality* Kollontai wondered how was it possible that "we" – by which she meant people in the socialist movement – pay almost no attention to one of the most important tasks of the working class, namely, creating healthier and more pleasant sex relations.<sup>9</sup> This was one of the questions that bothered Kollontai through her life – partly due to her personal history including two marriages and two other longer relationships. And through that prism she looked at the construction of the new gender system after the revolution.

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7 See for example Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia — Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*. (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1978) and Goldman 1993. In Finland the only more profound study is Marianne Liljeström's *Emanciperade till underordning — Det sovjetiska könsystemets uppkomst och diskursiva reproduktion*. (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1995).

8 The father of Alexandra's mother was a Finnish woodseller.

9 Alexandra Kollontai, *Uusi moraali*. (Vaasa: Työväenjärjestöjen Tiedonantaja, 1926) pp. 95-96.

Kollontai, as many other writers of the time, was interested in the effects the transition from an agricultural to an industrialized society had on social traditions and sexual morality. The novel elements in her writings, according to Richard Stites, were “a psychology of erotic technique, and a strong appeal for women’s independence from enslaving love affairs”.<sup>10</sup>

Both in *New Morality* and in the article “On Communist Marital Morality” that was published in *Työläisnainen* in 1923<sup>11</sup> Kollontai tried to explicate a new moral code for the working class; a code that would be something between the bourgeois double standard and total freedom. In *New Morality* there was an essay, originally written as early as 1913, on the new women that she had come across in contemporary literature. These women had found various settlements in their relations with men and children. One was in free union living separately, one had many relationships at the same time, one had been married several times and another again lived with two children who had different fathers. Kollontai seemed to think that one “Great Love” would be an ideal, but in practice, as she wrote ten years later, the sexual code of Communism would allow for varieties of marital and non-marital love and sex combinations, and all “loving hearts” would be supported and nourished spiritually in the “love collective”.<sup>12</sup> Neither Kollontai’s book *Great Love* nor her writing “Make Way for the Winged Eros” were translated into Finnish in those years which perhaps gives some hint of the mentality of the Finnish Communists.<sup>13</sup>

Soon after the revolution, the Bolsheviks substituted civil for religious marriage and established divorce at the request of either spouse. The new Code was based on individual rights and gender equality.<sup>14</sup> In November 1920 abortion was legalized. The practice of abortion had been widespread before the new decree, which was an attempt to move the operations into hospitals. Abortion was yet not seen as a woman’s right – even Alexandra Kollontai stressed that childbirth was a social obligation and the need for abortion would disappear once child care was available. According to Goldman, “the libertarian tendencies so evident in discussions over marriage and divorce never extended to the issue of maternity”.<sup>15</sup>

10 Goldman 1993, pp. 44-45; Stites 1978, p. 348.

11 *Työläisnainen* 11-12/1923.

12 Stites 1978 p. 353.

13 *Great Love* was translated into Finnish in 1982. See Alexandra Kollontai, *Suuri rakkaus* (Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 1982).

14 Goldman 1993, p. 49.

15 Goldman 1993, pp. 254-257.

In her essay *The Family and the Communist State* Kollontai wrote about the withering away of the family. Capitalism had already removed some tasks of the family outside the home, Communism would finish the job. The tasks that had remained in families – cleaning, cooking, washing, darning and patching – would be removed to professional cleaning women, central kitchens, laundries and “patching places”. Also the rearing of children would be removed to the society, and there would be a network of nursing homes, daycare centres, preliminary schools, children’s homes, etc. Communism would thus separate the kitchen and the nursery from marriage in the same way it would separate Church from State.

Kollontai’s vision was in some sense aristocratic, which was not surprising considering her background. The goal was to free adults – except those who were paid for it – of the boring housework including the care of children, the elderly and the infirm. In that way people (healthy adults of working age?) could have more time for their love life, just like the upper classes with servants had had before the revolution.

Work, too, would be important for both men and women in a socialist (or communist) society but it would be more like a hobby. Kollontai once wrote of utopia that takes place in 1960 in a resthome for the veterans of “the great years of the world revolution”. A group of young people has arrived there to celebrate Christmas, a long-forgotten feast. The readers are told that people work two hours a day for the commune, and the rest of the day they can do things that interest them most. Life is, all in all, carefree and people healthy, strong and beautiful.<sup>16</sup>

The same kind of utopia was published in 1925 in *Työläisnainen* and the writer was most likely a Finn. The new world would be a flower garden full of beauty, music and singing and people would be “morally, spiritually and physically perfect”. There would be no restaurants, hospitals or mental hospitals – nor prisons, churches or slums. The work would be nothing but pleasure and amusement.<sup>17</sup> The mentality differed thus from that of the busy bourgeoisie – or many workers, for that matter. And there also seemed to be no place for the ugly, weak, sick, and disabled.

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16 Alexandra Kollontai, ‘Tulevaisuus’ (The Future), *Työläis- ja talonpoikaisnaisten lehti* 9-10/1926.

17 Pseudonym O.L. (Olga Laukki?), ‘Tulevaisuus-sosialismi’ (Future-socialism), *Naistyöläinen* 4-5/1925.

So there were alluring visions and radical legal reforms but, according to Goldman, the enormous social problems caused by the revolution, the Civil War, and the crop failures and epidemics in the early 1920s had a greater role in shaping family policy than the early visions.<sup>18</sup>

### *The new communist woman in Finland*

I now try to outline some national features in the figure of the new woman of the Finnish women's periodicals. I also ask what were the subjects that seemed to interest the Finnish writers or the audience most. And was there any ground for the propaganda among Finnish working women in the 1920s?

In the women's periodical, the Bolshevik visions stayed alive although there were some realistic reports on the situation in Soviet Russia as well. Especially in 1922 there were many descriptions of the famine and all the miseries caused by it. In the spring of 1922, Hanna Kohonen, one of the Finnish emigrants, wrote that the crop failure by the Volga had been a terrific blow to Soviet Russia. It made tens of millions of people suffer from hunger and disease and the circumstances were "horrible". According to Kohonen, all this would suspend the emancipation of women for years; the revolution was no magician's wand that would annihilate the old family and household tasks.<sup>19</sup> The problems were presented though as challenges issued to the Bolsheviks by the forces of nature or the white army, not as insuperable difficulties.

The first article on Soviet women was published in *Työläisnainen* in the spring of 1920, when the periodical had started to reappear.<sup>20</sup> The working women's movement had not yet broken up. Among the editors there were women who would later choose the Social Democratic movement as well as those who would be Communist oriented. In spite of that the position of Soviet women was dealt with positively through the year 1920.

The writing "The Position of Women in Soviet Russia", mentioned above, dealt with the new liberal code on marriage, the family, and

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18 Goldman 1993, p. 100.

19 Hanna Kohonen, 'Naisen asema Neuvosto-Venäjällä' (The Position of Women in Soviet Russia), *Työläisnainen* 3/1922.

20 H.J.H., 'Naisen asema Neuvosto-Venäjällä' (The Position of a Woman in the Soviet Russia), *Työläisnainen*, 5/1920.



guardianship. The communal dining and child rearing systems were also mentioned. In the next two issues the Soviet welfare work was dealt with profoundly. The readers were told that all the unprotected children, pregnant women, unemployed, the sick and disabled were now protected by the Soviet government. The new maternity welfare system was explained thoroughly. In principal the system included, for example, maternity clinics and regular checkups of mothers-to-be, and babies until they were three years old. Later in the same year the first contribution by Alexandra Kollontai was published in *Työläisnainen*. The text was the same as in the booklet *The Family and the Communist State* but the title was now “The Family and the Socialist State”.<sup>21</sup>

These kinds of articles were typical of the periodical all through the 1920s. And after 1922 hardly anything unfavourable was taken up. The writers were sympathetic to the revolutionary changes and gave an impression of great progress. The Soviet woman was shown as the new woman, equal, independent and capable.<sup>22</sup>

In *Työläisnainen* there were also a few articles about the new sexual morality but not as many as on the question of collectivization of household labour, or the social security systems. The conception of morality, that sex belonged only to marriage, had been propagated in Finland from the end of the 19th century. On the other hand, there had been a lively debate also on the question of free love in the early twentieth century. August Bebel’s book *Women under Socialism* was translated into Finnish in 1904. It stimulated discussion in socialist circles. On the other hand, the country people had their own practices. In the Finnish countryside it had been generally accepted to have “free” sexual relationships which, in case of pregnancy, often led to marriage.<sup>23</sup> The debates of the 1920s rested on these traditions.

21 *Työläisnainen*, 8/1920 and 9/1920.

22 For example Henriette Roland-Holst, ‘Kommunismi ja naisten vapautuminen’ (Communism and Emancipation of Women), *Työläisnainen*, 6-7/1922; Pseudonym Tamara, ‘Äiti ja rintalapset Neuvosto-Venäjällä’ (Mother and Babies in Soviet Russia), *Työläisnainen*, 16/1922; ‘Neuvosto-Venäjän 5-vuotisjuhla’ (The Fifth Anniversary of Soviet Russia), *Työläisnainen*, 18/1922; Ella Anker, ‘Neuvosto-valta ja naiset’ (The Soviet State and Women), *Työläisnainen*, 11-12/1923; Aura K(üskinen), ‘Naiset ja yhteiskunnallinen elämä’ (Women and Social Life), *Naistyöläinen*, 4-5/1925; ‘Äitien ja lasten yhteiskunnallinen huolto Neuvostoliitossa’ (The Social Care of Mothers and Children in the Soviet Union), *Naistyöläinen*, 6/1925; Lyyli Latukka, ‘Naisten aviosuhde ja oikeudet Neuvosto-Venäjällä’ (The Marital Relations and Rights of Women in Soviet Russia), *Työläis- ja talonpoikaisnaisten lehti*, 9-10/1926.

23 See Maija Rajainen, *Naisliike ja sukupuolimoraali* (The Women’s Rights Movement and Sexual Morality). (Helsinki: Suomen Kirkkohistoriallinen Seura, 1973) pp. 91-103; Kirsti Pohjola-Vilkuna, *Eros kylässä - maaseudun luvaton seksuaali-*

One example of this type of article is a text in three parts by the pseudonym Simson, called “Dark sides of the prevailing married life from the point of view of the class struggle”. Simson had noted that in Finland there had been some discussion on how a class fighter should arrange his or her love life. He argued that the traditional marital pattern was a trap set by the capitalist society; it was a coffin where unsuspecting young people leant their heads. According to Simson, the solution would not be a civil marriage or other new forms of union as such; those should be backed by a socialist way of thinking. The crucial point was that love life should be subordinated to class struggle.<sup>24</sup>

The same year there were also some other articles that were as critical of the prevailing system. In Alexandra Kollontai’s contribution “On Communist Marital Morality”, the future is open for many kind of solutions and the new proletarian morality is outlined.<sup>25</sup>

In a short story about two emigrant women, Helena and Elsa, these problems are approached through everyday examples; an illustration of the consequences of the prevailing morality is a story of a wife who kills herself and her little daughter. The women agree that the reason for the event must be the mental cruelty of the husband and the lack of communication between the spouses. According to the writer, the revolution had shaken up social life and people had started to see themselves, their surroundings and their partners in a different light. The example demonstrated that many people – although they were conscious and enlightened workers – could, however, not comprehend these fundamental questions.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand there were such writings as “Chastity of Marriage”, by the pseudonym T. J., where the writer asserts that monogamy has always been the form of marriage among human beings, and that only monogamy and fidelity would make people happy. This theme was often repeated in the short stories, and it reached its climax in a story called “Is Mother Engaged?”, where the red widows were told not to take new husbands.<sup>27</sup>

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*suus vuosisadan vaihteessa.* (Eros in a Village - Forbidden Sexuality in the Countryside at the turn of the Century.) (Mikkeli: SKS, 1995).

24 Simson, ‘Vallitsevan avioelämän varjopuolia luokkataistelun kannalta katsoen’, *Työläisnainen*, 1/1923; 7-8/1923 and 11-12/1923.

25 *Työläisnainen*, 3/1922.

26 T. J., ‘Avioliiton puhtaus’ (Chastity of Marriage), *Työläisnainen*, 9/1923; A. N:nen,

27 ‘Äitikö kihloissa?’ (Is Mother Engaged?), *Työläisnainen*, 4/1920.

Sexual themes that were dealt with in *Työläisnainen* included prostitution. This problem was looked at as a by-product of the capitalist system, too. The readers were told that in Soviet Russia the phenomenon had already been wiped out or, more realistically, that the Government was trying to wipe it out.<sup>28</sup>

All in all, Kollontai's ideas on love life and some of the writings in *Työläisnainen* were probably all too flighty for the working women who were busy with other problems like feeding their children. The activists of the communist movement, however, discussed these questions. Those Finnish Communists that lived in the Soviet Union adopted the new habits there and perhaps also had some influence in Finland.

### *The red mothers*

Particularly one part of the new vision, the role of mothers in the new society, must have been somewhat puzzling to many women. After the Civil War the question of maternity and children was especially delicate in Finland. This was partly due to the fact that there had been some 2 000 women in arms during the war which was a shock to many Whites and raised hostility towards working women in general.

The old demands of the working women's movement for paid maternity leave, the ban on nightwork for women, and work restrictions for pregnant women and nursing mothers were now presented as achievements of the Soviet women. These aims were probably well received also among the Finnish women. But the other side of the coin, the public upbringing of children, was the stumbling block.

In *Työläisnainen*, the role of women as mothers was seen, on the whole, in the same way the Bolsheviks saw it; it was no private matter but a social obligation. Maternity was perceived, above all, as an obligation to the working class or the Reds. This was apparent particularly in a few short stories. The message seemed to be that now that thousands of workers had been killed in the Civil War, reproduction was the primary duty of working women.

In one type of story, the heroine is a red widow who is pregnant and becomes conscious of her purpose in life. In a story called "Two Mid-

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28 For example Alfons Goldschmidt, 'Nainen Neuvosto-Venäjällä' (A Woman in Soviet Russia), *Työläisnainen*, 3-4/1921, and 'Taistelu prostituutiota vastaan Neuvosto-Venäjällä' (The Fight against Prostitution in Soviet Russia), *Työläisnainen*, 9/1921.



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309

New women and working-class mothers. Above, the singing group The Northern Girls in Kemi in the late 1920s; below, working-class mothers and children celebrating Mother's Day in Kuusiluoto, in May 1928. (People's Archives, Helsinki)

summers”, the duty is even foreseen when a young woman gives herself to her fiancé during the autumn of 1917 because she feels that there is some indefinite “must” in the air. The woman gets pregnant, the man gets shot in the Civil War. First the woman turns bitter but then she realizes “the working woman must oppose the blind hate of the bourgeoisie surrounding the working class, by raising a new, more class conscious generation -- I live and he lives in me -- I’m a mother and my child lives”.<sup>29</sup>

A similar story with even biblical tones was published at Christmas in 1920. A red widow gives birth to a boy at holy night and recalls her husband’s words: “you will raise our son and make a man of him – a man who continues his father’s work, not just for the good of his mother -- but also for the good of his comrades.”<sup>30</sup>

Maternity as such was a sacred matter also in communist women’s periodicals. This is obvious not only in the short stories and poems published in every issue but also in the articles. In 1921 Hanna Kohonen, for example, wrote about women in Socialism, “the working women will have -- preconditions for the greatest and fullest of experiences, bliss of maternity ennobled by elevated humanity and without financial worries”.<sup>31</sup>

In this kind of an atmosphere it was not at all self-evident that the withering away of the family – since family was practically all the Reds had left – or the public upbringing of children would be an unproblematic vision. In Finland the “public care” at that time meant ideologically white systems of care and schooling. The concepts “children’s homes”, “nursery schools”, “daycare centres”, etc. were not established and most likely aroused suspicions in the minds of the Reds. On the other hand in the 1920s the group of women that would have needed daycare for their children was still relatively small.

So it was only after the Second World War the communist women started systematically to pursue the policy of public daycare systems.

Another problematic issue was abortion. In practice there were thousands of illegal abortions in Finland every year but ideologically the question was difficult. The Soviet model of free abortion was mentioned in *Suomen Työmies* in December 1920 but in the women’s peri-

29 E. M., ‘Kaksi juhannusta’ (Two Midsommers), *Työläisnainen*, 6/1920.

30 A. J-nen, ‘Vainajan joululahja’ (The Christmas Present of a Dead Man), *Työläisnainen*, 11-12/1920.

31 H(anna) K(ohonen), ‘Kenen huollettavaksi kuuluu pikkulapset?’ (Who’s going to Take Care of the Small Children?), *Työläisnainen*, 6-7/1921.

odical there was not a word about the matter before the end of the 1920s, and even then it was only touched briefly.<sup>32</sup>

It was only after the Second World War that the communist women accepted the principle of relatively free abortion – but not even then ever backed free abortion. When in the 1960s a new abortion committee was appointed the initiative came from the Finnish Women's Democratic League.

### *Martha or Masha?*

In spite of the alarming piece of news from Soviet Russia or the suspicions roused by the new system, the vision of the new woman probably also had some appeal for many Finnish working women. The importance of women as workers and voters had increased since men were dead, in prison or without civil rights. There were thousands of women who had lost their husbands, fathers or brothers in the Civil War in 1918, or whose relatives were in prison, who were insulted in public and whose ability to take care of their children was questioned; for those women the vision gave some hope and sense of human dignity.

The discussions of the 1920s were overshadowed by the Civil War, and the communist ideas on women had to compete with more powerful attitudes. The communist movement was weak and illegal after 1930. In the 1930s there was no women's periodical.

Between the World Wars the role of women was debated in Finland but also changed in practice by the large rightist women's organizations like the powerful Martha Organization, founded in 1900. New manners, rituals and morals were inculcated step by step to women. Historian Anne Ollila has written about the popular organizations that they tried to redefine "both the significance of citizenship and the family, and also the relationships between the social classes and the sexes". The aim was to create a new kind of culture of the home, in which the woman was to play the central role. The war of 1918 "had left the victorious Right suspicious of the working class: labourers' wives were suspected of being incapable of adequately caring for their homes and families, and it was thought that working-class families were in especial need of counselling in the home. It was also believed that well-run homes and a happy family would provide a

311

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32 'Raskaudentilan ehkäiseminen - Neuvostohallituksen toimenpiteitä', *Suomen Työmies*, 7.12.1920.

solution to the problems of the working class, and thus alleviate social tensions.”<sup>33</sup>

The new communist woman can be seen as one element in the process of shaping the new gender system. And this figure was a total opposite to the fairy godmother of the home – a figure the Marthas and later also a part of the Social Democratic Women’s Movement were espousing.

In some sense the model of a woman who worked just like a man fitted perhaps better the Finnish society than the competing pattern of the energetic homemaker. In the 1920s about 70% of the Finnish population still made their living from agriculture. In this sense Finland was a part of poor Eastern Europe. There never was such a housewife-institution as in some more modernized Western European countries.

Although the voice of the communist women was weak between the World Wars the idea of the new woman was not buried. The visions formed the basis for the policy of the Finnish communist women for decades to come. When the movement became legal after the Second World War a special women’s organization was founded and soon there were more than 10 000 members. It was one of the largest women’s political organizations in Finland. In the spring of 1945, the Finnish Women’s Democratic League started to edit a new women’s periodical. It was called *Uusi Nainen* (The New Woman). In this magazine the ideas of the 1920s were revived. The circulation at its best was tens of thousands of copies and the voice of the communist women was carried farther than ever. There were now also communist women in Parliament and the clubs of the women’s organization met all around the country.

In the 1920s, Alexandra Kollontai’s ideas must have seemed partly too radical, aristocratic and romantic to the Finnish working women. But if Alexandra could visit Finland nowadays she would most likely be satisfied. Women are active in many fields of society. They have good education and full-time jobs, and they are well represented in politics. The law guarantees (in principal) daycare for preschool-age children, there are well-organized systems of dining at schools and in workplaces, maternity welfare is better than Alexandra could have dreamed of, etc.

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33 Anne Ollila, *Suomen kotien päivä valkenee... Marttajärjestö suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa vuoteen 1939*. (In the Homes of Finland a New Day Dawns... The Martha Organization in Finnish Society up to 1939.) (Tampere: SHS, 1993) pp. 337-338, 342.

There have been, of course, many ideological and other influences in Finland since the war, like the Social Democratic women and their connections to the Scandinavian countries. And there has been the feminist movement that has taken up the role of men which was not so much debated in the 1920s. The most radical change concerning the sex relations has probably been effective birth control. What the role the new woman was in the process of creating these systems is certainly impossible to say, but it is, nevertheless, fascinating to speculate on the matter.