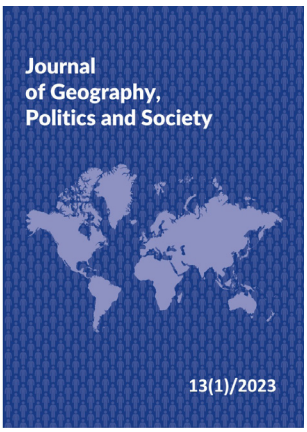

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THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE SOVIET UNION

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Abstract
For centuries, many women have been at the forefront of the struggle for emancipation and political changes. Efforts at integrating the idea of emancipation into society was an important part of the Bolshevik ideology; thus, the October Revolution of 1917 brought women new hope and new expectations. The Soviet Union was the first country in the world to successfully open the door to new economic and educational opportunities for women. In 1917, the Bolshevik legislative initiatives provided them with full political and civil rights while new legislation made women legally equal to men. The constitution adopted in July 1918 secured the political and civil equality of women and men. However, the gender policy developed and implemented by Lenin significantly changed after his death. Until the second half of the 1930s, the Soviet Union remained the world leader in terms of providing women with equal rights. However, after the new leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin, came to power, the government policy on women and equality substantially transformed. During Stalin's rule, the concept of "a new type of woman" was created. The early Bolshevik policy, which started with a radical liberal vision of individual freedom and women's rights, devolved into an abyss of cynicism that burdened women with a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work in the household.

The purpose of this work is to study the role of women during the early Soviet period and to examine legal and political changes in women's status. The study aims at explaining what the main goal of the Soviet gender policy was in fact, whether it actually changed the status of women and what crucial changes it ultimately brought to them. Using the method of content analysis, the content of official documents, press and scientific literature was analyzed. At the same time, attempts were made to identify and analyze the positive and negative results of the Soviet policy by applying the method of critical research.

Key words
women in the Soviet Union, Bolshevik revolution, communism, gender policy.

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1. Introduction

In the 1920s, women's labor was essential to the growth and development of almost all the most important sectors of the Soviet economy. Such widespread women's participation in the workforce became possible due to specific circumstances and a number of prerequisites. First, according to the basic principles of the communist ideology, "the first-class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male". K. Marx and F. Engels located the root of women's oppression in their role within the nuclear family in class societies. They understood that women's role as biological "reproducers" results

in their subordinate status inside the nuclear family, and consequently throughout society. In capitalist societies, women in property-holding families reproduce heirs; women in working-class families reproduce generations of labor power for the system (Karl..., 1950, p. 36). Consequently, Soviet theorists saw the Bolshevik Revolution as an opportunity to liberate women from centuries of slavery.

The revolution of 1917 removed all the legal restrictions that had kept women at a low rung on the status ladder, acknowledged gender equality and guaranteed women's economic empowerment by providing employment. Article 22 of the Soviet Constitution of 1918 proclaimed equal rights for all citizens of the Soviet Republic, irrespective of gender, race or nationality, and article 64 established the right of women to elect and be elected on equal terms with men. In 1920, abortion was legalized (1918 Constitution..., 2018). These provisions were once again incorporated in Article 122 of the new Soviet Constitution of 1936 that decreed equal rights for women and their equal standing with men in all spheres of economic, political, social and cultural life (1936 Constitution..., 1996).

All these changes seemed feasible at first glance, since Lenin himself was interested in emancipating women and giving them equal rights, for he was convinced that the socialist revolution could not be carried out without participation of the significant part of working women. Lenin argued that it was necessary to win over millions of working women in towns and villages to the side of communism. He believed that women should be interested in proletarian class struggle and would gladly participate in it. But first, their attention and trust had to be won, and this could only be done by making a point that real freedom for women is possible only through communism. Lenin stressed that

> women must be made conscious of the political connection between communism and their own suffering, needs, and they must realize what the proletarian dictatorship means for them: complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; an end to the power of the bourgeoisie (Lenin, 1918).

Lenin considered the status of women to be the same as one of the slaves, and they could only be saved through socialism. In his opinion, true emancipation begins only with transition from small-scale private property farming to large-scale socialist farming, which is a rather challenging task. For this purpose, Lenin decided to create a political organization of women workers and peasants, for as he explained:

> The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it. The Soviet government is doing everything in its power to enable women to carry on independent proletarian socialist work (Lenin, 1918).

The first step of Soviet government in this direction was the liberation of women from "domestic slavery" by passing from petty, individual, domestic economy to large-scale social economy. After the above-mentioned reforms, Lenin proudly declared that all traces of inequality between the sexes and classes had already disappeared and no longer existed in Soviet Russia (Lenin, 1973).

Lenin's gender policy and the Civil Code adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1918 granted women a full range of civil rights and freedoms and created equality between men and women under the law (Family law of the RSFSR, n.d.). However, a new political leader who came to power after V. Lenin's death in 1924 transformed the existing gender policy by placing on women a double burden of waged work outside the house and most of unpaid labor within it.

When Stalin came to power in the Soviet Union, he was ready to implement Lenin's ideas on the role of women in a communist society, urging women to rally round the Communists. Stalin stressed that women must fully support the proletarian revolution and that in human history there was not a single great movement of the oppressed masses without participation of female workers (Stalin, 1954). At the same time, Stalin's main goal was to use female labor at collective farms and factories. In his speech on International Women's Day, Stalin noted that

> Women toilers – working women and peasant women – are a vast reserve of the working class. This reserve constitutes a good half of the population. The side that it takes – for or against the working class – will determine the fate of the proletarian movement, the victory or defeat of the proletarian revolution, the victory or defeat of the proletarian power. Consequently, the first task of the proletariat, and of its advanced detachment – the Communist Party, is to wage a resolute struggle to free women, working women and peasant women, from the influence of the bourgeoisie, to enlighten them politically and to organize them under the banner of the proletariat (Stalin, 1954, p. 1).

However, Stalin's initial theoretical views had subsequently undergone a major transformation.

The Bolsheviks' goal was to transform the society and create a new ideal world where all people would be equal. This concept of equality, of course, included

women who, at the time, were limited to performing household chores. In Bolsheviks' opinion, women were supposed to be part of the workforce, so their role in family was also determined by the new Soviet vision. And in that vision, women were supposed to gain independence and be liberated from the traditional roles they played in the past.

2. Research problems

The main research question of the article is: What political and legal reforms were carried out under Bolsheviks' rule? What were the real reasons for the transformation of women's role and creation of the concept of "a new type of woman"? Did these changes affect the status of women in the Soviet Union?

The hypothesis presented in the article is that changes in women's status were brought about by the Second World War. Stalin needed to create "a new type of woman" who would be first and foremost a model mother but at the same time would be ready for war and hard work in factories. This was a life focused on productivity both at home and at work. To pursue this goal, the Soviet government actively promoted women workers who became tractor-operators, snipers or welders and their contribution to the development of the Soviet society.

3. Theoretical basis and methodology

Western Sovietologists used ideology in its instrumental capacity to explain all political innovations in the Soviet Union. In the totalitarian school of historiography, ideology was considered an important armament in the Bolshevik arsenal, and, along with the use of terror, it was primarily seen as a means of ensuring social obedience and control. The issue of women in the early Bolshevik state was based on F. Engels's "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" (Engels, 1884). This work focuses on the discussions on women's oppression in a context of class inequality. F. Engels identified the source of women's oppression in the development of class society that arose from economic necessity in primitive equalitarian society. F. Engels believed that the division of labor according to the worker's sex was a historical basis of women's oppression. According to him, the advent of agriculture gave rise to a need for male physical strength, thus keeping women away from gathering and limiting them to household work. Consequently, the accumulation of excess property and the emergence of private property led to the male control of female sexuality.

B. Wolfe (1984) evaluated the Bolshevik revolution primarily as a relentless pursuit of power. He believed that the Marxism-Leninism ideology was structural: organization, centralization, monopoly of economic and spiritual power, permanent dictatorship and absolute and unlimited power. Lenin's faith in his own theoretical views in the end led to a grotesque distortion of Marxism. Other historians from the totalitarian school reiterated this basic tenet and viewed Marxism-Leninism as a means of legitimizing relations of domination and upholding social hierarchies in the Soviet Union. R. Daniels (1960), who considerably distanced himself from the older interpretations by claiming that the October Revolution was more an accident than a planned coup, nevertheless concluded that Stalinist ideology divested itself of its Marxist intellectual content to more effectively drown both the individual and society in a sea of false consciousness.

Western scholars considered the concept of "women's issue" to be an independent social problem for the Communist Party that could be solved or eliminated through firm political actions. Many historians enthusiastically supported the main idea of Marxist Feminism which was to increase women's participation in the labor market. They believed it necessary to democratize the patriarchal family and eliminate gender inequality in both the private and public spheres.

According to W.Z. Goldman (1993), in the 1920s, Bolsheviks adopted some sort of a traditional social family policy. Eventually, this policy made it easier to strengthen a traditional nuclear family, rather than to create actual welfare states. Thus, the revolutionary rhetoric on gender equality, although incompatible with the Party's ideology and reality, was an important element of the Soviet experience. Soviet women's advocacy was defined by a literary style characterized by excessive exaggeration, fantasies, lies, and distortions.

This study is based upon primary electronic archival documents, scientific literature and materials of the leading periodical press of that period, such as articles of propaganda content of the newspapers Pravda and Izvestia, posters dedicated to women who fought at the front during the Second World War or were engaged in the internal front. In these materials, an important place is given to the promotion of women's labor and women's roles during the war. The study also examines and analyzes various legal documents, including Soviet legislation.

Based on the major research question, the method of content analysis of quantitative research was used in the article. During the research, a variety of primary and secondary sources was analyzed,

which allowed determining the real reason for the liberalization of USSR legislation, establishment of equality between men and women and providing women with new roles. The critical method helped us to identify and analyze outcomes of the Soviet gender policy, to determine factors underlying this policy and the real results it brought for women. The time frame of the study is 1918–1953. After Lenin's takeover, the emancipation of women in USSR was more or less successful, because it was with him that women were granted a number of rights and freedoms. However, after his death and since Stalin's coming to power, the Soviet gender policy radically changed. There was a radical transformation of the Soviet government's views on women's rights, which started with Lenin's radical liberal vision of individual freedom, abolition of family life and the institution of marriage and, following the adoption of the new Constitution of the USSR of 1936, ended with a government policy directed to strengthen and preserve the institution of family, which required from women to bear "a double burden".

4. Literature review

Over the last few years, interest in studying women's rights and their status during the Soviet period has greatly increased; therefore, the study on the Soviet past in the context of political and cultural memory has become relevant. Although Stalin stressed the importance of women's contribution and promoted women's employment, in fact, he limited women's access to self-development and prevented a rise in their intellectual capacity. A number of scientific studies have revealed a real position of women in the Soviet Union. For example, an article by professor K.B. Usha (2005) of the Center for Russia and Central Asia "Political empowerment of women in the Soviet Union and Russia: ideology and implementation" demonstrates the real-life situation of Soviet women. The researcher points out that despite the measures implemented to empower women politically, there was a continuously low political representation of women and that despite a high employment rate and a high percentage of educated people among Soviet women, the USSR did not succeed in changing the male-dominated culture and eliminating inequality between women and men. In her opinion, Stalin chose a strategy where he sacrificed women's right to national interest, when the need to promote a population growth became particularly acute after the outbreak of the war between the USSR and Nazi Germany. Observations of this kind were described in Hutton's work Resilient Russian Women in the 1920s & 1930s, where M. Hutton (2015) studies female leaders of that period. The author goes into great detail about their lives and careers, rise and fall, honors and persecutions under the Soviet rule. According to the author, revolution did little to eliminate the existing patriarchal culture. In the early Bolshevik state, divorces and abortions became easier to obtain; however, effective birth control was limited, and the concept of sexual freedom in reality meant more sexual freedom for men than for women. The transformation required for true equality was pushed aside by the political agenda created by communist leaders, such as Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. The author tries to prove that the end result of the policy, pursued by the soviet government, was negative for the political and social position of women despite all the windows of opportunity opened up for them.

5. Feminist interpretation of Bolshevism

Feminism nowadays is still undergoing constant changes because it continues to be one of the growing ideologies in the modern world. This is why people define and interpret feminism differently. There is no doubt that freedom and equality are two most important concepts of feminism. Specifically, by equality one refers to the equality of opportunities, opened for men and women alike, and freedom is understood, first of foremost, as freedom from assigned gender roles and freedom to choose one's own lifestyle.

Examples of policies that promote gender equality are those that guarantee equal pay, universally accessible education, etc. As for Stalin, he ignored the need to provide such a policy. During the early Stalin period, the Zhenotdel operated in the Soviet Union, an organization that protected women from discrimination in the workplace. Zhenotdel, the women's section of the Communist Party, was created to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women (Stites, 1976). At the same time, the number of women with higher education considerably increased, as education became more accessible for women. In 1935, an impressive 38% of Soviet women were enrolled in higher educational institutions, compared to 13.6% in Germany in 1935 and 25.7% in England two years before (Racioppi, O'Sullivan, 1995).

Freedom, in comparison with frequently mentioned and discussed equality, is a much more complex concept, due to its generality and abstraction. At first sight, Stalin promised to liberate

women from the oppression and protect them from exploitation by giving them absolute freedom. It is obvious that Stalin and his associates did not deny the necessity of women's emancipation, although they did not recognize difficulties that women encountered. While Stalin's public statements on women's issues were positive and attractive at first glance, the issue of whether his actions were consistent with his principles remained an object of controversy.

It was clear that Soviet leaders, and especially I.V. Stalin, supported the policy of empowering women, but the only real purpose of such a policy was to make heavy use of female labor force. To carry out his plans, Stalin did not appoint women to key political positions. Moreover, he abolished the Zhenotdel, the Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, established by Lenin in 1918 (Racioppi, O'Sullivan, 1995). Thus, gender equality in the Soviet Union meant that women were involved in hard work, from coal mining and foundry to cleaning streets and ditches. Under Stalin, women's status was not quite the same as described in Bolshevik statements and pamphlets. Despite passing new laws, women continued to be treated unequally. The attempt to create "a new type of woman" also changed woman's behavior, although it does not necessarily mean that they became equal to their male counterparts. In fact, women were not liberated from their family roles; they were given additional responsibilities both within family and outside it.

World War II cost the Soviet Union a great number of lives, destroying a whole generation of strong young men, which lead to a serious male-female population imbalance. The grand industrialization made a shortage of labor evident. The Soviet government took measures to promote women's full participation in the economy: Stalin's five-year plans increased the number of women in heavy industry. The Soviet legislation gave women equal rights and equal pay (Article 122 (1936 Constitution..., 1996)). Women took active part of the war effort, participated in agro-industry and had an active role to play in the process of restoring the post-war Soviet economy. In 1943, women comprised 57% of the non-agricultural workforce, in 1945 – more than 80% of the labor force in collective farms (Buckley, 1981). But, in the end, it was the war with fascist Germany that had far-reaching economic implications: the USSR decided to mobilize all possible resources to win the war, and women had to carry out difficult physical labor, instead of men.

When World War II resulted in heavy losses of men as labor force, the Marxist doctrine of gender equality proved to be an extremely effective instrument of the Soviet policy. The state required women to work in the iron and steel industry: by 1944 women comprised 40% of the labor force, which is 15% more than in 1939. Women accounted for 30–40% of the workforce in the oilfields, and, as the soviet newspaper "Pravda" proudly reported, in certain mines women constituted the majority of miners. Women became welders, builders, loaders and janitors (Dodge, 1966). Today, there is no doubt that the Soviet economy would not be virile without the work of women. The fact that by 1959 there were 20 million more women than men showed evidence of heavy losses of war. Women accounted for half of the workforce and were involved in the most complex and responsible activities. For example, by 1954, half of the workers in mechanical and electrical engineering were women. Women accounted for 64% of drivers, 70% of tower crane operators and 42% of locomotive engineers (Schuster, 1971).

In the post-war Soviet Union, most women were still engaged in manual labor. Women, mostly unskilled, mostly performed part of manual labor in collective farms and state farms, especially less attractive agricultural work. For example, between 1947 and 1959, women accounted for more than 90% of poultry farmers, herders and dairy workers, while the percentage of women among industrial and administrative workers was only 21%. In public transport, 57% of subway, tram and trolleybus drivers were women (Dodge, 1966, pp. 174–177).

Women also played an important role in the education system. They accounted for the majority of teachers at primary and secondary schools, while the share of women in academia was considerably lower. By the end of 1956, female professors, docents, and department chairs accounted for 41%, the share of women among the heads of institutions, deans and other high academic posts was only 15%. In general, the smaller proportion of senior positions held by women was very noticeable (Schuster, 1971). While a great number of activities and professions was open for women, their opportunities and prospects for promotion were not favorable. Soviet researchers claimed that women had the same knowledge and skills as men in almost all disciplines, including natural sciences and mechanics; however, women professionals were mostly concentrated in the lower echelons of management. This is clearly illustrated by the low number of women in party leadership bodies.

6. From a theoretical debate to reality and creation of a new image of mother

In the Soviet Union women had a double task. They had to work as hard as men in factories and fields and, upon returning home, they were to spend several hours a day in endless lines at the grocery stores. Women had to cook and clean because Soviet men (to preserve their masculinity) refused to share domestic duties (Liu, 2019). In a new Soviet culture, gender equality and respect for women were falling apart; therefore, everyday life and the existing reality of the Soviet Union remained detached from the communist ideology.

It is clear that Bolshevik leaders originally had other ideas in mind. In his speech, delivered at the Fourth Moscow City Conference of Non-Party Working Women, September 23, 1919, Lenin said: "You all know that even when women have full rights, they still remain factually downtrodden because all housework is left to them. In most cases, housework is the most unproductive, the most barbarous and the most arduous work a woman can do" (Pravda, № 213, p 45). Nevertheless, women remained in the subordinate position before and after Lenin's death. Indeed, in a sense, the situation of many women may have even worsened, since most women found themselves assuming the "double burden", doing both domestic and public work.

The 1930s were marked by a strong wave of industrialization in the USSR. In 1930, the Party launched a major campaign to encourage women to join the workforce: four times more women went to work in industry than in 1929. Between 1929 and 1935, nearly four million women took up a paid job, 1.7 million of them in industry. By 1935, they represented 42% of the industrial workforce. The state planners bureaucratically reorganized the division of work between the sexes in different branches of activity, following norms that had been fixed in advance (Goldman, 2002).

In the 1920s, communist activists, both men and women, advocated equality between the sexes in all areas of public and private life. By gaining the status of wage earners, women would have real economic autonomy from their husbands and families. The relationship between the sexes would thus cease to be a subordinate relationship and would transform into a relationship based on love and mutual respect. The marriage contract, which institutionalized economic inequality, would not be needed any more. Men and women would live in a "free union" and would be able to break up whenever they wanted. They would no longer have any domestic duties or economic functions, so the concept of family would "disappear" over time. In the traditions of Marxists, Bolsheviks developed a number of concepts of women's emancipation. Accordingly, a new life under socialism was to transform the relationships between the sexes, in particular, to enable women to participate fully in social life on an equal footing with men (Kollontai, 1920).

Thus, one of the Bolshevik Revolution's principal tasks was to transfer family affairs from the private to the public sphere, "liberating" women from family labor. To that end, first of all, it was necessary to liberate women from household chores by transferring such chores to the public sphere. Collective laundries, kindergartens and communal kitchens, where women worked for salaries, were to take over the tasks that were previously performed by them at home without any remuneration. Here is what Alexandra Kollontai, the People's Commissar for Welfare, wrote: "Instead of the working woman having to struggle with the cooking and spend her last free hours in the kitchen preparing dinner and supper, the communist society will organize public restaurants and communal kitchens" (Kollontai, 1920).

The Civil Code of 1918 abolished religious marriages and required civil ceremonies in order to gain a legal status as a married couple. Illegitimate children were afforded the same rights as legitimate ones (Family..., n.d.). The divorce, unthinkable under tsarist Russia, could be easily obtained based on a joint application of spouses. However, it turned out that the mindset was not as easily changed as legislation. Indeed, radicalism of 1920 against family and gender relations was often exaggerated. Lenin and other party members considered family, first and foremost, a key socio-economic unit. Soviet scholars believed that at a time when the state did not have the resources available to secure the welfare of its citizens, family had to play an important role in this area. Moreover, by the late 1920s, the attitude of the population and even of the communist activists towards the women's issue had changed. The population expressed a kind of fatigue against the background of various social experiments, including those that affected family and individuals' private lives. Various forms of family breakdown were perceived by a majority of the population as a social evil and moral chaos. Trade union instability made life difficult for women. An increasing number of women called for tougher laws to protect marriages.

The public debate about discrimination against women died out after 1933. In any case, after 1934 there was no organization left that was interested in

studying challenges women faced in the workplace. That year saw the disbanding of the Committee for the Improvement of the Living and Working Conditions of Working Women (Mespoulet, 2006, pp. 5–6). The 1930s also marked a turning-point in the family policy. As a result of the drop in the birth rate and the slow population growth, the Soviet state introduced policies aimed at encouraging people to have children. A new concept appeared in the language used by political leaders and lawyers, namely of the "strong socialist family", presented as a basic cell that was essential for the construction of socialism and characterized by a stable marriage, a high fertility rate, and a reinforcement of parental authority. "New Soviet women" had lost their rights over their own bodies due to their roles as mothers or potential mothers. Stalin violated the feminist principle of freedom in 1936 when abortion was forbidden, and divorce was made more difficult and more expensive (Mespoulet, 2006). The Soviet woman was "a mother and a citizen", bearing the responsibility of birthing and raising the next generation of citizens, while at the same time being part of the labor force. Various measures were directed to the aid for mothers, for example, a toughening up the enforcement of child maintenance and increasing allowances to families with many children. Strengthening the family was treated as a step to a normal life after inevitable shock of the first post-revolutionary years.

After Stalin had deprived Soviet women of a number of their basic rights, he did not stop using massive propaganda to create and promote the desired image of women. Consequently, he developed a policy to encourage large families, and in 1944, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR established an honorary title and order "Mother heroine". The honorary title "Mother heroine" was awarded to mothers bearing and raising 10 or more children (The USSR..., n.d.). In their analysis of the status of women in the Soviet era, Russian sociologists identify the 1930s as the period when the "basic contract between the genders in Soviet society" was signed, a contract that they characterized as that of the "working mother", who had to take on simultaneously a full working day, the upbringing of her children, and the organization of everyday life. Taking into account the fact that housing conditions and the provision of goods were not improving, the rise in the number of births meant at the same time an increase in the difficulties of everyday life for women. Consequently, in spite of the risks run by both women and doctors in contravening the law, backstreet abortions increased (Mespoulet, 2006).

The pronatalist and pro-family propaganda of the 1930s helped to shape the image of women as builders of socialism. Soviet leaders praised women in public speeches and in the press for their sense of self-sacrifice and resistance. In official speeches, they were presented as the pillars of the family. Working-class and rural women faced particular difficulties in solving everyday problems. Time spent overcoming these difficulties prevented them from actively participating in public organizations or party activities. Thus, the proportion of women in the Komsomol, which was 34% in 1935, was more than twice the number of women in the party, since the Komsomol members were mostly young and unmarried women (Buckley, 1981).

7. Women in politics

The objectification of women is evident in official speeches and letters of Soviet leaders. They expressed concern for women's development but regarded them as inferior creatures, lacking the capability of self-development. According to the last census of 1913, conducted before the October Revolution, 83% of women in Russia could not even read and write. Of the remaining women, almost all were members of the upper class, and it is likely that most of them were exiled during the revolution. Accordingly, immediately after the revolution, the proportion of literate women fell to about 5% (Hutton, 2015). The Bolshevik government wanted to introduce the idea of gender equality, whose real purpose was to attract as many women as possible to compulsory work outside the family, that is, to use female labor and energy. Therefore, they did not expect that women would bring a big change in thinking and political processes.

In the Soviet Union, the Communist Party played a irreplaceably leading role, for it was the basis of the real political power. Although about 20% of Communist Party candidates were women, the party's highest posts were still occupied by men (Dodge, 1966, p. 213). This situation was attributed to several factors. Clearly, the attitude of male superiority persisted as men received more education and training and were given better positions. The explanation that women did not spend all their energy at work and were mainly occupied with caring for the family was, in reality, nothing more than a simple attempt to justify discriminatory treatment that lead to women being mainly recruited into the middle and lower ranks.

Due to the time and effort spent at work and on domestic chores, most Soviet women were more

engaged in economic and social roles rather than political ones. Although in the most industrialized countries women were less politically active than men, in the USSR the problem was compounded by the fact that a high percentage of women worked full-time, often in physically demanding jobs, and husbands were not usually engaged in housekeeping and raising children. Thus, many women simply were not able to participate in political meetings, because party meetings and discussions required an unreasonably large amount of time from them. At the same time, many Soviet men without a "double burden" often "complained" in the press that political engagement was time-consuming. Weighed down by family responsibilities, young women had little time or energy for political activity, while Bolsheviks wanted women workers to support the Soviet regime. Yet, political activists in the delegatki and Zhenotdel groups often felt used and without proper direction. Some complained that the Bolshevik propaganda in the papers was ineffective and unhelpful. One argued: "The stranichka in Pravda is awful. I am a worker myself and we hope to receive something for directing our work. But there's nothing in the women's pages for us. There are only agitational little articles which would have been useful three years ago for the factories" (Hutton, 2015, pp. 35–36).

Despite all this, many women actively participated in local and regional events. Women were more politically active close to home due to the fact that conflict between economic, family, and political roles was the least likely in this space, and thus proximity to home gave women an opportunity for some political activity. For example, women made up 49% of deputies in rural, city, district and regional councils, while their representation at the level of the union republic decreased to 35%, and in the Supreme Soviet it was only 32% (Buckley, 1981).

It is interesting to note how women made up a third of secretaries of the primary organization of the Party and only 4% of city and district party secretaries. Above this level, women were virtually absent from the Party elite (Buckley, 1981). Although the proportion of women in the Communist Party increased over the years, women were still underrepresented in leadership positions within the party. For those women who entered the party and government elite, generally, their careers differed from those of their male counterparts. While men in the regional elite were selected and appointed from outside the region, later they were already successfully appointed to various posts within the same bureau. Women represented local residents and were not transferred from the bottom to the top, so their professional growth and promotion to leadership positions did not occur. Moreover, the appointment of women was often symbolic (Buckley, 1981).

However, one should not lose sight of the fact that, in parallel with the growing concern about the working and living conditions of women, the Soviet press began to focus on institutional arrangements for work with women. The Soviet leadership was always reluctant to create special women's institutions, initially on the grounds that they might smack of "bourgeois feminism", become independent of the Party, and thereby serve to divide the working class. Lenin argued that: "We derive our organizational ideas from our ideological concepts. We want no separate organizations of communist women! She who is a Communist belongs as a member to the Party, just as he who is a Communist" (Lenin, 1977).

All the complexity and contradictions of the cultural project of women's emancipation were revealed during the process of increasing women's participation in political decision-making, and especially during the activities of the so-called zhenotdels. Zhenotdel was the women's section of the CPSU, which turned out to be the only mechanism of women's political activity from 1919 to the early 1930s. Zhenotdel was established to raise women's political awareness and encourage their participation in the public sphere (Hutton, 2015). Zhenotdel, which had striven to protect women and their interests, was subsequently repeatedly targeted by the Bolshevik authorities. While for a time the organization was independent from the Party, it was soon abolished. One of the leaders of Zhenotdel, Alexandra Kollontai, declared: "Here in Moscow there are weekly meetings of women delegates from large factories. But women are encouraged to go to all political meetings and to work in conjunction with and on an equal footing with men" (Hutton, 2015, p. 36). The abolition of the Zhenotdel was based on the idea that it was time for a woman to advance not as a woman, but as a worker, as a developed and full-fledged member of society. The Zhenotdel was not the only "victim" of the authorities, since by that time a number of women's organizations had ceased to exist. The only women's organization that survived was the "Committee of Soviet Women" (the successor to the Antifascist

Committee of Soviet Women), which mainly focused on fighting Nazis abroad. Stalin justified his decision to abolish Zhenotdel by claiming that the "women's question" had already been resolved, and there was no more discrimination against women, which meant that there was no longer any need for women's departments. However, after Stalin's abolition of the "women's departments" in 1929, a "special commission for women's affairs at the local and regional level" was created under the auspices of the trade unions. Similarly, so-called "women's councils" were set up in factories and farms, linked to local party committees, whose task was to mobilize women on issues of concern to them. Although these organizations were not independent women's organizations, at the time they offered some limited institutional channels for women to discuss women's issues and advance their interests.

Consequently, under Stalin, a cultural icon of a woman was created, and along with the concept of "a New Soviet Man", the so-called "New Soviet Woman" appeared. The concept of "a new Soviet woman" contained two major elements: productivity and reproductivity. Productivity specifically refers to industrial productivity including efficiency of manufacture industries, production of heavy metal, and more importantly, assembly of military weapons. Stalin also believed that the "new Soviet woman" should bear the duty as a mother and demonstrate the virtues of being a mother by bringing multiple children up to be the hope of the country's future. Stalin successfully used the concept of the "Soviet woman" as a tool to achieve his ambitious economic goals. He knew how urgently the nation needed industrialization and a higher birth rate when a war was on the brink (Harrison, 2008). Thus, instead of the promised and desired freedom, state communism for women turned into some kind of oppressive system that imposed productive and reproductive roles on women. It was a heavy and mandatory burden of double, economic and family work. Unfortunately, the glorification of the woman's role and the depiction of a strong proletarian women on numerous posters that were part of state propaganda did not reflect the real situation of women in the Soviet Union.

8. Conclusions

The relevance of the women's issue and any changes in its status are closely connected with the processes taking place in the foreign and domestic policy. When Stalin came to power, he radically changed the early Bolshevik state's gender political course, for he looked to create a new type of woman who would be, above all, an exemplary mother, but at the same time would be ready for both war and active participation in the state economy. The propaganda of women who became welders, snipers and miners helped to attain that goal. The mentioned concept was only some kind of praise for the abilities and contributions of women.

Stalin's policy towards women had a common starting point, which, instead of focusing on protecting women's rights and expanding their economic opportunities, was aimed at mobilizing them to secure the national economy and better prepare the nation for World War II. Stalin's concept of "a new Soviet woman" required women to play a dual role as mothers and workers, while men could be only the latter. Stalin failed to ensure the desired equality and freedom for Soviet women either at work or in the family, because women's rights and their problems were never part of his political program.

Such mobilization could not ensure real equality and freedom for women. Stalin deliberately chose to ignore and turned a blind eye to gender discrimination in the workplace in order to focus on drawing as many women as possible into the workforce. His indifference to gender discrimination certainly violated the fundamental principle of feminist equality.

Proof of this lies in Stalin's abolition of "women's departments", whose purpose was actually to improve the living conditions of women and to support the struggle for gender equality. The problem is that that the promotion of women and the solution of their problems was never in Stalin's interests, because his main concern was to accelerate the industrial development of the country.

Therefore, he ultimately failed to provide women with real equality. Formal equality, which was established at the legislative level and reflected in a wide range of opportunities provided to women, was not enough to eliminate discrimination between sexes. The vision of emancipation which prevailed in the post-revolutionary years was never realized. Instead, a set of social expectations were formed, obliging women to work in the public sphere, while the tradition dictated them to create a family, and thus, women in the Soviet period were loaded with a double burden.

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