

Revisionists on Motherhood :

"Babies or Jail"

In a recent policy move, Nicolae Ceausescu, head of the revisionist Romanian government since the mid-60s, has unleashed what can only be called gynecological cops. The aim is to halt abortions and force up the Romanian birthrate to a stated goal of three or four children per family. To accomplish this, the government is on a witchhunt after abortions, and is heavily clamping down on women generally.

In a stark example of the new policy, the Romanian authorities last spring conducted a lightning raid in the capital of Bucharest on a candy factory named Confex. Seventeen thousand women workers at the plant were compelled to submit to a gynecological exam right at the factory. Any woman showing signs of an abortion which has not been approved by the authorities is liable to a prison term. Women were reported to have attempted to escape by fleeing through windows at the plant.

Lightning raids like this are only one of the more extreme features of a widely-reaching system of control which the government recently esta-

blished. Each month women in Romania are obligated to obtain a document from their factory or neighborhood clinic certifying that they have obtained a pregnancy exam. If a woman is pregnant, the pregnancy is followed by the authorities until birth. Without the certificate, a woman is deprived of other state health benefits, including dentistry and other medical care, and even of her right to a driver's license. Any woman failing to bear children is also subject to investigation. Women with fewer than three children must pay a monthly tax of up to 5% of their income.

The Romanian government's clampdown on doctors is also straightforward. According to Agence France Presse, any doctor giving unauthorized abortions is liable for up to twenty-five years in prison for the first offense. If caught a second time, the sentence is death. The new penalties were instituted in March; under the previous, more lenient system, the last doctor known to have been convicted was sentenced to ten years in prison. The penalties are not

simply for show.

In order to obtain an authorized abortion a woman must obtain the approval of the judicial authorities. There is no reason to think such approval will be anything but rare; already the rigidity of the authorities has led to dramatic consequences. It seems that one woman worker at the same Confex candy plant in Bucharest died of a hemorrhage after her doctor was refused authorization to perform an abortion. On the day she was buried, the women at the plant launched a strike—a rare sight in Romania.

As part of the Soviet bloc, the Romanian party naturally professes to be guided by Marxism-Leninism. It is worth recalling, then, the long-held Marxist-Leninist tenet that the nature of a society is invariably reflected in the position of the women. For years abortion has served in Romania, as throughout most of the Soviet bloc, as the *only* means of birth control available. No prophylactics are manufactured in or imported into the country. How many abortions the Romanian woman averages in her lifetime is not known—the figure in the USSR is now approaching ten per Soviet woman. The Romanian economy, and the health care system itself, are easily capable of providing other means of birth control. This "abortion only" reflects a policy decision of the state—a policy of treating women principally as baby factories. Forcing women to confront the choice of "have the baby, or face the scalpel" makes for more babies. This is assuming grotesque and deadly forms under the Romanian government, as the choice is now reduced to "have babies—or go to prison." As revisionist chief Mr. Ceausescu sums up the place of women in that society, having babies is "the most noble patriotic and civic duty." ■