

TIME OUT

BOOM *Baby* BOOM

What is making so many feminists in their thirties turn to motherhood? Julie McCrossin, alias Dr Mary Hartman, psychoanalyses.

Dear Patient,

My name is Dr. Mary Hartman. I run a chain of highly lucrative private (of course) clinics for people just like you: people who suffer from profound psycho-sexual malfunction.

It may interest you to know that a recent survey has shown that readers of the *Australian Left Review* are made up of a statistical majority of psycho-sexual cripples.

And so it was with particular pleasure that I agreed to take this opportunity to tell you about a new threat to your psycho-sexual health.

Patient, a plague is sweeping this nation.

A plague that is changing the very fabric of daily life.

You look all around you and what do you see?

Babies!!

Every second person seems to be having one.

And everyone else is thinking about having one.

Or helping someone else to have one.

Or regretting not having had one already.

Or even, God help them, planning a second.

Everywhere you look, it's babies, babies, babies. And you don't know what to do.

I had a patient in the clinic just the other day who'd been an active feminist for years. She'd had a high priority job in the law and a government bureaucracy.

She'd set her goals, planned her path and made it to the top!

One morning she woke up and found herself standing at the front door of her house in her nightdress.

She was barefoot, a baby on the breast.

And she was waving to her man as he drove off to work. She picked up the morning paper, turned and walked into the house.

Suddenly she realised that she was utterly alone with a tiny person whose entire conversational range consisted of "Goo goo" and "Gar gar".

In terror she tried to make the baby discuss the front page story in the *Financial Review*.

The child farted and fell asleep.

My feminist patient looked in the mirror and screamed.

She had entered the Twilight Zone of **BABY BOOM PSYCHOSIS!**

Patient, I know what some of you are thinking. I don't want to sound like a white-coated professional know-it-all.

But I do. You're reading this and, in a deep, dark corner of your mind, you're wondering "do I want a baby?"

You know the family is a reactionary organ of the state: but do you want a baby? You think to yourself:

"But I've got so many other things to do.

My job is fulfilling.

My union activity is important.

I enjoy my friends and my social life."

But this voice inside your head keeps saying, quietly, insistently: "Do I want a baby?"

And in the distance you can hear a ticking, ticking, ticking sound. One morning you look in the mirror and you see your first grey hairs. And still you hear this ticking, ticking, ticking.

A little later you notice you've got crows' feet. And the bags under your eyes never seem to disappear completely any more. And still this ticking, ticking, ticking, is nagging in the corner of your mind.

WHAT IS THAT SOUND?

And suddenly you realise - it's the

relentless ticking of your biological clock.

If you don't have a baby soon, will it be **TOO LATE?** And so, before too long, you present at my clinic with the tell-tale swelling of the belly.

Patient, this is just one example. As you know, people of all ages are having children these days.

All ages and all sexual preferences. Animal, vegetable, and mineral.

Lesbian separatist women who haven't even let a man inside their house for years are suddenly running around with an empty vegemite jar in one hand, and a turkey baster in the other.

And they spend their weekends listening to "wimmin's" programs on public radio, and poking tiny tadpoles into their innermost regions in a desperate bid to conceive.

THIS IS A BABY BOOM IN-DEED!

And we all know a couple who are "trying" to have a baby.

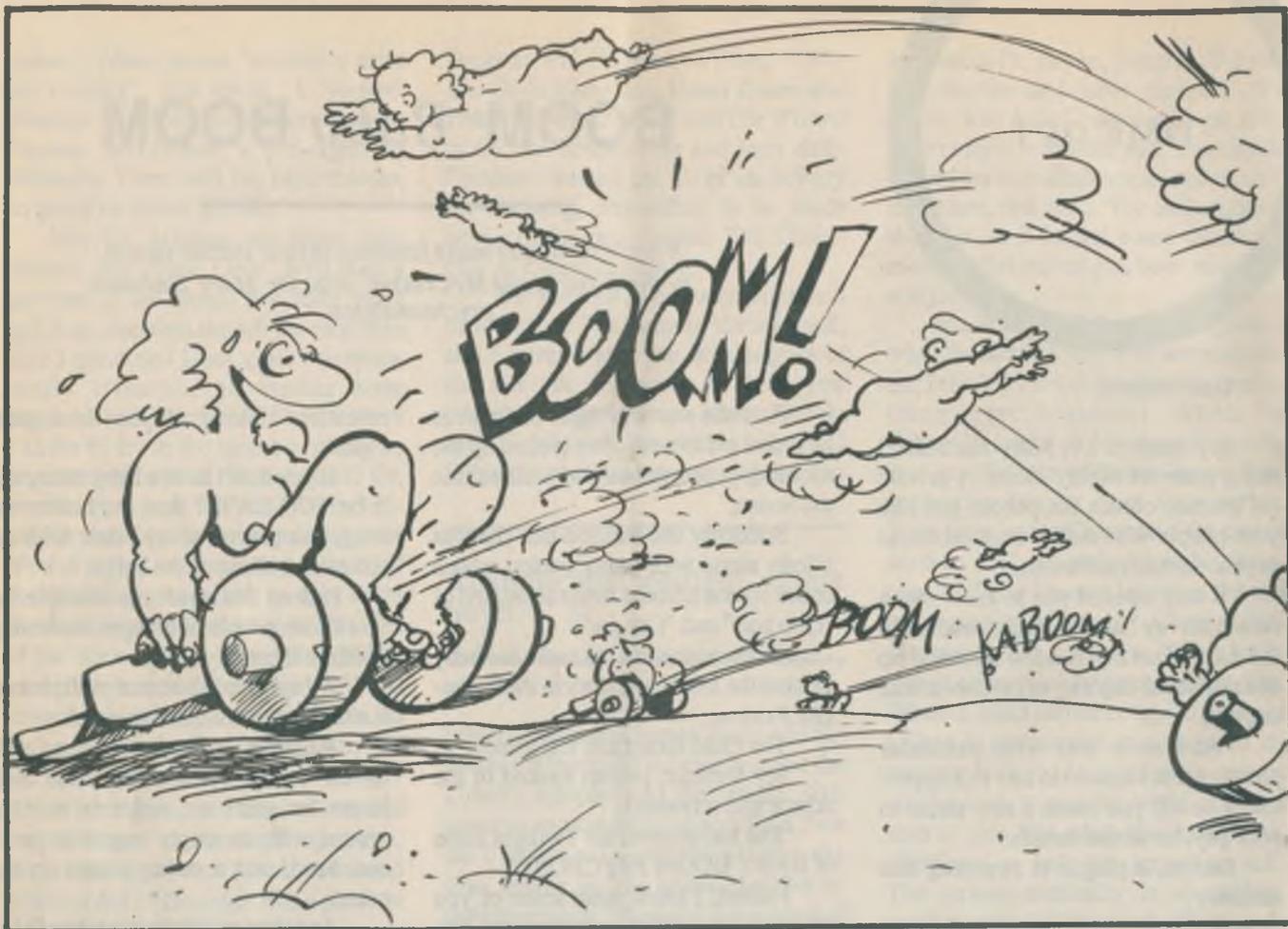
And they insist on telling you about it.

You get a picture in your mind of two people constantly in coitus - 24 hours day.

A classic symptom of the "trying couple" is the obsessive urge to keep the sperm in the love pocket for as long as possible. I had one young patient who insisted on standing on her head for an hour after intercourse so that not a single drop of the precious seminal fluid could slip down her leg into barren oblivion.

Another lassie rigged up an elaborate system of ropes and pulleys so that she could continue her household duties, like vacuuming and washing up, all the time remaining upside down - secure in the knowledge that her love pouch was full.

Clearly, the question must be



asked: why do these patients want a baby so much?

From my clinical experience you can divide the would-be parents into two main groups: the Sensualists and the Pedagogues.

The Sensualists want a child so they can love a little person unconditionally.

They imagine picking up the child from pre-school.

A little child in tiny shoes with an itty-bitty school bag. As you approach the school you see your child playing in a crowd of kids.

Your child spots you.

Her face lights up.

Her little body quivers with pleasure just because it's you.

She throws open her little arms and runs towards you.

You can't help yourself, you start running too.

And as you rush into each other's arms, New Age Music starts playing from beneath the pavement.

This is the Sensualists.

And the Pedagogues - they always imagine their potential child as being

permanently four years old and always asking questions. Questions they long to try to answer.

Like: where do clouds come from? Who makes the wind? Why is the sky blue? You can become a guru with just one little follower. Your child will be a blank sheet of paper, and the pen is in your hand. You can create your dream.

Of course, both groups of potential parents are in for a dreadful shock once the baby actually arrives.

Even a Spielberg movie can't prepare you for the full horror of what's inside that bucket of Napisan, left untouched for eight days.

And who but a parent can comprehend the terrible nagging tiredness of disrupted sleep, disrupted sleep for months. Your head rolls forward, your eyes roll back. And half the people at work think you've become a heroin addict on the nod.

But it's the question of discipline that really sends most of my patients into full-blown psychosis.

I had a mother come to me recently, who'd been driven so mad by the

nightly bedtime battle, that she'd retreated into a full combat fantasy.

Late each afternoon, as the child played innocently in the backyard outside, mother was in her bedroom changing into jungle greens.

At exactly 1700 hours mother blackened her face, pulled on her combat boots and armed herself with a set of the child's pyjamas. Then she crawled on her belly down the hall of her house, out the back door and across the lawn towards the unsuspecting child.

She had become RAMBO MOTHER.

IT'S BEDTIME.

AND THERE'S NO TURNING BACK!!!

Patient, if you have identified with any of these symptoms, I look forward to seeing you at one of my clinics.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Mary Hartman.

JULIE McCROSSIN is a freelance journalist and comedy performer.

JESSIE STREET - FEMINIST EXTRAORDINARY



Photos: Courtesy Jessie Street Centenary Committee

supporter of justice for minorities, a leader of campaigns for the ending of discrimination against Australian Aborigines.

From 1929, when she was a co-founder of the United Associations of Women, whose watchword was "Freedom, Equality of Status and Opportunity", what she said, wrote and did were reported in the press. She was a controversial figure because she worked vigorously for causes unpopular with influential sections of the community: wages for wives and mothers, equal pay for equal work in peace and wartime, equal opportunity and status in all the areas where women were barred because they were women. Her support for the Australian-Russian friendship movement was tolerated during the war, as was her welcoming of communist women into the United Associations of Women. From 1946 she was the subject of attacks from conservative individuals and organisations; in 1948 she left the Labor Party rather than turn her back on the Australia-Russia Society.

What made Jessie Street the more controversial was that, by birth, economic circumstances, education and marriage, she belonged in the upper echelons of Australian society. Her radical views set her apart from the class to which, in other ways, she belonged, though there were many other women like her, articulate, university trained, with the financial independence and leisure that enabled them to work with her in their commitment to feminism. But their social standing and their educational abilities also set them apart from the labour movement, including trade unionists. Anti-intellectualism, particularly where women were concerned, was welded with the distrust of middle class feminism.

There were other reasons for trade union suspicion of middle class feminists, particularly in the decade before World War II. The United As-

Jessie Street at the Status of Women Commission of the United Nations 1948.

This year marks the centenary of Jessie Street's birth. Winifred Mitchell remembers

The celebration in April 1989 of the centenary of the birth of Jessie Street is a belated recognition of her role in a number of areas. She was known as Australia's leading feminist, a champion of equality for women in the workplace, the home and the community; when

there were no women in federal parliament, she stood as a Labor Party candidate in the Liberal stronghold of the Wentworth electorate, almost defeating the sitting member; she was the only woman in Australia's delegation to the conference in San Francisco in 1945 which founded the United Nations Organisation; she was a staunch supporter of Australian-Russian friendship during World War II and in the cold war that followed; she was a fighter for peace, a

sociations was brought into being on the eve of the Great Depression. However much it campaigned in aid of unemployed girls and women, or married women teachers faced with dismissal, or improved wages and conditions for nurses, or national insurance schemes, its activities were reported in the press as part of a social scene which had little relevance for a desperate working class. The members were well dressed with no apparent economic troubles; their leisure was not the one enforced by unemployment.

As long as Jessie Street and her colleagues confined themselves to "women's affairs" they could be, and were, ignored by trade unions. When they began publicising their views in the early 'thirties about using the basic wage system to provide a wage for dependent wives and mothers, then went on to outline a scheme for equal pay for women workers, again based on the basic wage structure, the trade unions reacted angrily.

Jessie Street wanted economic equality for women, whether as marriage partners or in the workplace, while fully recognising the needs of a family with children. She pointed out that less than half the adult male population had dependent children and since the basic wage was based on the assumption that the adult male was the breadwinner with a dependent wife and between two and three children, the system should be made fairer. Single men and women should be paid the same minimum wage; the extra amount for adult male breadwinners embodied in the basic wage should be used as an endowment fund on which those couples with a child or children could draw.

The basic wage was, in a sense, a by-product of the arbitration system, arising from the humanitarian Justice Higgins' theories and practices as president of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. Higgins believed that conciliation and arbitration would bring about "A New Province of Law and Order". He also believed that an adult male worker should receive a wage which enabled him to marry, have two to three children and, with the aid of his thrifty dependent wife, live in a state of frugal comfort. Many labourers had large families and the concept of the minimum wage, on

which the whole structure was based, meant increasing poverty for those on lower wages.

The concept also envisaged the "average" or "normal" woman as destined for marriage, child bearing and dependency on a male breadwinner. The average women workers were therefore young and single and should be paid as juniors, at half the adult male rate. But many women did not marry, or were widowed or divorced; working women often had dependent parents or children or younger brothers and sisters to support. They were victims of the basic wage concept in the same way as the lower-paid male breadwinners, but doubly so because they were women.

The "average" rule of thumb also divided categories of employment into "men's" and "women's" work! At first, Justice Higgins conceded that if a woman worked in an occupation normally seen as men's work, and was equally productive, she should receive the same pay. But, by the time Jessie Street was taking up the cudgels on behalf of women's wage justice, male and female work categories had been defined more sharply. In general, women received half the male rate, though while there was no basic wage for women, the practice in wage-setting was to recognise a female minimum wage of not less than half, if there was equal productivity.

While there were some attempts by trade unions with women members to procure an equal wage for adult women doing the same work as their male colleagues, they accepted defeat philosophically. Nor did unions covering higher paid skilled male workers worry overmuch about their lower paid brothers on the basic wage. Their main concern was in protecting their own members' higher margins and their relation to the base rate. Few male unionists could see anything wrong with a male-based wage structure. The level of technology in industry strengthened the idea that work was primarily a concern for the strength of men, that the normal role of a woman was that of a worker in the house as wife and mother. The level of domestic technology confirmed her status as an unskilled labourer and unpaid auxiliary.

In the depression the male section of the workforce was worse affected by

unemployment than the female section, though the ten percent reduction in wages, applied universally, fell more heavily on the lower paid. Men recognised the threat of women working for lower wages but saw the solution as preference for men in employment. The support of trade unions for equality in the workplace had to be won mainly on the negative basis of defence against this threat to their own job security, not on the basis of justice for fellow trade unionists who were different only because of their sex. It took the experiences of the second world war, then the years of prosperity, technological advance and full employment to bring about full trade union support for equal pay. And to these factors for change must be added the continued work by the women's movement inside and outside the trade union movement, as well as the increased numbers of women workers both married and single.

A clear illustration of the difficulties faced by Jessie Street and the so-called "middle class" feminists can be seen in the differences that developed with another champion of equal pay, Muriel Heagney. Both women had the same sense of mission, the origins of their interest in the plight of women much the same. Educated at Richmond Convent, Muriel Heagney trained as a primary school teacher. She joined the Labour Party in 1906 as a member of its Richmond branch of which her father had been a foundation member. In 1915, when she was thirty, she became a clerk in the Defence Department. At that time, women clerks received the same rate of pay as their male colleagues. After the war, as secretary of the Relief Fund for Stricken Europe, she visited Geneva and Russia, later working with the Industrial Labor Organisation. Well known for her trade union work, particularly with clerks, she became a member of the central executive of the ALP in Victoria and, in 1933, stood as a candidate for Labor in a by-election, ten years before Jessie Street's experience, also unsuccessfully.

In 1930, both women were involved in campaigns to aid unemployed women. The scheme in Victoria involved the establishing of sewing and jam-making centres; in Sydney, the UA arranged farm training for girls on the land. The paths of the two women

crossed in membership of different branches of the same organisations and attendance at overseas conferences. They both published their ideas about equal pay and campaigned for wage justice for women.

In 1935 Muriel Heagney came to Sydney while working for the Clerks' Union. She joined the United Associations and was soon a colleague of Jessie on the council of that organisation and on its Like Conditions of Work Committee. In 1937 Muriel established the Council of Action for Equal Pay at the behest of the Clerks' Union. At the conference which founded this body there were representatives of 53 trade union with women members, and women's organisations, the UA included. By this time the differences of approach to methods of achieving equal pay must have been clear to both women.

Jessie Street believed that, as industry's capacity to pay had been an important factor in the reduction of wages during the depression, the precedent necessitated a gradual approach: an increase to 60 percent, then quarterly increments over five years to achieve 100 percent of the male rate. Muriel Heagney thought the correct strategy was the demand for equality immediately, that the gradual approach showed opposition, not support, for the principle of equality. It seems rather strange that the two women could not solve their differences or agree to differ. At the annual conference of the Council of Action for Equal Pay in September 1939, the Heagney line was adopted. After being denounced for "bowing to the dictates of their bourgeois husbands", the United Associations withdrew.

The United Associations then took advantage of a federal inquiry into the basic wage to plan an appearance before the Commonwealth Arbitration Court to give evidence about the need for increases in women's wages. They gained the support of twenty women's organisations from all states, seven from New South Wales, to brief Nerida Cohen, the UA's legal adviser, to appear for them.

Muriel Heagney, resentful no doubt because of lack of consultation and intrusion into trade union affairs, gained the support of John Hughes of the Clerks' Union, president of the NSW Labor Council and, later, of the



State Labor Party group which amalgamated with the Communist Party in 1943. They made a joint approach to C Crofts, the ACTU's advocate in the court, to oppose the intervention of the feminists. But, since none of the 70 unions seeking an increase in the basic wage made any reference to women's wages in their applications, the women's plan was frustrated.

Street and Cohen then approached the Melbourne Trades Hall for aid in calling a conference of unions with women members. Thirty-three unions were represented and, after Jessie had spoken, a resolution was carried unanimously, calling on the ACTU to make an application to the Commonwealth Court, in conjunction with unions with women members, for equal pay.

Despite, maybe because of, this ruthless determination to pursue their own line of dedicated action, the disagreement between the two champions helped provide stimulation to the ACTU and the trade union movement in Victoria and New South Wales. Crofts wrote to the New South Wales Labour Council warning against organisations of women claiming to represent the interests of female unionists. A decision to call a conference of federal unions

with women members in 1941 was made. The ACTU's own triennial congress a few months later adopted all the recommendations of the equal pay conference and Muriel Heagney was selected as a member of the committee appointed to act on the decisions. At last the trade union movement was paying heed to the women's call for equality in wage rates.

Another spur was the need for releasing male workers for the armed services. The federal government's plan was viewed with alarm by those trade unionists who saw it as "a means of providing cheap labour at the expense of male employment". The Minister for Munitions in the Labor wartime government listened to delegations from the trade union movement. He also explained the proposed Women's Employment Board's provisions to a delegation led by Jessie Street. The United Associations congratulated itself and the federal government on the proposals to start women in munitions and other essential industries at 60 percent and then, depending on proved productivity, increase the rate to 100 percent of the male wage.

By 1949 there was joint action by five feminist organisations with a com-

mon policy regarding equal pay, one of which gave evidence before the Commonwealth Court in support of the ACTU's case for retention of the Women's Employment Board's wartime wage rates. Seventy-five percent only was awarded. In 1959 the state government in New South Wales decided to give equal wages to women in the state teaching service since the NSW teachers' Federation had proved that women's work was equal to that performed by male teachers.

One of the women teachers who had been in the forefront of the equal pay campaign was Lucy Woodcock, another colleague of Jessie Street. A founding member of the NSW teachers' Federation, the first woman member of its executive, she was the principal of a school in Erskineville where, during the depression, she organised meals for the children of the unemployed. She also campaigned against the dismissal of married women teachers during the depression, thereby coming into contact with Jessie Street and the United Associations of Women. On her retirement she became president of that association, representing both it and the Teachers' Federation at the victory dinner celebrating equal pay for teachers in 1963. It should be noted that women teachers gained equality in the gradualist way, their union supporting the government's yearly instalment proposals 1959-1963. Lucy Woodcock had been a member of the UA's Like Conditions of Work Committee as well as the Council of Action for Equal Pay. Well educated, well paid, articulate and clear thinking, Lucy Woodcock was able to relate equally well with Jessie Street and Muriel Heagney. In *Education*, the journal of the Teachers' Federation, in 1968, the obituary spoke with respect of her work in a number of trade union campaigns particularly those for equal pay. It stressed, however, that her approach had always been that of a trade unionist and not a middle class feminist.

Jessie Street included servicewomen in her campaign for wage justice, as did the Council of Action for Equal Pay. She also made representations on behalf of the Australian women who married American servicemen, enlisting the aid of Eleanor Roosevelt to ensure they received main-

tenance. But she had many other programs during the war years. A member of the Labor Party from 1939, she gained pre-selection in 1943 for the seat of Wentworth. Her personal appeal to the electors combined with an extremely efficient campaign organised by the United Associations members and their friends gave her a majority of first preferences. She was defeated by Eric Harrison, Liberal, on the fourth count.

In the same year, Jessie Street led the UA committee which organised a national conference for women, the first "Charter" conference. Delegates from over 90 women's organisations came from all states in Australia. They included women of all shades of political and religious views, trade unions and feminist bodies. This conference's resolutions became the Charter, a manifesto of women's opportunities and needs in the home, the workplace and the community, in war and in peace. It was unique in that it provided a post-war reconstruction program for women.

The second conference in 1946 was also successful, featuring the first all-women art exhibition, a procession for peace, and a service at the Cenotaph conducted by the Salvation Army Brigadier Barbara Auton. But it was smaller: there were 68 organisations represented and it was attacked from a number of areas: the presidents of the National Council of Women and six of its constituted bodies, the *Catholic Weekly*, and the labor party Women's Proposals Committee. It was not the Charter that was criticised: it was the United Associations of Women, particularly its president, Jessie Street. For some conservative women, Jessie Street's candidature as a member of the Labor Party in the 1943 federal elections had seemed radical. Worse was her open admiration, publicly expressed after she returned from a visit to Russia in 1938, for the socialist system, particularly in relation to the status of women. She had become a leading figure in the Society for Cultural Relations with Russia, helped initiate Russian Medical Aid, then Sheepskins for Russia in the war years. When the various committees were combined into the Australia-Russia Society in 1945, she became first its vice-president, then president. Jessie Street had been appointed by the Australian government in 1945 as a

member of the delegation to San Francisco for the inauguration of the United Nations Organisation.

The end of the war brought the resumption of pre-war antagonisms, fear of communism, suspicion of those like Jessie who expressed the desire for friendship with Russia and associated with known communists. When the Labor Party proscribed the Australia-Russia Society in 1948, Jessie Street remained firm in her principles. She resigned from the Labor Party rather than obey the direction to resign from the Australia-Russia Society.

She spent much of the 1950s overseas. Using London as a base she attended many conferences as a speaker on peace, international understanding, the status of women and the rights of minorities. On her return to Australia she was a leader in the campaign for justice for Aborigines. Working with the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship she drafted the petition for the referendum to remove the discriminatory legislation from the Australian Constitution and lived to see that referendum passed in 1967.

She died in 1970 after several years of ill health; though she had managed to publish her autobiography *Truth or Repose* in 1968 she could not participate in the new surge of feminism rising at the end of the 1960s. Nor could she realise that much of the Charter of the 1940s would, in essence, become the reforms in the status of women made in the 1970s and 1980s.

As educational opportunities for women, including mature age women, widened, distinctions between kinds of feminists have become blurred. Laws against discrimination based on a person's sex are beginning to take effect. There is far more protection of women as wives and mothers, and a long list of other improvements that Jessie Street and her colleagues campaigned for. While some have yet to be gained it can be said that she and they would have been pleased with the developments. It should also be recognised that women like Jessie Street were an essential part of the history of feminism, that the label "middle class" is an irrelevance.

WINIFRED MITCHELL is a retired academic and feminist, and author of the history of the United Association of Women.

At Last the News

*Read all about it in Moscow News,
suggests Denis Freney*

In the Soviet Union, the first and most difficult task is to buy a copy of *Moscow News*. Only 25,000 copies are printed in the Russian language and most go to those privileged or lucky enough to have a subscription.

The weekly is allocated a certain amount of newsprint, and their quota was set when no one read *Moscow News*. But that was before Yegor Yakovlev took over as editor-in-chief a few years ago, as *glasnost* picked up steam.

Fortunately, anyone in Australia willing to part with \$14.50 can get a year's airmail subscription.

You soon find problems. Unless you read it from cover to cover, you are likely to miss the most interesting articles. Headlines give no help.

Second, you must read through the usually verbose or "philosophical"

opening paragraphs, to get to what the author is really on about.

Third, you must be able to read between the lines. Old habits die hard, and decades of censorship have turned obtuse allusions into an in-built part of the Soviet journalist's stock-in-trade.

However, that said, *Moscow News* can always surprise. It was able to claim another "first" recently, when it published an interview with Trotsky's grandson and a photo of him beside Trotsky's grave on the outskirts of Mexico City.

"I could not dispute the grandson's opinion about his grandfather. Not out of delicacy... Simply I don't have, nor can I have, my own opinion about Trotsky ...I haven't read Trotsky's works...and am not aware of his views on socialism or marxism.."

We are told, too, that an increasing number of Soviet citizens are paying

their respects at Trotsky's graveside...

Forbidden fruit...

Over the past two years, *Moscow News* has also provided something of a barometer of the progress of *perestroika* - and of the icy winds that occasionally blow from the corridors of bureaucratic power. Late 1987 and early 1988 was one such hard period, and the columns of *Moscow News* became much more subdued.

There was a sense of euphoria in mid-1988, in the lead-up to and during the special CPSU conference. Soon, however, the hard realities, particularly in the economy, reasserted themselves.

Today, there is sense of foreboding, as the forces of darkness once more emerge, and *perestroika* hits more and more rocks. The big battles, you can read between the lines, are yet to come...

Reading *Moscow News* becomes addictive. Forget the TV, turn on some good music and set aside a night to read it when it is delivered...and after that there's *New Times*, and, most extraordinary of all, *XXth Century and Peace*, the monthly bulletin of the Soviet Peace Committee that's now a voice for the "unofficial" opposition.

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