

WOMEN IN GERMANY AND IN RUSSIA

From a talk by J. B. PRIESTLEY in the BBC's Overseas Service, reported in "The Listener" (London)

THE Nazi propagandists, with their usual impudence, have been very busy lately telling enormous lies about the position of women in Russia, and calling Bolshevism the greatest enemy of woman. We may reasonably detect the hand of Goebbels here. That energetic little man is clearly worried by the morale of his womenfolk, as well he might be, when sooner or later he will have to explain to them the stupendous losses of German manhood in the Russian campaign, and also have to explain to them why he cannot keep his promises to restore to them their sons, husbands, brothers, and sweethearts. I have heard it said that when at last the German people do revolt, it will be the women who will make the first rebellious move. So something has to be done to keep the women quiet. There is a women's congress, assisted by whole reservoirs of eyewash, in Berlin. At the same time the Soviet system is denounced as the greatest enemy of woman.

I mentioned impudence in connection with this latest propaganda move. And not without reason, for it is really an attack not on one of the weak places of the Soviet system, but on one of its very strongest . . . You might reasonably criticise the Soviet system on many grounds, but the one ground on which it cannot be reasonably attacked is its relation to the woman question. Not only is it not the greatest enemy to women, but it is actually their greatest friend. The only discrimination between the sexes in Russia is one that favours women, in their capacity as actual or potential mothers. In the Soviet Union, two-thirds of all the teachers, two-thirds of all the doctors, and a large proportion of the trained agriculturists are women. More than a third of the industrial technicians are women. They are to be found in all the professions and important occupations, and hold many official appointments of high rank.

The Contrast is Striking

Three years ago Professor Kirkpatrick, of the University of Minnesota, published an impartial study of women and family life in Nazi Germany, and in that book he declares: "The contrast with Communism is striking. In Russia the fetters of the law and custom were stricken with extraordinary suddenness from the limbs of women. The competent woman became the Russian ideal. Perhaps Nazism was driven to its stress of sex differences by an over-reaction against its hated rival." Again, the care of mothers and children was one of the greatest achievements of the Soviet system. I was talking the other day with a woman who has specialised in the care of young children, and she spoke with great enthusiasm of Russian methods, and held that in some branches of this work, notably in the organising of

crèches and nursery schools, the Russians were much further advanced than anybody else, and that we ourselves had much to learn from them. And it is these people, who have given women more opportunities than they have ever had before, and have at the same time done so much for the care of mothers and young children, who are accused by Nazi propagandists as being the greatest enemies of women. This is typical Nazi impudence.

Maze of Contradictions

And now let us have a look at women in Germany. Here, once again, we come upon a bewildering assortment of paradoxes, a maze of contradictions, until the observer who lives outside the vast hypnotic day-dream of the Germans hardly knows what to



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Will German women move first?

say . . . The Nazis promised the women everything, just as they promised the farmers, the peasants, the industrial workers, the industrial magnates, the small shopkeepers, the large shopkeepers, everything against everybody. What they actually did, as they rose to power, was to disintegrate the feminist movement, which had been very strong during the years of the Weimar Republic, which had begun by enfranchising women. In 1928 four enormous federations combined together some sixty women's organisations that had millions of members. Moreover at this time German women were well represented in many international women's organisations, such as the International Council of Women, the International Association of University Women, the International Medical Women's Association. This whole great structure of feminism stood in the way of the almost primitive tribal organisation that the Nazis wanted, and so they determined to remove it. They went to work first by fomenting jealousies and disagreements, and encouraging and actively supporting all dis-

Women and the Home



"THE RUSSIANS promoted women": Young Russian nurses, with their cycles and medical supplies, during manoeuvres behind Soviet lines

satisfied and rebellious members of these women's groups. Then as soon as they arrived in power, the Nazis began to appoint their own leaders to such groups, with the result that many of the women's organisations had either to change their character and deny the principles that had first brought them together, or to disband themselves.

Higher Education Strangled

During the first year of the Nazi regime many of the largest women's organisations were dissolved. By the end of 1933 it was possible to issue the following official notice: "The leaders of the Nazi *Frauenschaft* warn that no unsocial behaviour may take place in other associations. In case such should take place, the woman commissioner of the province shall act in association with the German *Frauentron* to restrain forbidden activity." This meant that German feminism had received its death blow. German women are now thrown out of responsible positions by the thousand. During the first two years the number of German women teachers dropped by more than a third. By 1935, out of six thousand teachers in higher educational institutions, only forty-six were women. A Nazi medical representative announced: "We will strangle higher education for women." German women doctors put up a fight, but during the first two years about four hundred and fifty of them were removed, and this stupid policy was continued, until it was realised, too late, that national efficiency must inevitably suffer. Once the Nazis were firmly seated in the saddle women disappeared both from positions of great responsibility and also from the councils of the nation. There were thirty-eight women members of the old Reichstag. Hitler's Reichstag of to-day has no women members at all. There are, of course, so-called Nazi women leaders, but they are merely the mouthpieces of the party policy in organisations dragooning women for the benefit of the party.

At the same time that the Nazis were busy disintegrating the German women's movement, they were also busy spreading their own ideals of womanhood. We know what these were. They were the old "*Kinder, Küche und Kirche*" — "Children, Kitchen and Church." Woman was to be the recreation of the tired warrior. Woman was to stay at home. Woman was to bear as many children as possible, in order that the state should have plenty of young lives to hurl into the furnace of war. The Führer, it seems, was essentially a lover of family life and young children, and photographs by the millions of him talking and smiling to carefully selected peasant women and children were circulated throughout his empire. The fact that he was such an ardent lover of family life and young children that he remained a childless bachelor was not stressed. And something more important was not stressed. When the Nazis first came into power it was essential that as many men as possible should be employed, therefore women were turned out of innumerable jobs to make room for men, on the ground that woman's place was in the home. But no sooner had the great war machine absorbed all man-power, no sooner was it seen that female labour would have to be employed on a very large scale, than it was announced that woman's place was not necessarily in the home, but was also in the munitions and other factories, serving the machine that would ultimately destroy such family life as they had had.

What has really happened to women in Nazi Germany is that they have been brutally made a convenience of; first, taken out of good responsible jobs, and then pushed back into inferior ones. Where the Russians promoted women, the Nazis have demoted them. The fact is, of course, that this insane power-seeking militarism is woman's worst enemy.