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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

Le présent article porte sur les récits de voyage de cinq Canadiennes professionnelles instruites de classe moyenne qui ont visité l’Union soviétique entre les deux guerres mondiales : Alexandrine Gibb, Margaret Gould, Agnes Macphail, Margaret McWilliams et Ella Smith. Toutes ont mis l’accent sur la femme soviétique, sujet sur lequel elles prétendaient avoir une perspective spéciale et posséder une certaine expertise. Alexandrine Gibb, par exemple, a offert à son lectorat « les yeux et les oreilles d’une femme canadienne prête à [leur] livrer la mystérieuse Russie ». Peu importe ce que ces Canadiennes ont vu d’autre en URSS – et la réalité soviétique a varié considérablement entre 1926 et 1936, années entre lesquelles ces femmes ont voyagé –, l’impression plus ou moins constante qu’elles ont donnée à divers publics canadiens est que l’ expérience soviétique offrait aux femmes des possibilités que les femmes se voyaient refuser au Canada. Rétrospectivement, on peut dire qu’il y avait là méprise à l’égard de la réalité soviétique, quoique l’inégalité vécue au Canada à laquelle s’opposaient les voyageuses canadiennes par comparaison avec l’exemple soviétique n’était nullement illusoire. Les publics canadiens n’étaient cependant pas tous prêts à accepter pareille comparaison.

Gender and the Great Experiment: 'Feminine and Canadian Eyes' See Soviet Women, 1926–1936

KIRK NIERGARTH*

Abstract

This article focuses on the travelogues of five educated, professional, middle-class Canadian women who visited the Soviet Union in the interwar period: Alexandrine Gibb, Margaret Gould, Agnes Macphail, Margaret McWilliams, and Ella Smith. For these visitors, Soviet women were a point of emphasis, and on this subject they claimed special insight and relative expertise. Gibb, for example, offered readers a "pair of feminine and Canadian eyes and ears ready to give you mysterious Russia." Whatever else feminine Canadian eyes saw in the USSR — for Soviet reality varied considerably between 1926 and 1936 when these women travelled — they gave Canadian audiences a more-or-less consistent impression that the great experiment was providing Soviet women opportunities denied women in Canada. This was an impression that not all Canadian audiences were prepared to accept.

Résumé

Le présent article porte sur les récits de voyage de cinq Canadiennes professionnelles instruites de classe moyenne qui ont visité l'Union soviétique entre les deux guerres mondiales : Alexandrine Gibb, Margaret Gould, Agnes Macphail, Margaret McWilliams et Ella Smith. Toutes ont mis l'accent sur la femme soviétique, sujet sur lequel elles prétendaient avoir une perspective spéciale et posséder une certaine expertise. Alexandrine Gibb, par exemple, a offert à son lectorat « les yeux et les oreilles d'une

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femme canadienne prête à {leur} livrer la mystérieuse Russie ». Peu importe ce que ces Canadiennes ont vu d'autre en URSS – et la réalité soviétique a varié considérablement entre 1926 et 1936, années entre lesquelles ces femmes ont voyagé –, l'impression plus ou moins constante qu'elles ont donnée à divers publics canadiens est que l' expérience soviétique offrait aux femmes des possibilités que les femmes se voyaient refuser au Canada. Rétrospectivement, on peut dire qu'il y avait là méprise à l'égard de la réalité soviétique, quoique l'inégalité vécue au Canada à laquelle s'opposaient les voyageuses canadiennes par comparaison avec l'exemple soviétique n'était nullement illusoire. Les publics canadiens n'étaient cependant pas tous prêts à accepter pareille comparaison.

"You'll see in Moscow as many pretty girls and as attractively dressed as you'll see anywhere, in fact more," Eugene Forsey wrote to his mother in 1932; "many of them, I might add, have a fearless, independent efficient air, but without any of the fearsomeness that usually goes with it, for example, in Englishwomen. Russian girls are competent but they remain feminine."[1] Forsey's perception of Soviet women was far from unique among interwar Canadian visitors. The dress, manner, and even the bodies of Soviet women were important markers for Canadian observers of the relative standard of living in the Soviet Union. In 1935, *Toronto Star* reporter Alexandrine Gibb was the lone wearer of a swimsuit at the beach for factory workers at Yalta, and male tourists in her party "gaped and gaped" at the "rows and rows of naked women — most of them beautifully developed and beautifully tanned …. It was quite a sight, I'll admit," she allowed.[2] Frederick Banting was impressed: "I like the Russian people," he wrote, "… The women are fine, big, healthy, rosy cheeked, plump and muscular looking. They are much fatter and healthier than any group I have ever seen. In Moscow, Banting observed that the women wore "fine highly coloured dresses and some had lipstick. They were very bright and happy." [3]

A number of female visitors maintained that, *contra* Forsey and Banting, Soviet women were *not* well dressed. Canada's only female MP, Agnes Macphail, was particularly emphatic on this point: "Their costume," she told an audience in 1936, "is a

scramble of Irish stew. The women wear blouses not intended to go with any skirt and especially the one that it does go with."[4] She was willing to admit that some of her assessment might pertain to her own cultural biases: "[Women] just wore running shoes and many were without stockings. Maybe that is the custom — I don't know. Older women wore shawls; the younger women were without hats mostly. Maybe that too is the custom. Maybe they did not have hats."[5]

Toronto social worker Margaret Gould, who visited the Soviet Union a few months before Macphail, agreed that Soviet women were poorly dressed. "Women love nice clothes," Gould wrote in a front-page article in the *Toronto Star*, but Soviet women were forced to wear "coarse shapeless coats, home-made cotton dresses, and homespun."[6] As was typical for Gould, noting a shortcoming in the USSR was preamble to an explanation of the measures taken by the state to overcome it. Gould had witnessed an exhibition put on by the "House of Fashions" that would soon bring stylish clothing to the Soviet masses. The models, Gould thought, would be of interest to *Star* readers since they were not "the languid willowy types seen at our fashion shows; they are buxom…. Some are not even pretty: they represent thoroughly the average women who are reviewing them." Soon all Soviet women would be able to experience the "delights" of beautiful clothing.[7] Gould, here and elsewhere, followed the intended script of a typical Soviet tour: the present of the Soviet Union must always be seen in contrast to both a dark past and a bright, soon-to-be realized future. For Gould, Macphail was one of those tourists who "judge from their own 'conditioned' outlook and standards and fail, utterly, to understand."[8]

As the divergence between Macphail and Gould suggests, gender was by no means the only factor that shaped interwar visitors' impressions of the Soviet Union.[9] In fact, the travelogues of the five women who are the central focus of this study — Gibb (b.1891), Macphail (b. 1890), Gould (b. 1900), Ella Smith (b. 1884),[10] and Margaret McWilliams (b.1875) — could be mined as easily for the diversity of their opinions as for common trends. Gibb, in 1935, wrote that the Soviet "hand of steel" created an

unmistakeable "under surface fear" that could be detected in the faces of citizens, while Gould, in 1936, concluded that the Soviets had "hitched their wagon to a star!"[11] Yet, on the subject of the status of women in the Soviet Union, there was broad consensus. As Gibb put it, "life for women … in Soviet Russia has opened up in a way that no other country has even tried to accomplish."[12]

Male visitors, including Banting, Forsey, Graham Spry, Frank R. Scott, and others, too, made observations about apparent contrasts between the rights of women in Canada and the Soviet Union that align with those of the women considered here. The difference that gender made in this regard was not of kind, but of degree. For the female visitors, Soviet women were a point of emphasis in published and public accounts. McWilliams and Gould both devoted significant portions of their books about the USSR to women's issues, Smith lectured most frequently on "A Woman's Life in Soviet Russia," and the status of women was a repeated theme in the articles of Gibb and Macphail. On this subject, women travellers claimed special insight and relative expertise. As Gibb explained in the first of her articles about her Soviet experiences, she was providing *Star* readers with a "pair of feminine and Canadian eyes and ears ready to give you mysterious Russia."[13] Whatever else feminine Canadian eyes saw in the USSR — for Soviet reality varied considerably between McWilliams' visit in 1926 and 1936, when both Gould and Macphail travelled —, they gave Canadian audiences a more-or-less consistent impression that the great experiment was providing Soviet women opportunities denied women in Canada. In retrospect, this impression can be seen as in some respects mistaken or naive, but the inequality these Canadian women experienced at home and juxtaposed against the Soviet example was by no means illusory. As we shall see, not all Canadian audiences were prepared to accept this juxtaposition.

Travel narratives about the Soviet Union, like those created by tourists in other times and places, can reveal travellers' own predispositions and ideological commitments, but this may be particularly the case in Soviet tours.[14] As Joan Sangster points out, there is a considerable difference between leisure tourism

and the kind of "political tourism" that often motivated a visit to the USSR. While tourism studies have "tended to stress tourism as involving a search for tradition, history, or native 'authenticity,' and travel as an escape from modern or capitalist alienation," Sangster writes, "political tourism might be a search *for* modernity as tourists were searching out an answer to the future as much as to the past."[15] A central feature of a Soviet tour was to explicitly condemn the past and look forward to the realization of social ideals. This certainly applied to gender issues. In contrast to the "degradation of women" that characterized the rule of the Czars, what Gould saw in the USSR convinced her that the Soviets' "cardinal principle" was to eventually remove the "inequalities between men and women."[16]

While gendered analysis figures relatively little in major international studies of Western visitors to the USSR, Canadians do not figure at all. [17] Historians who have studied Western visitors to the USSR — Paul Hollander calls them "political pilgrims" — have focused on the intellectual climate that motivated their visits and the "techniques of hospitality" used by the Soviets to "lure and seduce" them.[18] In most cases, Hollander notes, "visitors in the 1930s were deceived, not necessarily by staged events, fake settings, or the unrepresentative sampling of the sights, but by the overall image of Soviet life and society conveyed to them."[19] Relatively consistent impressions can at least in part be explained by the fact that visitors were often guided literally to the same sites, particularly in and around Leningrad and Moscow. Visitors were also instructed in *how* to see the USSR. A Soviet tour was one in which "life was described as it was *becoming*."[20] As Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, this was characteristic of the "'socialist realist' mindset" that many visitors absorbed, according to which the "mundane present" was much less important than the soon-to-be- realized future: "Thus an empty ditch could reasonably be seen as the germ of a future busy canal, if there were signs of construction and a blueprint."[21] Ella Smith, it would seem, adopted this mindset during her 1931 tour. She had learned that new Soviet mothers received extra rations, except that it was often the case that none were avail-

able. Nevertheless, she assured her New Brunswick audience, "the intention was good and would eventually be carried out."[22]

If Canadian visitors' political predispositions influenced the impressions they formed of the Soviet Union, so too did the objective reality of their experience there (regardless of whether that experience was typical of Soviet reality more generally).[23] In 1932 and 1933, seeing evidence of famine and starvation shaped the views of Canadians including Smith, Andrew Cairns, Arthur Lower, and Jack Pickersgill.[24] Yet J. King Gordon and Eugene Forsey travelled for nearly two months in the USSR in the summer of 1932 without, apparently, encountering widespread hunger and deprivation.[25] At the height of the purges and show trials in 1937, Hugh MacLennan's tour led him to the conclusion that "as regards the dictatorship of Stalin and Hitler, one might say this with accuracy: both resemble a boot, but while Hitler's boot rests on the people's neck, Stalin's reposes on their backside."[26] A year earlier, the most impressive thing to CCF organizer Graham Spry about Soviet citizens was "their total lack of fear."[27]

Andrée Lévesque and Joan Sangster have described the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) sponsored delegation of working-class women who toured the USSR in the summer of 1930. The rank-and-file delegates, each chosen because she was believed to be "absolutely dependable, not subject to reformist influences," entered the Soviet Union "singing the 'Internationale,' and experienced the thrill of a formal welcome by the Red Army."[28] The remainder of their visit was not uniformly as inspiring. At one point in the tour, to the alarm of the organizers, an unimpressed Annie Whitfield of Cape Breton threatened to tell "the truth" when she got home, but the rest of the visit led her to either modify her views or to be willing to refrain from voicing them.[29] Uniformity was better achieved in the carefully orchestrated publicity that followed the tour, providing eye-witness confirmation of the "marvellous progress" of the Soviet Union where women "held down non-traditional jobs and had the right to free education and paid employment while knowing that their children would be well cared for."[30]

As Lévesque explains, the image of "Soviet Woman, the New Woman" presented an "incontestable attraction for Canadian women comrades."[31] As the Canadian economy descended into a decade-long Depression, the Communist press documented Soviet advances in social security and towards gender equality: "unemployment insurance for both men and women, day-care centres and paid maternity leaves, no to evictions, no to job discrimination against married women, yes to free school meals, milk, clothing, and shoes for the children of the unemployed … a list like this could only attract the attention of many Canadian women for whom such comprehensive social measures smacked of Utopia."[32] As the travelogues of Gibb, Gould, Macphail, McWilliams, and Smith attest, the attraction of the new Soviet woman extended beyond the membership of the CPC and those facing deprivation and insecurity during the 1930s. Only Gould could be described as being sympathetic to the Party, while McWilliams and Smith travelled to the USSR before 1935 when the CPC adopted the "Popular Front" strategy and became more interested in attracting support from middle-class liberals and social democrats.[33]

Each of these five women was an educated, professional, interwar feminist pioneer: McWilliams, a journalist and author, helped found the Canadian University Women's Clubs; Smith was the first Canadian woman to graduate with a Master's degree from Oxford; Gibb was a well-known athlete, women's sports organizer, and sports journalist at the *Toronto Daily Star*; Gould played an important role in the organization and professionalization of social work in Canada and also worked as a journalist at the *Star*; and Macphail, of course, was Canada's first female member of parliament.[34] Gould (at 36) was the youngest at the time of her visit to the USSR, and McWilliams the eldest, at 49. McWillliams was the only one who was married at the time of her visit (she travelled with her husband in 1926), and none had children. Each woman would have been considered middle-class when she embarked on her journey, though Gibb's upbringing was more affluent than the others and Gould, who grew up poor in the "Ward" neighbourhood of Toronto, less so. Gould was

raised Jewish; the others all grew up in Protestant households. Only Gould could speak Russian. Each made extensive public record of her Soviet experience. McWilliams and Gould both published books; Gibb and Macphail wrote extensive article series; and Smith toured Canada and the United States offering lectures about her "research travels" in the Soviet Union, first in 1932 and again in 1933.[35]

In the ten years following McWilliams' 1926 trip, Soviet policy towards women and the family underwent what Wendy Z. Goldman labels a "complete reversal," by 1936 focusing on a "repressive strengthening of the family unit."[36] The industrialization of the first Five-Year Plan, beginning in 1928, led to encouragement of women's entry into the workforce and the expansion of "daycare, socialized dining, and women's liberation from household responsibilities," but, ultimately, while the Stalinist state clung to the "empty rhetoric of women's emancipation, it abandoned its promise to socialize household labor and foster freer, more equal relations between men and women."[37] The Department of Women Workers and Peasants (Zhenotdel) was abolished in 1930 and over the course of the next half decade, as Sheila Fitzpatrick writes, "Stalin's 'great retreat' involved … an assertion of traditional family values." Divorce "became more difficult to obtain, free marriage lost its legal status, homosexuality was made a criminal offence, and, in 1936, after long public discussion … abortion was also outlawed." Wives of the new Soviet elite were "directed into voluntary community activities that bore a strong resemblance to the upper-class charitable work that Russian socialist feminists had always despised."[38] The "New Woman" of the USSR, attractive as her image was to a number of Canadians, was no longer in favour in the Soviet Union itself by the later 1930s.

Canadian visitors were not entirely oblivious to these trends. In 1936, Macphail noted that divorce had become more expensive and was in decline. She also learned how state policies on reproduction had recently changed. While "birth control information" was still made widely available, "sterilization is condemned and abortions now only allowed when the health of the mother makes

them essential." This was because, Macphail was told, there was "plenty of food" and "medical services have been organized sufficiently to ensure the care of children."[39] Margaret Gould also accepted the official explanation for the new policies. The Soviet state, Goldman notes, "justified repression with the facile, even cynical claim that conditions had improved."[40] Gould, however, also noted that several of the Soviet women she spoke to were opposed to more limited access to divorce and the prohibition on abortion. One "energetic young mother" told Gould that the new restrictions went too far: a woman should not be "submerged" in family life if she was to be "an equal participant in the construction of our country."[41] In general, Sangster is correct to observe that Gould accepted Soviet measures to "increase the birth rate at the expense of women's health and autonomy" in a way that can be juxtaposed against contemporary "trenchant feminist criticisms" of the USSR.[42]

Indeed, the basic narrative of the travelogues of the five middle-class women visitors considered here is in stark contrast to the declensionist narrative of women's rights in the Soviet Union that historians, including Goldman, have documented. In the Canadian context of the 1930s, however, the repressions of the Stalinist regime were presented in reassuring tones. Canadian audiences were less conversant with the libertarian socialist vision of the revolution's early years than they were with ubiquitous Canadian criticism of the Soviet Union—a commentary that had long maintained that Communism sought to destroy familial love, religion, and sexual morality. Far from portraying Stalin's revolution from above in the 1930s *as a retreat*, women such as Macphail, Smith, and Gould presented these developments to Canadians to illustrate the Soviet state's reasonable and rational policies: as a natural pendulum swing of the USSR towards less threatening, less radical sexual politics.

The travelogues of these five women support Sangster's insight that a political tour of the Soviet Union involved a search for modernity, more specifically a Western modernity. Macphail was pleased to learn that women received equal pay for driving tractors on collective farms, but upon surfacing from the "mag-

nificent" Moscow metro, she was appalled to see old women with "silly little brooms made of twigs, busily sweeping the over-wide streets."[43] Miraculously, Margaret Gould reported, Soviet medical science had progressed to such an extent that "almost 100 per cent of the births in Moscow are painless." Minimizing the "disabilities of childbirth" provided women a "better chance to study, to work, and to enjoy activities as citizens." [44] The "economic security and independence" of Soviet women, Ella Smith learned, was extending to the periphery of the USSR. Turkmen women were "casting off their veils" and Armenian women were engaging in public life. One young Armenian woman Smith met was studying at the Institute of Pedagogy and so would not be illiterate like her parents. Conversing with this young woman, "with her straight bobbed black hair and shining black eyes, and her keen mind devoted to social interests with no thought of self" did more to help Smith understand "what the Revolution has brought than hours of argument."[45]

Smith also noted the "bobbed hair and frank honest eyes" of an elected official in Moscow, a mother of two, who impressed Smith with her "intelligence and sense of social responsibility." The "bobbed" hair was an example of the kind of fashion that pleased Canadian visitors: the signifiers they praised were often those characteristic of the archetypical "modern girl" of the 1920s.[46] Unlike the many Soviet women Macphail judged to be poorly dressed, her guide, Thamara, wore "western dress" and had "had her long finger nails painted vivid red, to match her lipstick."[47] The "brisk woman" who nursed Gould when she fell ill in Moscow had "black eyes snapping with energy, her finger nails immaculate and painted vermillion."[48] Male visitors were less inclined to make specific mention of hair or make up, but a sculpted representation of the Soviet feminine ideal left Frank Scott "instantly aware of that sudden exultation which art alone can give. The figure was a life-size clay figure of a girl standing with a ski against her shoulder. She had the well-proportioned solidity of the peasant woman, standing with firm ease on the ground, but her face had that slightly upward look of fearless confidence that the revolutionary art had evolved to symbolize

its new womanhood."[49] By contrast, Frederick Banting could see that life was "not quite so good in Kazan" as in Moscow, in part because "the women have the towel about their heads as of old."[50]

Male and female travellers alike were impressed with the education afforded Soviet women. With the "short, stout and very efficient" manager of a factory kitchen, Smith discussed literature. The fact that Canadian women thought *Madame Bovary* was "naughty" was indicative of how they were behind the times.[51] Banting's guide was studying English in university: "she has read Scott, Dickens, Shakespeare and has even tried Chaucer — fancy these people reading such things."[52] The contrast between the USSR and Canada in terms of access to education was demonstrated to Forsey when he learned that his guide was in fact a "bright-eyed Jewish girl" from Montréal. She had been working at a sweatshop on St. Catherine Street until, at the age of 17, she emigrated to the Soviet Union where she obtained a university education. For her and for "multitudes like her here in Russia, the new regime has opened a new life," Forsey wrote.[53] Margaret McWilliams was impressed with a young woman, recently arrived in Moscow,wearing a "spotlessly clean embroidered peasant's costume." The woman was training to be a doctor without needing to pay "even the moderate charge made to others."[54] Educational opportunities for adults and children in the USSR also made a positive impression on Macphail. She was convinced that the "idea that the adult should continue to learn all through life has a strong hold on the Russian people."[55] At the collective farm she visited, in the "creche and kindergarten the effect of science and new methods was apparent …. The Russians are training their children to be very self-reliant. They may not admit using Montessori methods, but such is what an observer would call it."[56]

The occupations of Soviet women were even more remarkable to Canadian visitors than their education. Soviet women had achieved equality "as far as work and vocations are concerned," Ella Smith told an audience, and "practically all of the women employed in industry were married." Macphail noted that 38 of 42 doctors were women at a Moscow clinic she visited.[57] Gibb's

first published article about her Soviet visit made mention of meeting women doctors, dentists, and "even a woman lawyer."[58] In a later column, she wrote that coal mining and oil drilling were the only occupations off-limits to women, and described female sea captains, women in the Red Army, and a high-ranking female engineer who supervised work in the Baku oil fields.[59] In the USSR in 1936, Margaret Gould reported, there were 11 000 female scientists, women occupied "positions of responsibility in government, industry, finance and the diplomatic service," and there was no discrimination against mothers or married women.[60]

Women working in less prestigious occupations also fascinated Canadian visitors. Smith showed audiences photographs of "happy and capable" policewomen, women driving tractors, and women working with cement. In Saint John, Smith "showed a picture of a husky, smiling woman doing paving repair work, and said that she did not know that that woman would have been happier at housework."[61] In the Dinamo factory she visited, Macphail noted, 25 percent of the workers were women.[62] Gibb described women working in various industries, with representation ranging between 30 and 40 per cent.[63] In 1936, Graham Spry wrote about seeing female "bricklayers ... working like … children building nothing more serious than sand castles."

Only Gibb, a sports journalist who had long praised "feminine" female athletes as opposed to those who were "mannish," expressed concerns about the biological implications of Soviet women's labour.[64] She saw "women doing much too heavy work for their physique. They were not peasant women, but ordinary girls of a city type." This, Gibb wrote, would "have a very bad effect." Female factory workers would not admit to Gibb their own limitations because they were "too full of national enthusiasm … like pride when your new shoes are tight knows no pain." In spite of their enthusiasm, Gibb was "appalled." These women would someday pay a "price" for their exertions; "they can't avoid it."[65] While Gibb does not specify "price" or "effect," it seems likely that she was referring to medical theories about the effect of physical exertion on female fertility. Gibb would

have undoubtedly encountered these ideas in her decades-long involvement in women's athletics and, apparently, she found them convincing. Other women travellers, as if anticipating these objections, described the support given to working mothers in the Soviet Union. Based on her factory visit, McWilliams concluded that the "married woman worker is occupying a most favoured place."[66] At the Dinamo factory, Macphail found an impressive array of health, educational, cultural, and childcare services available to working women and, relative to Canada, a generous system of maternity leave and benefits.[67]

The Soviet government recognized, McWilliams wrote, that "the position of mother and housewife, combined with that of wage earner, places on the woman with children an almost intolerable burden."[68] Social services and the collectivization of domestic labour, Smith told a Saint John audience, made women's careers possible: "Food was prepared in large kitchen factories and children were cared for in institutions." Free health services were provided and "married women received two months holiday before childbirth and two months holiday afterward."[69] Soviet leaders, Gould wrote, "believe that when women are released from the narrowing drudgery of the home and are given a chance to become educated people, active in the social work of their communities, … they will be much better wives and parents."[70]

Canadian visitors were very curious about Soviet domesticity and sexual morality. Spry wondered, "What will the family be with no necessary legal marriage, with the freest most universal knowledge and availability of contraceptives, with divorce a matter of three rubles and abortion a matter of entering a hospital?"[71] Gould described frank sexual education provided to both school children and adults.[72] According to Banting, the accessibility of birth control and abortion had made a Soviet woman "master of her fate. She does not have to have a baby, even for the sake of the state, if she does not want to have one." Visiting an abortion clinic, he interviewed a patient who was a "graduating university student" who "did not want her career interfered with at present."[73] It was possible, Smith allowed in a display of her own race-consciousness, that the moral "disturbance experienced

in all countries during the war had lasted longer in Russia where, too, racial differences made the question of sex regarded with a casualness not acceptable to the Anglo-Saxon."[74] On the other hand, in five months in the USSR she had "never seen an act that savored of indecency or the slightest attempt to exploit sex," but in Toronto she had seen an advertisement for a film in which "a woman with little on was evidently the drawing card."[75] And, as far as she knew, in contrast to Canadian youth, "the Russian young people do not have 'petting parties.'" Young Communists were "strictly taught as to abstinence and self-control."[76] According to Forsey, the "new economic position of women" meant that "prostitution has practically disappeared."[77]

Almost all Canadian visitors commented on the easy accessibility of divorce in the Soviet Union. Smith emphasized the extent to which Soviet fathers were required to pay child support after divorce.[78] There was "no such thing as the stigma of illegitimacy," she said, but ease of access had not led to rampant divorce rates,. In fact, Smith claimed, ease of access might be increasing rather than decreasing morality: "the simplicity of acquiring divorce in many instances served to make a too irresponsible husband behave himself for fear of losing his home."[79] Smith reassured her audiences that state services were not "destroying the home": "The 'home' might be one room, but the family seemed pleased to gather together in it."[80] And if the Soviets had the "idea that children are better in the hands of experts," this had not diminished familial love. Smith told an audience of "seeing a young Russian father proudly carrying a baby" while Canadian fathers "could hardly be persuaded to push the baby carriage."[81] McWilliams, Macphail, and Gould also made special mention of Soviet fathers carrying their children in public — clearly this was not a typical sight in Canada.

Gibb, again, struck a different note. Independence, she agreed, was the aim in the USSR, but a "man's wife is his wife in any country and a husband the father of the home anywhere."[82] Gibb believed that Soviet men were so committed to the state that they were neglecting their familial duties: the factory had become a "mistress." Through the advice columns of the Kom-

somol (young Communist) newspaper, she encountered the complaints of a young woman who wrote that "her husband says his work demands all of a man, that he cannot even manage an hour or a day or one evening a week to be with his family." It was typical of the decline of the family in the Soviet Union, in Gibb's view, that reader responses to the young woman advised her to seek a divorce.[83] The "most repugnant feature of the whole set-up," Gibb thought, was that the loyalty of Soviet citizens was to be first to the state. Thus, when children reported counter revolutionary activities of their own parents to authorities, "the parents are promptly sentenced … and the children are made heroes."[84] Though Margaret McWilliams' *Russia in 1926* paints a generally favourable portrait of the "advantages which the married woman with children has gained in Russia," she, too, expressed anxiety that the "idea of the home … is being broken down."[85]

The distinction between the perception of Soviet family life expressed by Gibb/McWilliams and women visitors further left on the political spectrum, such as Smith/Macphail/Gould, is notable. Certainly, the former perspective was one more commonly expressed in the Canadian press. Readers of *Chatelaine* in 1933 heard from a Canadian housewife whose 18 months in the Soviet Union convinced her that it was the "avowed purpose" of the Soviet state to "demolish the home as an institution." The "family as a unit" would soon disappear in a "society that has neither time nor inclination for love and affection as we understand it."[86] Yet, the more sympathetic views of Smith or Gould towards Soviet family law and gender relations were echoed by a number of male visitors to the USSR, including Banting, Forsey, and Spry.

The preconceptions of Canadian audiences and the risks that praising the USSR in Canada could entail are important considerations when assessing the travelogues of these middle-class Canadian women. McWilliams, one of the few Canadian women to visit the USSR before Stalin consolidated power, couches her description of the rights and circumstances of Soviet women in a way that makes it difficult to discern her own views and opin-

ions. Much of her book chapter "Concerning Women" records her interview with a high-ranking female representative of the Soviet Communist Party. This woman, "gentle of face and voice," clashed with McWilliams' preconceived "notion of a woman Communist" with "hawk-like eyes and hard mouth." McWilliams tried to "explain to her the attitude of Western women" towards divorce, but no argument could "make the least impression on [her] belief" that easy access to divorce was a "good law for women."[87] This way of telling the story makes it appear that McWilliams is resisting the Soviet perspective, and yet the evidence she presents in the rest of the chapter is highly favourable to it. All the ordinary women with whom she spoke approved of the divorce laws. Soviet women, she wrote, have a "great air of self-reliance and independence. They give one the impression that their world is not unpleasant to them."[88] The enthusiasm of the reporter here is difficult to miss, but the guise of being merely a reporter gave McWilliams a certain amount of "plausible deniability."

The degree to which voicing positive impressions about the Soviet Union was a risky affair in many social circles in interwar Canada is perhaps best illustrated in the papers of Ella Smith. In 1932, when Joséphine Dumoulin, President of the Women's Canadian Club of Québec City and the sister of Premier Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, introduced Smith's illustrated lecture "Russia under the Five Year Plan," she left no doubt about what she hoped the audience might learn from the invited speaker. The "unfortunate land of the Czars" had now become a "warning to those who would destroy the fundamental ideas of civilized society, liberty, and the sacredness of private property." Miss Smith had courageously crossed the "forbidding curtain" resulting from the "national upheaval" that had ended the reign of the "great" Romanovs.[89] Smith might have anticipated this kind of introduction had she read the advance notice in *L'Événement*, which suggested that Smith's lecture would be useful, since one should know more about one's enemies than about one's friends.[90]

Smith, it would seem, did not take the hint.[91] In the scrapbook containing clippings pertaining to her lectures, Smith

writes that "Quebec, being Catholic and conservative, did not like my address and the French papers actually reported nothing I said," but instead printed "judgments on Russia which I neither inferred nor share."[92] The report in *L'Événement* certainly supports this assessment. After devoting more space to Dumoulin's introduction than to Smith's lecture, the most positive thing the reporter noted was that in Smith's lantern slides the cities of Moscow and Leningrad did not appear as "démoralisant et misérable" as expected, but this could be explained by the fact that the Russian people were used to brutality: if there was a people on earth that could adapt easily to slavery, it was certainly them.[93]

This was only the most obvious example of the difficulties Smith had in getting her positive views on the USSR conveyed accurately in the Canadian press. In a note beside the *Wolfville Acadian*'s clipping in her scrapbook, Smith indicated that the lines "the state is Russia's only god. The Russian religion is based on the doctrine of Karl Marx, as interpreted by Lenin, and denies the existence of supernatural agencies," were the invention of the reporter and not drawn from her talk.[94] Numerous other articles in her scrapbook have passages that are marked "misquotation."

After a five-month stay in the USSR, an unusually long stay for a Canadian traveller, Smith delivered 33 lectures in 12 Canadian and ten American venues between December 1931 and March 1932.[95] Her lectures to Canadian Clubs were hosted in prominent hotels — the Ritz-Carleton in Montréal, the Château Frontenac in Québec City, the Admiral Beatty in Saint John — and attracted, according to press reports, large audiences. In Montréal, she estimated that she spoke to a gathering of 800 "at least."[96] Superficially, Smith's lectures received a positive reception. Even in Québec City, there was no public criticism of Smith, and she received from the Women's Canadian Club a gracious note of thanks. Private correspondents, however, let Smith know that her presentation of the Soviet Union had not been received with equanimity. Helen Hooper of Saint John wrote to tell Smith of the "severe" criticisms that had been "hurled against-upon your lecture on Soviet Russia." Smith had "aroused the ire" of

many who felt it was a "straight propagandistic effort in favour of Russia." Though Hooper had personally enjoyed the lecture because she was old enough to "desire to hear both sides of every question," she advised Smith to "cut out a great deal you gave us here on the religious moral and political situation as you found it in Russia for I feel Canadians won't stand for your cheerful and forgiving attitude."[97]

Molly, a friend of Smith's in Québec City, warned that members of Québec's Canadian Club had written members of Montréal's club urging that Smith's upcoming lecture be cancelled. "They say you drew invidious comparisons between Russia and Canada in which Canada always came off second best. You mentioned prostitutes without any reason — ran down the church and spoke slightingly of the Czar." Smith, it appears from newspaper reports, was unswayed. Her Montréal lecture, which concluded by suggesting that a "study of Russia might have an effect on our own economic life," was substantially the same as the ones she had given in Toronto, Saint John, Halifax, Sackville, and Québec City.[98] And, in spite of Hooper's warnings, when Smith returned to lecture again in Saint John in March 1932, her presentation was even more positive about the Soviet Union, prompting the headline: "Russia offers much to delight."[99]

The countryside of the USSR, however, did not offer much to delight when Smith made a second Soviet visit in the summer and autumn of 1932. Travelling with an interpreter she had hired in England to avoid using one provided by the Soviet state, Smith appears to have moved with remarkable freedom during her second journey. Perhaps the sympathetic views she expressed after her previous visit made her a trusted figure in the eyes of the Soviet bureaucracy. According to her account in the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal*, Smith visited towns in five regions (including in Ukraine where the famine was most dire) and made inquiries in each town's marketplace until she found a farmer who lived between 30-40 miles from the town. She then made arrangements to spend four to eight days boarding at the farmer's home. This quasi-scientific procedure made Smith's experiences almost impossible for Soviet officials to plan or control. It also made

obvious to Smith the disjunction between the information she received from officials in Moscow and in regional offices and the realities of life for Soviet agriculturalists.[100] By November, Smith was malnourished and seriously ill. She returned to England to recuperate with the intention of resuming her research the following summer. This would not come to pass, since her reports of Soviet famine in the British press made her unworthy of a visa for return entry. The Soviet state's trust in Smith had, from its perspective, gone unrewarded.

Unable to re-enter the USSR, in the autumn of 1933 she travelled instead to Nazi Germany, where Hitler's dictatorship was in its first year. "My significant experiences in Germany," she wrote, "I find difficult to reconcile with the pacific tone of Hitler's speeches."[101] Returning to Canada to lecture in the spring of 1934, she found that Canadian audiences were less interested in hearing about Nazi Germany than in her new lectures criticizing the agricultural policy of the Soviet Union. She was given a return engagement in Québec City where she told an "exceptionally large audience" how "in one [Soviet] village of 250 households … the hard protuberant stomachs of their little children … told the cost in national health" of collectivization.[102] Unlike Smith's previous lectures in Québec, this talk was apparently described accurately by the press. Smith has made no annotation in her scrapbook beside the clipping describing this talk to indicate any misquotation; nor are there any letters asking her to restrain or modify her views. Had Joséphine Dumoulin attended, she no doubt would have found this lecture much more in keeping with her expectations.[103]

Agnes Macphail, who had been a member of parliament for 15 years before embarking for the Soviet Union, was sufficiently politically savvy to be cautious when making public statements about the USSR. In Terry Crowley's biography of Macphail, her 1936 trip to the Soviet Union is covered in one paragraph.[104] Other than the "cleanliness of the streets and the availability of birth control information," Crowley writes "she was unimpressed with the results of communism after two decades." Unlike socialists such as the Webbs who "panegyrized Soviet communism,

Macphail was not duped."[105] Crowley then reproduces one of Macphail's best lines about the USSR: "While the people are dirty, the men unshaven, the food unappetizing and the bed bugs prolific, the thing I disliked most about Russia is its dictatorship."[106] This line does, in a superficial way, sum up Macphail's impressions of the USSR; but it is not altogether adequate, as is suggested by the following sentences from Macphail's address to a Canadian Club audience in Toronto in the fall of 1936: "And yet all in all, Russia was fascinating. There is no unemployment and no surplus of products, while we in Canada sit around in misery with more products than we know what to do with; there is free public health service and medical attention and a sense of economic security that the average person in Canada knows nothing about."[107]

After a busy two-week tour of the USSR, Macphail returned to Canada with decidedly mixed impressions. "Russia is a puzzle, a provoking sort of puzzle," she wrote. "Just when you think you have the thing going together, you find a few pieces that simply won't fit in."[108] Journalists were keen to get Macphail's assessment of the Soviet experiment, right from the moment of her disembarkation in Québec City. The *Star* dispatched Frederick Griffin, author of *Soviet Scene: A Newspaperman's Close-Ups of New Russia* (1932), to Macphail's home in Ceylon, Ontario. In this interview, as would be frequently the case when she spoke about her travels over the next several months, Macphail was keenest to speak about the cooperative movement in Denmark and Sweden that had thoroughly impressed her, but her interlocutor was most interested in the USSR. Macphail found it difficult, she told Griffin at that point, to explain her view of the USSR: "I thought I knew something about Russia. I had read the books of a dozen people about Russia, but I found I had not read anything that pictured it as I saw it." This difficulty would persist for Macphail: when she wrote or spoke about the Soviet Union, she praised much of what she had seen but quickly moderated or balanced the praise with disclaimers about the lack of democracy or the low standard of living to balance the praise. As she told Griffin, she "got a greater thrill in Russia than in any place but I felt

more miserable in Russia than in any place." Among the "magnificent" things in the Soviet Union that left her "exalted" were the "seven-hour day, the five-day week, vacation for all workers with pay, care of workers generally, free health care and so on …, but there are so many other aspects of life that do not seem so enticing. The people looked so sombre. I never heard a whistle or a song."[109]

Macphail's negative impressions were emphasized in papers less sympathetic to the USSR than the *Star*. While admitting to having criticized Macphail's political views many times in the past, a *Globe* editorial of 14 September praised her observations of the USSR for their "common sense and candor." One of her sentences, "I would not like to have to live there," showed that "Miss Macphail was not as have been so many other visitors to Russia, carried away by the glamour of official entertainment and the opportunity of making speeches in the banquet halls of Moscow and other chief centres of population." This sentence, as well as her lines about the lack of gaiety and whistling, "convey to Canadians a truer picture of Soviet Russia than volumes of propaganda extolling the wonders of communism in action."[110]

The *Star,* responding to Macphail's views on the USSR that had attracted the *Globe's* praise, rebutted her observations. The editorial, "Let's Whistle a Bit," noted that Macphail's complaints about the lack of whistling in the Soviet Union could equally be made in Toronto.[111] A more serious subsequent editorial debated Macphail's claim that "there would be a revolution in Canada if the people had to put up with the life of the workers in Russia." But how, the *Star* wondered, would Canadians feel about living in conditions akin to those in "old Czarist Russia"? The Soviet Union had to be judged by its "astonishing progress upwards from a condition of degradation."[112]

The *Star* had reason to rebut. For two months that summer — from 24 June to 22 August — the paper had on an almost daily basis given front-page space to Margaret Gould's highly positive articles about the USSR. The *Star* also gave Gould opportunity to respond to a letter to the editor that queried how Macphail and Gould could have arrived at such divergent con-

clusions about the same place. Reliable facts, Gould wrote, are best obtained by "those who know how to observe and collect" them. "[M]y travelling companion (Miss Kathleen Gorrie, director of the Protestant Children's Homes) and I are professionally engaged in this field and know how to make social surveys .... This accounts for the difference between our opinion and Miss Macphail's. Another reason is that we spent three times as long a period in the Soviet Union, covered a larger territory, got close to family life, and measured and checked the vital social services with which we have had years of professional experience. Unfortunately, Miss Macphail has not had similar advantages."[113] In sum, it was Gould's professional expertise that allowed her to see the Soviet Union in ways Macphail could not.

Gould's views of the USSR were not, however, the only ones that could be contrasted against Macphail's. A letter writer to *The Globe,* who had heard Macphail speak on the Soviet Union, used material from her speech to question the accuracy of the anti-Soviet perspective in *The Globe's* series of articles, "What I Saw in Red Russia," by "Yonge Street." Correspondent W. R. Shanks observed there was "quite a discrepancy" between the "gloomy picture" painted by "Yonge Street" and that of Macphail. Shanks, clearly, sided with Macphail: "From what information I can gather from our local press and other sources, the Russian people are determined to eliminate poverty, disease and unemployment ... I contend that before we criticize condition in other countries we should put our own house in order."[114]

Shanks' interpretation of Macphail's view can certainly be sustained with material from her series of articles in the Owen Sound *Sun-Times.*[115] Macphail's criticisms of the USSR are certainly present in these articles, but, in spite of "spotty development," Macphail "felt the up-surging energy of a people suppressed for centuries fighting its way through inefficiency, ignorance and dirt to meet the challenge of Lenin's up-flung arm shown in countless statues throughout Russia."[116] A "colourful" parade she saw on Red Square left Macphail wrestling again with the contradictions of the Soviet Union: "However deeply troubled we, as democrats, are over the lack of justice as we understand it shown

again in Russia … we cannot but be moved with admiration of their achievements …. The organization of clinics, mother and child institutes, centres for the treatment of accidents, parks of culture and rest and great sports grounds with stadiums, all over the Soviet Union is so good as to seem unbelievable."[117] Macphail was also impressed with the cleanliness of the facilities of the Thalmann collective farm and, ultimately, she concluded, "agriculture in Russia is on the march. Gigantic efforts are being made to increase the quality and quantity of their products and to improve the standard of living of the peasants … life as it now is on the farms is an immense improvement over the condition of the peasants in the old days."[118] Yet, here, as in her speeches, Macphail maintained that collective farming was a "system which would never work in Canada" for reasons which she does not appear to think needed clarification or explanation.

Macphail spoke to many audiences about her travels in the year after her return. Initially, she seemed willing to indulge audiences' curiosity about the Soviet Union. Instead of giving a scripted speech to an audience in Hanover, Ontario, for example, Macphail instead offered to answer audience members' questions about the countries she had visited: "practically all of them dealt with Russia," a reporter noted. [119] In most of her published speeches, however, particularly those dated 1937, Macphail says very little about the USSR. In a speech entitled "Lessons from Scandinavia," she discusses her Russian experiences mainly in negative comparison to Sweden and Denmark — emphasizing the lack of freedom and cleanliness.[120] When describing the things she admired about the Soviet Union — health and social services, 100 percent union membership, and social security — , she would here and elsewhere substitute positive examples of similar programs and patterns drawn from Sweden, Finland, or Denmark. Canada could emulate these countries, which had become "truly cooperative commonwealths."[121] Macphail's admiration for Denmark, Sweden, and Finland was no doubt genuine, but her praise of these countries attracted less attention and less criticism in the Canadian press than her mixed reports about the Soviet Union.

Gould was undoubtedly the Canadian woman studied here who was least ambivalent in her praise and admiration of the Soviet Union and the one most inclined to use the Soviet example to support her advocacy for improved Canadian social services and programs. For this, she would later pay a significant political price. Her career suffered in the climate of the Cold War, and a planned world tour was abandoned when she was denied entry to the United States on security grounds in 1949.[122] Gibb had no such worries and, of the travelogues considered here, her portrayal of terrorized citizenry suffering under an authoritarian regime is closest to today's retrospective perceptions of Stalin's Soviet Union. At the same time, with their conventional notions of femininity and at times blatant orientalism, her articles read as the most distant from contemporary sensibilities.[123] It is worth repeating, too, that though Gibb criticized the USSR, she thought no other country had opened more opportunities for women and children. Gibb's impressions, like Macphail's, were mixed. Whatever the USSR's other drawbacks, these five middle-class feminists agreed about the general praiseworthiness of Soviet women's opportunities and access to social services.

The travelogues of these women are a distorted, fun-house-mirror image of the real lives of Soviet women, but in them some reflection of the deep gender inequality of interwar Canada might be more clearly glimpsed. Their views of gender in the Soviet Union were obscured by class biases, their confidence in western modernity, and a corresponding sense of cultural and occasionally racial superiority. Not least, they were misled by the generally unrepresentative sights they saw. The Soviet Union, *as it was portrayed* to these visitors, nevertheless teaches us something about real conditions in Canada against which Canadians measured this portrayal. The contrast with Canada—in terms of sex education and contraception, ideas about marriage and divorce (and child support thereafter), pre- and post-natal care of mothers, early childhood education, maternity benefits, child care, and professional and educational opportunities available to women—was dramatic.

Were these women 'dupes' in this regard? Perhaps in the cynical knowingness of the present we might see them that way, but their illusions about Soviet reality were not without value. Their political utility in convincing occasionally hostile audiences that greater gender equality was not only desirable but possible and practical should not be underestimated. In the intervening decades, Canada has adopted many social programs for women and children akin to the ones that seemed remarkable in the Soviet Union to interwar Canadian visitors. The ideal to which they understood the Soviet experiment to aspire — that women and men would and *could* be equal citizens at work, at home, and in politics — was an ideal their audiences were encouraged to embrace. It is also an ideal more durable than Canadian visitors' fleeting and retrospectively illusory impressions of what the great experiment was, in reality, achieving.

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Endnotes

1 Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Eugene Forsey Fonds, MG 30 A25, v 48, f 10, Forsey to Mother, 7 July 1932.

2 Alexandrine Gibb, "Toll of famine years is stamped on faces of Russians over 25," *The Toronto Daily Star* (13 September 1935), 3. To be fair to male Canadian visitors, Frank Scott was at the same beach the same

summer and called the sight "natural and decent." LAC, F.R. Scott Fonds, MG 30 D211, Soviet Travel Diary, 22 July 1935.

3 University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, Banting Papers, MS 76, Box 30, file 2, Diary of Trip to the Soviet Union, 27 June 1935.

4 LAC, Agnes Macphail Fonds, MG 27 III C4, (hereafter Macphail Papers), v 5, f 21 A, "Russia," Nora Loeb, "Miss Macphail, MP Speaks on Russia" clipping, n.d., n.p.

5 Frederick Griffin, "Russia begrudges rubles for army," *The Toronto Daily Star* (12 September 1936), 1, 3.

6 Margaret Gould, "Women in Russ factories witness fashion parade," *The Toronto Daily Star* (10 July 1936), 1.

7 Ibid. 5.

8 Margaret Gould, *I Visit The Soviets* (Toronto: Stafford Printers, 1937), iv.

9 Not all Canadian men agreed, either, about the standards of female fashion in the Soviet Union. The only well-dressed women George Drew admitted to seeing in the USSR in 1937 were those he saw dancing at Moscow's Metropol Hotel, "eating caviar, drinking vast quantities of champagne and getting noisily drunk" in the company of "Russia's new aristocracy," commissars, and bureaucrats. Colonel George A. Drew, "Workers in Russia starving," *The Globe and Mail* (18 August 1937), 1. To understand the context of this observation, which was in keeping with Drew's uniformly negative impressions of the USSR, see Kirk Niergarth, "'No Sense of Reality': George A. Drew's Anti-Communist Tour of the USSR and the campaign for National Government in Canada, 1937," *Ontario History* (Autumn 2015), 199–227.

10 Smith is the only woman in this paper who has not yet attracted the attention of historians. Born in Saint John, Smith had a remarkable scholarly record. She graduated at the top of her class in Classics at McGill in 1905 and earned a Master's Degree in that discipline there in 1908. She studied at Oxford from 1911to 1914 when that institution did not grant degrees to women; when Oxford began awarding degrees to women in 1921, she was awarded a first-class Master's Degree in Modern History. Smith taught during World War I at the progressive Bedales school in England — a school with many links to British Fabians and other social reformers — before becoming a lecturer at Smith College in Massachusetts (where she developed a course on the history of socialism, suggesting a longstanding interest in the progress of the Russian Revolution). In 1926 she returned to England, taught at King's Hall School in Taunton, and began offering occasional public lecture series. She was not without connections in British high society — she reported that Labour MP Malcolm Macdonald, the son of Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald (and a Bedales alumnus), had introduced her

to the Soviet Ambassador to England who issued in a day and a half her visa to travel in the USSR. Smith's biography is nicely summarized in the finding aid of her papers produced by Mount Allison University Archivist David Mawhinney. Mount Allison University Archives, Ella Smith Fonds (Acc. 7304), (hereafter Smith Papers). See also, "Receiving greatest challenge: Mrs. Ella Smith lectures at Annapolis Royal on Russia," *Halifax Herald* (6 January 1932), clipping, n.p.

11 Alexandrine Gibb, "Fear chills hearts as families vanish under Soviet regime," *The Toronto Daily Star* (14 September 1935), 1, 3; Gould, *I Visit the Soviets*, 165.

12 Alexandrine Gibb, "Trade mothers' milk for cows' in Soviet to help weak babies," *The Toronto Daily Star* (9 September 1935), 3.

13 Ibid., 1.

14 The historiography on modern travel and tourism is vast, but a notable Canadian study that reads travel narratives in the way I am describing here is Cecilia Morgan, *'A Happy Holiday': English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourism, 1870–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

15 Joan Sangster, "Political Tourism, Writing and Communication: Transnational Connections of Women on the Left, 1920s–1940s," *Crossing Boundaries: Women's Organizing in Europe and the Americas, 1880s–1940s*, edited by Pernilla Jonsson, Silke Neunsinger, and Joan Sangster (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2007), 104. In Sangster's article, two of the Soviet visits considered here, that of McWilliams and Gould, are discussed on pages 104–5 and 107–9 respectively.

16 Gould, *I Visit The Soviets*, 126.

17 The historiography of Western visitors to the USSR can be roughly divided into two generations. Cold War-era studies, relying principally on Western sources, include Sylvia Margulies, The Pilgrimage to Russia: The USSR and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924–1937 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Paul Hollander, Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the USSR, China, and Cuba, 1928–1978 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and David Caute, The Fellow-Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988). More recent studies, with access to Soviet sources, include notably Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012); David C. Engerman, Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ludmila Stern, Western Intellectuals and the USSR, 1920–1940: From Red Square to the Left Bank (Routledge: New York, 2007); and Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Ras-

mussen, eds., Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the USSR in the 1920s–1940s (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

18 "Techniques of hospitality" is Hollander's phrase: *Political Pilgrims,* 16; "lure and seduce" is Stern's description of the aims of the Soviet tourism apparatus: *Western Intellectuals,* 35.

19 Hollander, 19.

20 Shawn C. Salmon, "To the Land of the Future: A History of Intourist and Travel to the Soviet Union, 1929-1991" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2008), p. 22.

21 Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Australian Visitors to the Soviet Union: The View from the Soviet Side," in *Political Tourists*, eds. Fitzpatrick and Rasmussen, 17.

22 Smith Papers, "Five-year plan hold gigantic good or bad power, she tells: Miss Ella Smith, Saint John, heard after visit to Russia by Canadian Clubs," *Telegraph Journal* [Saint John] (13 December 1931), clipping, n.p.

23 The historiography discussing interwar Canadian visitors to the USSR is not extensive. On Canadian women, see Andrée Lévesque, *Red Travellers: Jeanne Corbin and her Comrades*, trans. Yvonne M. Klein (Montréal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2006), 138–42 and Sangster, "Political Tourism," 103–9. Other travellers are briefly discussed in J. L. Black, *Canada in the Soviet Mirror: Ideology and Perception in Soviet Foreign Affairs, 1917–1991* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1998): 102–-5 and Niergarth, "'No Sense of Reality'". Notable also is Graham Carr's 2014 article on Glenn Gould's 1957 concert tour of the Soviet Union, which reveals the importance of studying non-state actors to understand the history of Canadian cultural diplomacy. See Carr, "'No Political Significance of any Kind': Glenn Gould's Tour of the Soviet Union and the Culture of the Cold War," *Canadian Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (March 2014): 1–29.

24 On Smith, see below. On Cairns, see Tony Kuz, ed., *The Soviet Famine 1932–33: An Eyewitness Account of Conditions in the Spring and Summer of 1932, by Andrew Cairns* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989). The experience of Lower and Pickersgill is described in Arthur R. M. Lower Fonds, Queen's University Archives, 5072-A204, box 9, file 5, Jack Pickersgill to Lower, 25 July 1933.

25 Keith Fleming, *'The World is Our Parish': John King Gordon, 1900–1989: An Intellectual Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015): 90–5.

26 McCord Museum, Montréal, Hugh MacLennan Papers, Hugh MacLennan to George Barrett, n.d. 1937.

27 LAC, MG 30 D297 v. 43, file 41, Graham Spry Fonds, "Transcripts of material from Russian Trip for the *New Commonwealth,"* Typescript of

Graham Spry, "Soviet Survey: Impressions of a trip on a Soviet Boat to Leningrad — A Boat commanded not only by the captain but by a Committee."

28 The delegation was led by Beckie Buhay and included two trade-union members, Pearl Wedro, a Polish-Jewish fur worker from Toronto, and Bessie Schecter, a tailoress from Montréal; Annie Whitfield, the wife of a coal miner, who had been active in the Cape Breton Women's Labour League; Annie Zen, a domestic worker from northern Ontario; and Elsa Trynjala, identified by Sangster as a Ukrainian garment worker who was, Levesque suggests, sponsored by the United Farmers of Alberta — these descriptions might both be accurate. Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, 140 and Sangster, "Political Tourism," 105.

29 Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, 142 and Sangster "Political Tourism," 106.

30 "Marvellous progress" are the words of Beckie Buhay as quoted in Sangster, "Political Tourism," 106. The delegates' list of attributes in praise of the USSR is from Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, 142.

31 Lévesque, *Red Travellers*, 129.

32 Ibid., 129–30.

33 John Manley, "'Communists Love Canada!': The Communist Party of Canada, the 'People' and the Popular Front, 1933–1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 4 (Winter, 2002): 59–86.

34 On Macphail, see particularly Terry Crowley, *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1990). On McWilliams, see Mary Kinnear, *Margaret McWilliams: An Interwar Feminist* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991). On Gibb, see M. Ann Hall "Alexandrine Gibb: In 'No Man's Land of Sport'," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 18.1 (2001): 149–72 and Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). The most comprehensive biography of Margaret Gould has been recently produced by Marjorie W. Johnstone, "Diverging and Contested Feminisms in Early Social Work History in Ontario (1900–1950)" (Ph.D. diss., York University (Toronto), 2015), 221–73.

35 These five women were far from the only female Canadian interwar Soviet visitors. Others from similar social origins include Rose Henderson, Alice Chown, Kathleen Gorrie, Dora Wilensky, and Lucy Woodsworth; but there were also women visitors with different backgrounds and political commitments, including the prominent Communist Beckie Buhay, and the aforementioned delegation of female trade unionists. A larger number of female visitors left little by way of historical traces, save for glimpses in the records of Soviet tourist agencies, such as one Ellen Gentry who infuriated her Soviet guide by singing "God Save the King" instead of, presumably, the "Internationale." State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), P5283, Op. 3, Delo 1086.

36 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, The State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 337.
37 Goldman, *Women, The State, and Revolution,* 338, 342.
38 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution: 1917–1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 150, 151. See also, Goldman, "Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR," *Slavic Review 55.1* (Spring 1996): 46–77 and the overview in Barbara Evans Clements, *History of Women in Russia: From Earliest Times to the Present* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 211–36.
39 Macphail Papers, Agnes Macphail, "Mother and Child Clinics lend every assistance to production healthy race," *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound] (8 October 1936), clipping, n.p.
40 Goldman, *Women, The State, and Revolution,* 340.
41 Gould, *I Visit the Soviets*, 126.
42 Sangster, "Political Tourism," 109.
43 Macphail Papers, Agnes Macphail, "Tellemann Collective Farm example mass production applied to agriculture labour," *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound] (6 October 1936) clipping, n.p. and "Life in Russia full of paradoxes as interpreted from street scenes," *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound] (2 October 1936) clipping, n.p.
44 Gould, *I Visit The Soviets*, 126, 127.
45 Smith Papers, Vol. 2, F.3, Scrapbook clipping: Ella Smith, "They testify to the revolution," *Moscow News,* (26 October 1931) n.p.
46 See Jane Nicholas, *The Modern Girl: Feminine Modernities, the Body, and Commodities in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).
47 Macphail, "Life in Russia full of paradoxes."
48 Gould, *I Visit The Soviets*, 36.
49 Frank Scott Travel Diary, 16 July 1935.
50 Banting Papers, Diary of Trip to the Soviet Union, 6 July 1935.
51 Smith, "They testify to the revolution."
52 Banting Papers, Diary of Trip to the Soviet Union, 5 July 1935.
53 Eugene Forsey Fonds, v. 48, f.11, Diary, 1 July 1932.
54 Margaret and R.S. McWilliams, *Russia in 1926* (Toronto: Dent and Sons, 1927) 59.
55 Macphail Papers, Agnes Macphail, "Gorki, Moscow's finest park provides culture and rest: Stakhanovite rest homes" *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound] (7 October 1936) clipping n.p.
56 Macphail, "Tellemann Collective Farm."
57 Macphail, "Mother and Child Clinics."
58 Gibb, "Trade mothers' milk," 3.

59 Gibb, "Women run Soviet plants army only place for men," *The Toronto Daily Star* (17 September 1935), 1, 5.
60 Gould, *I Visit the Soviets*, 133.
61 "Five-year plan hold gigantic good or bad power."
62 Macphail Papers, Agnes Macphail, "Workers who increase standard of production called 'Heroes of Labour'" *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound] (3 October 1936), clipping n.p.
63 Gibb, "Women run Soviet plants," 5.
64 See Hall, 'No Man's Land of Sport' 158-60.
65 Gibb, "Women run Soviet plants," 5.
66 McWilliams, *Russia in 1926,* 70.
67 Macphail, "Workers who increase standard of production." As one observer of this paper's earlier version noted, Canadians of that era who shared a similar social class to these Soviet visitors expressed dismay at the sight of women working as manual labour in Canada, for example the Doukhobor women who were portrayed as exploited 'beasts of burden' because they worked in the fields. One distinction here appears to be the perceived context of the work — with one kind of labour symbolizing the primitive and backwards life of the past, the other the modern life of the soon-to-be liberating future.
68 McWilliams, *Russia in 1926,* 69–70.
69 "Five-year plan hold gigantic good or bad power."
70 Gould, *I Visit the Soviets*, 141.
71 LAC, MG 30 D297 v. 1, file 24, Graham Spry Fonds, Spry to Irene Biss, 3 June 1936.
72 Gould, *I Visit the Soviets,* 68–72.
73 Banting Papers, Diary of Trip to the Soviet Union, 2 July 1935.
74 Smith Papers, "Russian women on par with men: life under five year plan described by visitor to Russia," *The Montreal Daily Star* (24 February 1932), clipping n.p.
75 "Five-year plan hold gigantic good or bad power."
76 Smith Papers, "Women's Status in Russia Changed by Revolution Speaker Declares in Talk Before Iris Club Members," clipping n.d., n.p.
77 Banting Papers, Diary of Trip to the Soviet Union, 1 July 1935.
78 "Five-year plan hold gigantic good or bad power."
79 Ibid. and "No double standard for Russian women," *Mail and Empire* [Toronto] (9 December 1931), 12.
80 "Russian women on par with men."
81 Smith Papers, "Russia offers much to delight — speaker pictures bright side: Miss Ella Smith takes audience 'through Russia with a camera,'" *The Evening Times Globe* [Saint John] (5 March 1932), clipping n.p.

82 Alexandrine Gibb, "Duty to state is first among young Russians family subordinated," *The Toronto Daily Star* (12 September 1935), 3.
83 Ibid.
84 Alexandrine Gibb, "Children in homes are secret police to spy on parents," *Toronto Daily Star* (11 September 1935), 1.
85 McWilliams, *Russia in 1926,* 73.
86 [As told to] Geraldine McGeer Appleby, "I Kept House in Soviet Russia," *Chatelaine* (July 1933), 13, 30, 37.
87 McWilliams, *Russia in 1926*, 67.
88 McWilliams, *Russia in 1926*, 70, 66.
89 Smith Papers, Vol. 2. File 3, undated handwritten fragment. This document is not in Smith's hand and may not be the text of Dumoulin's introduction written by Dumoulin herself. It aligns very nearly, however, to the account of Dumoulin's words given in Smith Papers, "Un Voyage en Russie," *L'Événement* [Québec City] (15 January 1932), clipping n.p.: "Madame P.-B. Dumoulin rappela, dans une magnifique synthèse, l'oeuvre destructrice au point de vue de la civilisation de la liberté et de la propriété que s'efforcent de réaliser les Soviètes."
90 Smith would talk about "un pays dont on nous dit bien du mal et qui peut nous en faire beaucoup. Nous devons connaître nos ennemis plus que nos amis, car ces derniers ne sont pas à craindre." From Smith Papers, "Mlle Ella L. Smith parle au cercle des femmes canadiennes," *L'Événement* [Québec City] (13 January 1932) clipping, n.p.
91 "Result of Soviet experiment hard to foretell yet," *Quebec Chronicle* (15 January 1932), 3.
92 Smith Papers, Vol. 2, File 3, Scrapbook.
93 "Un Voyage en Russie": "Les villes de Moscou et de Leningrad, d'après les projections données hier après-midi par Mlle Smith, n'offrent pas l'aspect démoralisant et misérable qu'on pourrait s'attendre d'y trouver. Il est vrai que le peuple russe n'est que dans son élément, même dirigé avec la brutalité que l'on sait. S'il existe un peuple qui s'adapte facilement à l'esclavage, c'est bien lui."
94 Smith Papers, "Interesting Lectures on Russia," *Wolfville Acadian,* (14 January 1932), clipping n.p.
95 Smith Papers, Vol. 2, file 3, "List of lectures (1931–2)."
96 Smith Papers, Vol. 2, File 3, Scrapbook.
97 Smith Papers, Vol. 2, File 3, Helen Gates Hooper to Smith, 15 January 1932.
98 "Russian women on par with men."
99 "Russia offers much to delight."
100 Smith Papers, "Russian peasants far from happy under Soviet rule: Miss Ella Smith back in Saint John after extensive travels and investigations

in U.S.S.R., Germany, Central Europe," *The Telegraph-Journal* [Saint John], clipping n.d. (March 1934), n.p..

101 Ibid.

102 Smith Papers, "Collective farming in Russia has made peasants serfs once again says Miss Ella Smith," *Chronicle-Telegraph* [Québec City](20 March 1934), clipping n.p.

103 Smith continued her fearless research travel later in the decade. She was arrested by the Loyalist secret police during the Spanish civil war; she became almost certainly the only Canadian woman to be arrested in the USSR, Nazi Germany, and Spain in the 1930s. She taught history at Mount Allison University in Sackville (New Brunswick) during and after World War II, but, undoubtedly because of her gender, never obtained a permanent faculty position. Students in the postwar years who knew her only as the eccentric older woman who ran the University bookshop would have perhaps not guessed her extraordinary background and life of adventure in the 1930s when she had been one of Canada's most persistent, diligent, and forthright observers of the Soviet Union. Her career trajectory is indicative of why Canadian women such as Smith were enthusiastic about the opportunities the Soviet Union appeared to afford professional women in the 1930s.

104 Crowley, *Agnes Macphail*, 148.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid. The line must have been one of Macphail's favourites since it occurs in a number of press interviews and reports of her speeches. Macphail Papers, v 5, f 21 A, "Russia."

107 Loeb, "Miss Macphail, MP speaks on Russia." Macphail visited England, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and the USSR in late July and August 1936. Macphail Papers, v. 1, f. 4, Macphail to Harold R. Peat, 2 June 1936.

108 Macphail, "Life in Russia full of paradoxes.,"

109 Griffin, "Russia begrudges rubles for army," 3.

110 "Miss Macphail's observations," *Globe* [Toronto] (14 September 1936), 4. See also "Does not desire to live in Russia" *Flesherton Advance* (16 September 1936), 1.

111 "Let's whistle a bit," *The Toronto Daily Star* (30 September), 4.

112 *Toronto Daily Star,* 30 November, 4.

113 "Children in Russia," *The Toronto Daily Star* (26 September), 4. It is perhaps worth noting here that, in this instance, Gould does not mention her other travelling companion, Dora Wilensky, Executive Secretary of the Jewish Family Welfare Bureau. Perhaps this was because the letter writer, William O'Connor, who self-identifies as a retired long-serving child welfare inspector, might have been aware of the fact that Wilen-

sky was the wife of Joseph Salsberg, one of Toronto's most prominent Communists.

114 W. R. Shanks, "Says Russia may be O.K.," *Globe* [Toronto] (19 November 1936), 4.

115 Macphail Papers, "Miss Macphail describes Russia in series interesting articles," *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound],(1 October 1936), clipping n.p.

116 Macphail, "Life in Russia full of paradoxes."

117 Macphail Papers, Agnes Macphail, "Mingle in Red Square with throngs who witness Stalin receive victorious flyers,'" *Daily Sun-Times* [Owen Sound] (5 October 1936), clipping n.p.

118 Macphail, "Tellemann Collective Farm."

119 In response to these questions, Macphail explained her view of the history of the Russian revolution. "Karl Marx, Engels, Tolstoi, Lenin, and Trotsky" had "abundant courage" in trying to bring about a "social millennium" in which "production was to be for use, not profit; there should be public ownership of natural resources, and the people should have access to wealth, health, travel and social benefits." The great difficulties in realizing this vision in the USSR owed to the fact that the country in 1917 was "filled with ignorance and superstition." The remainder of her answers, in the reporter's summary, reiterate many of the experiences described in Macphail's own articles — with a few additional details: Macphail had tried vodka and it was "like our gin, only worse" — and ended on her usual note that she "did not like a dictatorship," though in this instance she allowed that though Stalin "acted like Hitler and Mussolini," she "believed there was honesty in administration. Stalin is a very common man, living and dressing plainly," Macphail Papers, "Life in Russia is not comparable to Canada, says Miss Macphail," clipping in scrapbook, n.d., n.p.

120 Macphail Papers, v 9, f 18, "Speeches – Scandinavia,." "Lessons from Scandinavia."

121 "Does not desire to live in Russia," *Flesherton Advance* (16 September 1936), 1.

122 Johnstone, "Diverging and Contested Feminisms," 238–9.

123 Much more warrants to be written on Gibb's orientalism, so endemic in her article series. See, for example, "Finds Russian fast worker when searching for wife," *The Toronto Daily Star* (8 October 1935), 1.