

ABORTION, CONTRACEPTION, AND POPULATION POLICY IN THE SOVIET UNION

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RESUMEN

A pesar de su sesgo antimalthusiano, la actual doctrina soviética muestra claramente que la regulación del tamaño y del crecimiento de la población es uno de las funciones del estado. Dos medidas recientes de la Unión Soviética: la relegalización del aborto y un nuevo impulso a la difusión del uso de métodos contraceptivos deberían considerarse como anti-natalistas.

Por otra parte, todas las declaraciones recientes de la Unión Soviética destacan que la tasa de natalidad actual de los Soviets, que es bastante alta, debería mantenerse o aumentarse. Datos recientes dados a conocer en fuentes soviéticas indican que la tasa de aborto en la U.R.S.S. sería tan alta como en ninguna parte del mundo mientras que la práctica de la contracepción es relativamente poco frecuente. Todavía más, en años recientes la fecundidad de las mujeres rusas casadas ha sufrido aparentemente un descenso substancial. Se piensa que el régimen soviético podría preferir teóricamente una tasa de natalidad superior a la actual, pero que no estaría dispuesto a pagar el precio que ello significaría.

En consecuencia, las actuales campañas soviéticas en contra de la excesiva frecuencia de los abortos y en favor de la contracepción no se consideran una contradicción de su política de población, sino únicamente una manera más satisfactoria de regular la natalidad.

Despite its bitter opposition to Malthusian thought, current Soviet doctrine makes clear that regulation of the size and growth of population is one of the functions of the state. The leading Soviet economist, S. G. Strumilin, recently has stated: "We do not visualize the relationship between the growth of prosperity and the decline of the birth rate in our country as a mechanical bond between the two acting automatically and not subject to any planned influence."¹

A more explicit statement of current Communist population policy comes from Bohumil Vobornik, a leading demographer of satellite Czechoslovakia. Vobornik states:

One of the basic population problems considered as practical by Socialist demography is the question: What is the most desirable population development in the foreseeable future, and how could it be attained?

Even the posing of this question entails the supposition that population growth is amenable to influence, both in the affirmative and negative sense.²

¹James W. Brackett, "Demographic Trends and Population Policy in the Soviet Union," in *Dimensions of Soviet Economic Power*, 87th Cong. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 546.

Granted, then, that a population policy is considered within the purview of official governmental action in the Soviet Union, what sort of population policy have the Soviet leaders chosen? Certain recent deeds of the Soviet government might lead one to believe that the official population policy of the Soviet Union is anti-natalist. The principal act leading to this conclusion was the legislation concerning abortion adopted in 1955. In that year the Soviet government reversed a policy of nineteen years' standing and legalized abortion. Between 1936 and 1955, abortion had not been legal in the Soviet Union, except in accord with strict medical indications. From 1920 to 1936, the U.S.S.R. had been the one nation in the world which freely, and without charge, granted abortion at a woman's request. The stated reasons given for legalizing abortion in 1955 were twofold. First, it was contended that there already was a large number of abortions being performed illegally, many outside hospitals and in unsanitary conditions. Second, the legalization of abortion was in congruence with Leninist doctrine that no woman should be forced to bear a child she did not want.

²*Ibid.*, p. 547.

The second recent Soviet action conducive to a belief that Soviet policy could be anti-natalist is the current Soviet attempt to further research on contraception and to improve the distribution and use of presently-available contraceptives.

On the other hand, official Soviet statements concerning population policy definitely contradict the hypothesis that Soviet population policy is anti-natalist. The most explicit and authoritative pro-natalist statement was that made by N. S. Khrushchev in January, 1955. He then declared:

Bourgeois ideology invented many cannibalistic theories, among them the theory of over-population. Their concern is to cut down the birth rate, reduce the rate of population increase. It is quite different with us, comrades. If about 100 million people were added to our 200 million, even that would not be enough. Under socialism the raising of the birth rate is regarded not only as a means of providing greater labor power. The socialist state also looks at the matter from the viewpoint of the nation's future.³

It must be admitted that this statement by Khrushchev was made before abortion had been relegalized and before there was any effort to improve contraceptive techniques and extend their use. Are there then later statements of pronatalist intent?

In 1959, a Soviet physician and economist, B. Ya. Smulevich, published an extensive treatise entitled *Critique of Bourgeois Population Theories and Policies*. At the end of this book there is a brief discussion of population policies in the U.S.S.R. Smulevich asserts:

In the Soviet Union, where there has been created a mighty socialist industry, a large-scale system of public health and along with these there are large unexplored open spaces the government encourages the growth of population. "If to our 200 million people there were to be added an additional 100 million, even that would not be enough," said N. S. Khrushchev.

Under socialism the birth rate is considered from the point of view of the future nation,

³ *East Europe*, VIII, No. 7 (July, 1959), p. 32.

from the point of view of its further development. N. S. Khrushchev said, "We should think of the development of society. Therefore, each family should have, let us say, three children, and they should be well reared" (*Pravda*, August 1, 1956). These words of N. S. Khrushchev testify to the very different approach to the problem of population and the fate of the people under capitalism than under socialism.⁴

From Smulevich's statements it is clear that at present the government prefers a growing population to one that is stationary in size. However, the Soviet population is not now stationary but is in fact, growing at the approximate rate of 1.5 percent a year. Is this growth considered fast enough? Further quotations from recent Soviet writings illuminate this question. In an article published in 1961 in *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie* (Soviet Public Health), the leading Soviet journal in the field of public health, O. E. Chernetskii made the statement, "A decrease in the number of abortions and an increase in the birth rate is an important task of the state standing before workers in medicine."⁵

Still more recently, in another article published in *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie*, E. A. Sadvokasova stated:

In the preparation of a prognosis of population for the next twenty years, it has become clear that beginning in 1962 and extending to 1980, cohorts born during the Great Patriotic War, when the birth rate was especially low, will be entering into the age of greatest fecundity (20 to 34 years); that is to say, the proportion of women of the most fecund age will become smaller during that time than it is today. Other things being equal, the natural consequence of such a situation must be a reduction in the birth rate. Under these conditions, a reduction in the number of abortions may be a substantial reserve for preserving the birth rate at the level which exists at present.

In connection with this, it is important to

⁴ B. Ya. Smulevich, *Kritika Burzhuaznykh Teorii i Politiki Narodonaseleniya* (Moscow: Sotsekgiz, 1959), p. 401.

⁵ O. E. Chernetskii, "Organizatsiya Raboty Po Snizheniyu Abortov," in *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie*, XX, No. 6 (June, 1961), p. 20.

uncover the reasons causing women to refuse the joys of motherhood and openly resort to abortion.⁶

A search of the relevant recent literature reveals no statements which declare or imply that the Soviet birth rate should be reduced. Therefore, we may conclude that the stated ideal of Soviet population policy is at least to preserve the present rather substantial birth rate or to raise it even higher.

Let us now shift the focus of our attention to investigating the effect which recent Soviet governmental actions have had on the nation's fertility. Although it has been almost ten years since the government of the U.S.S.R. relegalized abortion, as yet there has been no release of statistics on the number of abortions performed. This situation is in considerable contrast to that obtaining in the satellite nations of Eastern Europe. In all these countries, with the exceptions of Albania and East Germany, abortion for nonmedical socio-economic reasons was made legal shortly after the relegalization of abortion in the Soviet Union. Except in Romania, in all the satellite nations where abortion has been legalized statistics on the number of abortions performed under legal auspices have been published. These official data indicate a very large number of legal abortions. In Hungary, in 1961, there were seventeen legal abortions per thousand of total population, as compared with a birth rate of only fourteen per thousand. Although in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland the 1961 abortion rates were substantially less than the birth rate, they were still at very high levels.

In Bulgaria the abortion rate was 8.7 per thousand population and the birth rate 17.4; in Czechoslovakia the abortion rate was 6.8 and the birth rate 15.8; and

⁶ E. A. Sadvokasova, "Nekotorye Sotsial'no-Gigienicheskie Aspekty Izucheniya Aborta (Po Materialam Spetsial'nogo Issledovaniya v Ryade Gorodov i Sel'skikh Mestnostei RSFSR za 1958-59 gg.)," in *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie*, XXII, No. 3 (March, 1963), p. 46.

in Poland the abortion rate was 4.8 and the birth rate 20.7.⁷

In Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, the legalization of abortion was accompanied by substantial declines in crude birth rates. From 1955 to 1961, the birth rate declined from 20 per thousand to 17.4 per thousand in Bulgaria; from 20.3 per thousand to 15.8 per thousand in Czechoslovakia; from 21.4 per thousand to 14.0 per thousand in Hungary; and from 29.1 per thousand to 20.7 per thousand in Poland. Thus the legalization of abortion for socio-economic indications most probably had a profound effect on the birth rates of these satellite nations.⁸

If the abortion rate in the Soviet Union were approximately as high as in the East European satellites, and if it had increased after legalization, one would also expect a substantial decline in the birth rate in the Soviet Union in the six years following 1955. Such a decline did not, however, occur. In 1955 the Soviet birth rate was 25.7 per thousand and, in 1961, 23.8 per thousand. The decline experienced during this six-year period was 7 percent of the 1955 birth rate. This decline was very slight compared with those experienced during the same time interval in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland and was smaller even than the minimal 13 percent decline in the Bulgarian birth rate. However, for reasons which we shall now explain, the recent trend in Soviet fertility is not well measured by the crude birth rate.

In 1955, because of tremendous population losses during World War II, particularly of men in uniform, the ratio of men to women in the reproductive age groups was still exceedingly low. In that year there were only 694 men 20-49 years old per thousand women 15-44 years old. In 1961, however, the corresponding ratio

⁷ Christopher Tietze, "The Demographic Significance of Legal Abortion in Eastern Europe," in *Demography*, I, No. 1 (1964), p. 121.

⁸ *Ibid.*

had risen to 844 per thousand.⁹ Since this increase in the number of available males enabled a larger proportion of Soviet women to marry, one would have expected that the Soviet birth rate would have been augmented during this period. The fact that the birth rate did not rise suggests that the fertility of married Soviet women decreased substantially during the period from 1955 to 1961, and that this decrease in marital fertility was counteracted by the increased proportion of Soviet women who were married.

Further evidence that the fertility of Soviet married women declined substantially after 1955 is obtained by examining figures concerning the trend in male fertility in the U.S.S.R. Estimates of the gross reproduction rate for Soviet males which have been computed by the Foreign Demographic Analysis Division of the U.S. Bureau of the Census show a reduction from 2.19 in 1955 to 1.84 in 1961, a decline of 16 percent.¹⁰ Thus, in the Soviet Union as well as in the East European satellites, there is reason to believe that the legalization of abortion has had a significant depressant effect on fertility.

Quite recently, further light has been shed on the subject of abortion in the Soviet Union by publication of the results of a large-scale survey of women requesting abortion there. This survey was conducted in 1958-59 and its results published in 1963 in an article in *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie*, authored by E. A. Sadvokasova, docent in the N. A. Semashko Institute for the organization of public health and the history of medicine.¹¹

The respondents for this survey were 26,000 women in the Russian Republic. Of the total number of respondents, 20,000 were from urban areas and 6,000 from the countryside. Respondents were selected from each of the ten economic regions of the Russian Republic. We are told that "according to our calculations, the data

for the cities are sufficiently representative, since they cover around 20 percent of the total population." Presumably, this means that the areas included in the sample contain 20 percent of the population of the Russian Republic. The respondents from the rural areas are not claimed to be representative of all geographic areas. Respondents were contacted at medical establishments and were asked to fill out written questionnaires.

The findings of the survey answer several interesting questions. First, what type of woman asks for an abortion in the Soviet Union? According to the results of this survey, "the overwhelming majority of women having an abortion were married." This statement can be compared with the limited available data concerning marital status of those seeking illegal abortion for the United States. In a sample of 5,210 women seeking an illegal abortion in Baltimore, only 53 percent were married women.¹²

Other data are published concerning petitioners for abortion by number of their children. In contrast to the rather vague statement concerning the number of abortions by marital status, the data with regard to this topic are quite precise. Among persons requesting abortion who lived in urban areas, 10.2 percent were childless, 41.2 percent had one child, 32.1 percent two children, and 16.5 percent three children or more. Among those living in rural areas, 6.2 percent were childless, 26.9 percent had one child, 30 percent two children, and 36.9 percent three or more children. Thus, the average number of children among the rural persons requesting abortion was considerably higher than among the urban; the median number of children borne by rural women was 2.06 and by urban women only 1.47. If we were to assume that none of the unmarried women had children, then we can also deduce that in this sample less than 10 percent of the women seeking a

⁹ James W. Brackett, *op. cit.*, pp. 555-56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

¹¹ E. A. Sadvokasova, *op. cit.*

¹² Statement of Dr. G. L. Timanus, in *Abortion in the United States*, ed. Mary Calderone (New York; Paul B. Hoeber, 1958), p. 60.

legal abortion were without a spouse. A further indication of the fact that very few of these women were single is that only 6 percent of the urban women seeking abortion and 3.8 percent of the rural women were pregnant for the first time.

One can also compare the Soviet results with our fragmentary data for the United States, from which it appears that the average number of children among American women seeking abortion may be less than that in the Soviet Union. According to the previously mentioned sample of 5,210 Baltimore women, the average number of children per patient was only 0.73, as compared to the 1.47 children per women in the Soviet survey of urban areas. Thus, it is obvious that in the Soviet Union very few of the women requesting abortion are unmarried, with illicit pregnancies; in the United States, perhaps one-half of all abortions are performed on single women, and well over half of the women who undergo an induced abortion may have no living children.

A major aim of the Soviet survey was to discover the reasons why women resort to abortion. Consequently, all the women petitioners were asked the reason for wishing to interrupt their pregnancy. The reasons given were divided into four classes. First, certain causes of abortion were thought to result from social conditions which could definitely be remedied by proper governmental action. These causes were placed in one class. Other causes of abortion were considered to result from social conditions which might possibly be removed by appropriate government action. These were placed in a second class. Causes of abortions seen as resulting from social conditions which could not be changed by governmental action were placed in a third class. Finally, certain reported causes were so unclear that it could not be determined whether they resulted from remediable or irremediable social conditions. These causes were placed in a fourth class. Table 1 presents the reasons for wanting an abortion and the classification of these causes for re-

spondents of urban and rural residence.

The "unconditionally removable" causes, according to the classification employed in Sadvokasova's article, include material need, inadequate housing, and lack of child care facilities for working mothers. As a proportion of total responses, the "unconditionally removable" causes are larger among urban than rural

Table 1.—REASONS FOR ABORTION ADVANCED BY 26,000 WOMEN IN THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC, 1958-59

	PERCENTAGE GIVING EACH REASON	
	Urban Women	Rural Women
Unconditionally removable causes	35.0	26.3
Material need	10.0	11.2
Lack of space	14.0	4.2
No one at home or no institution to put child in	11.0	10.9
Conditionally removable causes	16.5	18.0
Absence of husband	5.9	7.3
Family troubles	4.9	5.6
Illness of one or both parents	5.7	5.1
Unremovable causes (baby in family, many children already)	10.0	10.0
Unclear causes	37.9	45.2
Mother unwilling to have child	30.2	40.1
Father unwilling to have child	2.9	3.1
Other reasons or multiple reasons	5.8	2.0

women. Among urban women 35 percent reported one of these reasons and among rural women only 26 percent. The chief difference between the two groups of women lies in the proportion who state lack of housing space as the chief cause of their desire for an abortion. Fully 14 percent of the urban women reported this as the principal reason for their wanting an abortion as compared to only 4 percent of the rural woman. This finding is certainly congruent with the well known overcrowding in Soviet cities. The "conditionally removable" causes constitute

16.5 percent of all responses for urban women and 18.0 percent for rural women and include absence of husband, family troubles, and illness of one or both parents. The "unremovable" causes form only a small proportion of the total—10 percent for both urban and rural women. These "unremovable" causes are either too many children already in the family or the presence of a baby so young that the impending birth of a second would provoke undue hardship. The "unclear" causes consist chiefly of the unwillingness of the mother to bear another child—among urban respondents, 30 percent of all causes, and among rural respondents, 40 percent. The total number of unclear causes represents 38 percent of all chief causes advanced by urban women and 45 percent of all those advanced by rural women.

None of the published findings of the study indicate directly the incidence of abortion among women of reproductive age in the Soviet Union. However, Sadvokasova's article does contain a statement concerning the relative incidence of abortion among working and nonworking women, from which a good inference concerning the total incidence of abortion in the Soviet Union can be made. Sadvokasova asserts, "In our country the overwhelming proportion of women of productive age are occupied in work. According to our data, the frequency of abortion among women of this group is considerably higher than among those not occupied in work (105.5 per thousand as against 41.5 per thousand)."¹³

Assuming that these rates are representative, it can be calculated that the annual number of abortions in the Soviet Union would be somewhat larger than the number of live births. Specifically, as of the date of the 1959 census, there were 64,751,000 women of productive age, that is, 16–54 years old. Of these, 49,094,000 were working and 15,657,000 were not working.¹⁴ The number of abortions in the

¹³ E. A. Sadvokasova, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–47.

Soviet Union in the twelve-month period centering on January, 1959, can then be estimated as 5,829,000. The corresponding number of births can be closely estimated to be 5,242,000. It is possible that the actual number of abortions was even higher than this. Sadvokasova's survey did not include abortions taking place outside of a hospital, which, she admitted, "still constitute a sufficiently large number." Furthermore, "a considerable portion of them are criminal abortions."¹⁵ From another source we learn that in 1958 abortions taking place outside of a hospital constituted 21 percent of all abortions performed either in or outside of a hospital.¹⁶ Thus the actual number of abortions, including those taking place outside of hospitals, might be some 27 percent higher than we have calculated.

Another indication of the very high rate of abortion among the respondents in this study is Sadvokasova's statement that 15 percent of the urban women and 16 percent of the rural women who obtain a legal abortion have had a previous abortion within the preceding twelve-month period.

Our calculations lead one to suspect that the abortion rate in the Soviet Union may be as high as any in the world. In 1958–59, the birth rate in the U.S.S.R. was approximately twenty-five per thousand population. Our data suggest that the abortion rate in the Soviet Union is at least this high, if not substantially higher. In contrast, the officially reported abortion rate in Hungary is only seventeen per thousand and the total rate (assuming the same proportion of abortions taking place outside of hospitals as in the U.S.S.R.) around twenty-two per thousand. The official abortion rate in Japan

¹⁴ *Annual Economic Indicators for the U.S.S.R.*, 88th Cong. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), pp. 44–45.

¹⁵ E. A. Sadvokasova, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁶ O. K. Nikonchik, "Problema Kontraktseptsii i Organizatsiya Borby S Abortami v SSSR," in *Akusherstvo i Ginekologiya*, XXXV, No. 6 (November–December, 1959), p. 4.

has been around twelve or thirteen per thousand population. However, according to calculations by Muramatsu, the number of unreported abortions may be as high as the number reported.¹⁷ If this is true, then the abortion rate in Japan in recent years may also have been approximately as high as in the Soviet Union.

A technical matter should be cleared up at this point. It should not be supposed that one can add the abortion rate to the actual birth rate and assume that the total of the two rates is necessarily equal to the potential birth rate. Rather, in the absence of contraception, the presumptive birth rate is best obtained by adding to the actual birth rate one-half to one-third of the abortion rate. This can be shown by examining the average interval between two conceptions in the case of the first conception's resulting in an induced abortion; second, in the case of the first conception's resulting in a live child which is breast fed; and, third, in the case of the first conception's resulting in a live child which is not breast fed. When the first conception results in an abortion, the total interval between conceptions is approximately nine months, divided into three months of pregnancy, one month of post-partum amenorrhoea, and five months of ovulatory exposure prior to the second conception. When the first conception results in a live child which is breast fed, the interval between conceptions is twenty-seven months, divided into nine months of pregnancy, eleven months of post-partum amenorrhoea, two months of anovulatory cycles, and five months of ovulatory exposure prior to the second conception. When the first conception results in a live child which is not breast fed, the period of post-partum amenorrhoea is reduced to two months and the total interval between conceptions is eighteen months.¹⁸

Thus, high as it is, the abortion rate

¹⁷ Minoru Muramatsu, "Effect of Induced Abortion on the Reduction of Births in Japan," in *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, XXXVIII, No. 2 (April, 1960), pp. 153-66.

we have presumed for the Soviet Union does not imply that there would be a fantastically high presumptive birth rate if there were no abortion but, instead, implies a birth rate lower than that in several nations and no doubt restricted to some extent by contraception. However, the important point for the Soviet Union is that the abortion rate implies that the use of contraceptives in the Soviet Union is probably very much less frequent and/or effective than in the United States. The fertility of married couples in the United States and in the Soviet Union is approximately at the same level. Yet the highest estimate of the number of abortions in the United States is of an abortion rate less than 30 percent of the birth rate.¹⁹ It is thus quite probable that the much higher abortion rate in the Soviet Union is matched by a much lower proportion of pregnancies prevented by contraception.

Some limited data are available concerning the practice of contraception in the U.S.S.R. In the journal *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie*, O. E. Chernetskii describes the result of a survey of contraception practice among women requesting abortion in the small city and rayon of Belaya Kalitva, situated in the southern part of the Russian Republic in Rostov Oblast.²⁰ According to the results of this survey, 52 percent of the respondents did not use any type of contraception. Condoms were the most prevalent form of contraception, and were used by 20 percent of the respondents. An additional 10 percent made use of coitus interruptus, 8 percent relied on lactation, 5 percent employed douches, and 5 percent used a diaphragm and/or jelly. These data show a substantially smaller proportion of contraceptive users than among recent samples of married women in the United States. For example, the University of Michigan study, conducted in 1955 on a

¹⁸ Robert G. Potter, Jr., "Birth Intervals: Structure and Change," in *Population Studies*, Vol. 16 (November, 1963), pp. 155-166.

¹⁹ Mary Calderone, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 180.

²⁰ O. E. Chernetskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

national sample of married white women 18-39 years old, showed that 70 percent of all respondents were current users of contraception.²¹

Now let us return to the question of population policy. We cited earlier one quotation which implied that the birth rate in the Soviet Union was not considered high enough. We have cited another quotation which showed that as the age structure of the Soviet population changes within the next few years, the birth rate will decline, unless fertility at each specific age is increased. Sadvokasova, the author of this second quotation, advocated a reduction in the abortion rate in order to make up for this prospective decline in the birth rate. Thus, in the U.S.S.R., there would appear to be at least some advocates of a policy of reducing the number of abortions in order to increase the number of births.

On the other hand, a different population policy is suggested in the frequent argument of Soviet publications that contraceptive practice should be improved and increased so that the number of abortions may be reduced. This argument implies that present rates of fertility at each age are sufficiently high. In this connection, let us quote further from recent Soviet publications.

In an article in *Fel'dsher i Akusherka* ("Feldsher and Midwife") published in May, 1962, A. N. Shibaeva writes:

Every year, the number of contraceptive devices grows and becomes more varied. Contraceptive devices allow one to carry out a successful fight against abortion—which is extremely harmful to the health of women. However, experience shows that people still do not use these devices widely enough. This can be explained not so much by the failings of the devices themselves, as by the ignorance of the population in their use.

The task before workers in obstetrical-gynecological agencies is to instruct wide circles of the population in the use of contraceptive

devices for the prevention of undesired pregnancies and primarily to instruct women, since the overwhelming majority of means can be applied only by women. Therefore, public health propaganda concerning contraceptive devices right now acquires great significance.²²

The journal *Akusherstvo i Ginekologiya* ("Obstetrics and Gynecology") published in 1959 a series of articles dealing with new contraceptive techniques being developed in the Soviet Union. In the article introducing this series, O. K. Nikonchik made the following remarks:

However, it is not proper to consider the abolition of the prohibition of abortion as its encouragement.

A large army of physicians and midwives should lead and conduct a large-scale health-education campaign among the population concerning the harmful effect of abortion on the female organism. . . .

One of the principal methods of fight against abortion is supplying the population with contraceptive devices. In this area medical scientists and practitioners have great deficiencies. This can be explained by the fact that during the course of the last twenty years, research institutes, departments of obstetrics and gynecology of medical schools and post graduate medical training, did not occupy themselves with seeking new effective, and convenient contraceptive devices. . . .

The problem of supplying the population with contraceptive devices would be solved much faster if the leading medical institutes, institutes for post graduate training of physicians, research institutes of obstetrics and gynecology and for the protection of women and children, which are dedicated to solve problems connected with the protection of the health of women, did not stand aside, but instead became concerned with the questions of contraception.²³

Thus there seems to be some confusion in Soviet thought whether positive efforts should actually be made to encourage a higher level of fertility. The Soviet government would probably prefer increased

²¹ Ronald Freedman, P. K. Whelpton, and Arthur A. Campbell, *Family Planning, Sterility, and Population Growth* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 68.

²² A. N. Shibaeva, "O Nekotorykh Formakh Propagandy Protivozachatochnykh Sredstv," in *Fel'dsher i Akusherka*, XXVII, No. 5 (May, 1962), p. 50.

²³ O. K. Nikonchik, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

fertility, for a higher rate of reproduction would augment the population of the Soviet Union more rapidly and probably give it greater influence in future world affairs. On the other hand, higher fertility might have other more immediate consequences not so beneficial. A lower proportion of women might wish to remain in the labor force. If not, more money would have to be spent in providing child-care facilities for working mothers. In addition, higher fertility would necessitate the regime's spending more resources for education and to improve the nation's very inadequate supply of housing. Therefore, even though the regime might abstractly prefer a higher rate of childbearing, it is probable that it is not willing to pay the price of a full-scale campaign toward this end.

We have documented the official consensus that the present rate of abortion in the Soviet Union is too high. We have also shown that the policy of the Soviet

regime is to further the practice of contraception. Do these two positions involve a contradiction in population policy? My own opinion is that probably they do not. Although Soviet philosophy has no moral qualms about killing a human embryo, the plain fact is that abortion is expensive, both in terms of the time of physicians and in the use of hospital beds. Moreover, there are sometimes undesirable complications resulting from the operation, and, very rarely, abortion even results in death. Thus, a method of birth control which combines a small frequency of abortion with a high utilization of contraceptives is undoubtedly superior to one which relies heavily on abortion alone. If we assume that the Soviet Union is not really committed to a higher rate of fertility, it is easy to understand both the current Soviet agitation against abortion and the efforts to increase the practice of contraception.