

WOMEN DURING THE SOVIET ERA

During the 70 years of Soviet Era, women's roles were complex. Women in Soviet Russia became a vital part of the mobilization into the work force and this opening, of women into sectors that was previously unattainable, allowed opportunities for education, personal development, and training. Women's responsibility as the ideal industrial Soviet woman meant that she was one who matched working quotas, never complained, and did everything for the betterment of Soviet Russia. These expectations were in addition to the standards demanded of them in the domestic sphere.

The legal equality of women and men was established during the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. Lenin saw women as a force of labor, that had previously been untapped and encouraged women to partake in the communist revolution. He stated, "*Petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades [the woman], chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery.*" Women needed to be economically free from men, and this meant that there had to be an allowance of women to enter the work force. The number of women who entered the work force rose from 423,200 in 1923 to 885,000 in 1930.

To achieve this increase of women in the work force, the new communist government issued the First Family Code. This code separated marriage from the church, allowed a couple to choose a surname, gave illegitimate children the same rights as legitimate children, gave rights to maternal entitlements, health and safety protections at work, and provided women with the right to a divorce on extended grounds. In 1920, the Soviet government legalized abortion. In 1922, marital rape was made illegal in the Soviet Union. Labor laws also assisted women. Women were given equal rights in regard to insurance in case of illness, eight-week paid maternity-leave, and a minimum wage standard that was set for both men and women. Both sexes were also afforded paid holiday leave. These measures were put into place to produce a quality labor force from both of the sexes. While the reality was that not all women were granted these rights, they established a pivot from the traditional systems of the Russian imperialist.

To oversee this code and women's freedoms, the communist party created a specialist women's department, called the Zhenotdel. The department produced propaganda encouraging more women to become a part of the urban population and the communist revolutionary party. The 1920s experienced changes in the urban centers of family policy, sexuality, and women's political activism. The creation of the "*new soviet woman*", who was self-sacrificing and dedicated to the revolutionary cause, paved the way for the expectation of women to come. In 1925, with the number of divorces increasing, Zhenotdel created the second family plan, proposing a common law marriage for couples that were living together. However, a year later, the government created a marriage law as a reaction to the de facto marriages that were causing inequality for women. As a result of the policy implementation of the New Economic Plan (NEP), if a man left his de facto wife, she was left unable to secure assistance. Men had no legal ties and as such, if a woman got pregnant, he would be able to leave, and not be legally responsible to assist the woman or child; this led to an increase in the number of homeless children. Because a de facto wife enjoyed no rights, the government sought to resolve this through the 1926 marriage law, granting registered and unregistered marriages equal rights and emphasized the obligations that came with marriage.

By 1930, the Zhenotdel was disbanded, as the government claimed that their work was completed. Women began to enter the Soviet workforce at a scale that had never before been

seen. However, in the mid-1930s, there was a return to the more traditional and conservative values in many areas of social and family policy. Abortion was made illegal, homosexuality was declared a crime, legal differences between legitimate and illegitimate children were restored, and divorce was once again difficult to attain. Women became the heroine of the home and made sacrifices for their husband and were to create a positive life at home that would “*increase productivity and improve quality of work.*” The 1940s continued its traditional ideology and the nuclear family was the driving force of the time. Women held the social responsibility of motherhood that could not be ignored.

Some local women's organizations also existed. For example, a group of Azeri Bolshevik women in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic founded the Ali Bayramov Club, a women's club dedicated to the unveiling of Muslim women, promoting female literacy, giving women opportunities for vocational training and employment, and organizing leisure and cultural events.

During Stalinist Russia, women also fell victim to the Great Purge that plagued the country. From 1934-1940, the number of women that were gulag prisoners rose from 30,108 to 108,898. The women were not sent to hard labor camps, but rather worked at camps that were textile or sewing factories and were only forced to perform hard labor as a punishment. Women in the camps were often subjects of violence and/or sexual abuse. At the same time, “*Thank you literature*” became a result of the personality cult that Stalin had implemented and articles in women's magazines would praise Stalin for the work that he had done for women.

During WWII, women exemplified the motherland and patriotism. Many became widowed during the war, making them more likely to become impoverished. As men were called away to assist with the fighting, women stepped in and became in charge of state farms and large collective farms. In 1942, to meet harvest quotas, over half of the agricultural labor force was made up of women. They were not only assuming roles on collective farms, but 8,476 girls went into the Red army and Soviet navy to assist in the Great Patriotic War. The motto of the time became, “*Soviet women gave all their strength to the motherland...no difficulties arising on the path to building peace could frighten them.*”

The ban on abortion was repealed in 1955 - after almost 20 years of prohibition, abortion became legal again. After Stalin's death, the Soviet government revoked the 1936 laws and issued a new law on abortion.

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Russia

WOMEN IN STALIN'S RUSSIA

There were fundamental differences between fascism/Nazism and Marxism/communism over the emancipation and role of women in society.

In 1926, a new Family Code consolidated earlier rights, and also gave women in 'common law' marriages the same rights as those in registered marriages. In Muslim regions, where feudal forms of social structure remained, women were a subject class. The communists raised the minimum age of marriage in these regions to 16 (it was 18 in the European parts of Soviet Russia), and polygamy and bride money were banned. They also organized mass political activity, known as the khudzhum, to mobilise women to oppose traditional practices. At the same time, education was provided equally for both males and females. State nurseries and workplace crèches and canteens were provided to enable mothers to work outside the home.

However, under Stalin some of these reforms and benefits were reduced or removed. Fear of war was growing following Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, and Soviet population growth was in decline. For these reasons, from 1935 Stalin decided on policies to promote 'traditional' family values in order to increase the Soviet population. Although most of the rights established by the 1926 Code remained intact, a new family law was introduced in 1936. This made divorce more difficult, with a rising fee for each divorce, and restricted abortion to those required for medical reasons only. In addition, in order to encourage bigger families and so raise the birthrate, tax exemptions were given to families with large numbers of children. From 1944, only registered marriages were recognized, children born outside marriage were no longer allowed to inherit property from their father, and divorce became even more difficult and expensive. During the Second World War, medals were awarded to mothers with large families and unmarried people were taxed more heavily.

However, women in particular benefited from new welfare reforms introduced under Stalin – a free health service, accident insurance at work, the expansion of kindergartens for working mothers with children, and paid holidays for many workers. Equal educational provision continued. Nonetheless, the provision of sufficient and adequate housing continued to be a problem.

In employment, women had traditionally been found mainly in agriculture, textiles and services. Their position improved considerably under the Bolsheviks, and even more so under Stalin's rule. Women were actively encouraged to play their part in the economic development of Soviet Russia, and all employment was thrown open to women, who had the same rights as men. By 1939, a third of all engineers and 79% of doctors were women. In 1928, the number of women listed as 'workers–employees' had been 2,795,000. By 1939, this had risen to just over 13 million. By 1933, women made up 33% of the industrial workforce, rising to 43% by 1940.

Despite the emphasis on family life during the 1930s, women of all ages continued to work. There were many women 'hero-workers' in the Stakhanovite movement, though in a smaller proportion than men; by 1936, a quarter of all female trade unionists were classified as workers who had exceeded their production targets. However, access to the higher administrative posts was unequal and the patriarchal tradition was still widespread in society, leaving many working women with the bulk of household chores. Despite these realities, the attitude of the Stalinist state to women was very different from that in Nazi Germany. Nazis considered women to be

inferior to men and thought they should be confined mainly to domestic concerns. Communists believed in total equality between the sexes in education, employment and the law.

DIFFERENT FACTS

Fact 1: Before 1924, the Soviet government had tried to liberate women and establish equality between the genders. Steps were taken to weaken the traditional family, which was seen as contributing to the exploitation of women. Left-feminist Bolshevik leaders such as Alexandra Kollontai pushed hard for this, although Lenin's views were more conservative. Early reforms included free contraceptive advice. Abortion was legalized in 1920 and made available free on demand. Marriages were to be performed in brief civil ceremonies in register offices, and divorce was made much easier – all that was necessary was for one partner to request it.

Fact 2: Many Muslim women removed their veils at mass meetings on International Women's Day, 1927. This continued in the following years and hundreds of women in traditional areas were raped and killed by male fundamentalists for 'outraging' Islamic customs.

Fact 3: By 1934, the divorce rate in Moscow was 37% and there were over 150,000 abortions for every 57,000 live births. Population growth dropped and there was an increase in the number of abandoned children. Between 1923 and 1928, the population had grown by 4 million a year – in 1928, the rate of population growth had been 24%. But from 1928 to 1940, rates of population growth fell almost continuously.

SOURCE: Allan Todd and Sally Waller. History for the IB Diploma. Authoritarian and Single-Party States.

FAMILIES AND WOMEN UNDER STALIN'S RULE

TIME OUTLINE 1928-1953

Stalinist System

- Communist Party controlled decisions having to do with political appointments, economic policy, cultural activities, and foreign relations
- A personal dictatorship with loyalty to a single leader, Stalin
- A pervasive, restrictive system of police controls, forced labor, and violent repression
- A system of forced modernization
- A foreign policy that sought to protect Soviet borders and the Communist ideology

FAMILY ISSUES

Background

- Bolsheviks implemented emancipation from all bonds, despite the one with the Party
- Promoting the State as "one big family"
- People didn't trust one another in Soviet Russia. They all had to be obedient of the state in 100% and were indoctrinated to value the good of the country over any other. Family was no different.

Strategy:

1. Weakening family bonds
2. Strengthening family bonds again

REFORMS

1917-1945 – FOUR GREAT EDICTS

1918:

- Religious marriages replaced with civil marriages - power to the State
- Divorces - either the man or woman in a married couple to pursue divorce and win.
- Unwed mothers received special protection
- All children, whether legitimate or illegitimate, were given equal rights before the law
- Women were granted sexual equality under matrimonial law
- Inheritance of property was abolished

1919 - FIRST EDICT - New legal definitions of family structure, marital and parental relationships, sexual behavior, women's position

1920 - Abortion legalized

1926 - SECOND EDICT - continuation of First Edict

1936 – THIRD EDICT – Return to more traditional model of family and rights and obligations of its members.

"Russian Experiment"

Abortion made illegal.

1940 - Tax on childlessness

1945 - FOURTH EDICT - continuation of Third Edict

According to the 1968 law

"Principles of Legislation on Marriage and the Family of the USSR and the Union Republics", parents are "to raise their children in the spirit of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, to attend to their physical development and their instruction in and preparation for socially useful activity."

CONSEQUENCES

- Weakening family ties + devastation and dislocation caused by the Civil War (1918–21) = 7 million homeless children.
- Government failing to fulfill people's demands to restore family's strength
- Mistrust between people and government
- Destruction of family, collectivization of it, making all state owned

PRAVDA ABOUT WOMEN

"On the Path to a Great Emancipation" March 8th, 1929

"Today is international communist women's day, the international day for working women"

"Working women in capitalist countries. Capitalist "democracy" has not and cannot give freedom to working and laboring women. "

"Only we in the Soviet Union have at hand all of the preconditions and foundations for the complete emancipation of working women. "

"She stands in the most advanced ranks of our working collective in the present-day glorious and productive period of socialist construction. In the factory workshop and at the controls of the state ships, in the cooperatives and at the shooting range, in the nursery school and at the thundering machinery, everywhere the tractors of our increasingly strong state farms and collective farms are plowing the virgin soil of our Soviet land, in the workers' faculties and in courses for the red sisterhood where the proletariat struggles relentlessly to master science, and everywhere that life is in full swing and the anthills of labor are humming—in none of these places have the working women of the Soviet Union been forced into last place.

"Needless to say, without the conscious and active participation of the working woman we will not fulfill the tasks defined by Lenin and by the entire development of the October revolution. "

"We will not achieve the rapid tempo of socialist industrialization if the woman worker turns out to be passive. "

"Recruitment of the best women into the Party and the courageous and steadfast advancement into the soviets, management and cooperative duties, and the governing apparatus—these measures will ensure the actual emancipation of women "

"And not only today, on the red holiday of March 8, should we take note of and strongly emphasize the great challenges facing the women's proletarian movement. "

WOMEN ISSUES

Background

- *Soviet socialism= a critique of the conventional family and its household economy
- *Vladimir Lenin in 1919 - *"It is necessary to be socialized and for women to participate in common productive labor. Then woman will be the equal of man."*
- Women had almost no rights before October Revolution
- "Emancipation" of women was possible only in a socialist system:
 - Women were no longer treated as a kind of domestic property
 - Educational and employment opportunities were offered to men and women equally
 - Women's political involvement was actively encouraged.

REFORMS

1918:

- Code on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship was ratified by the Central Executive Committee
- The constitution declares the principle of equality of the sexes, but it does not contain a clear prohibition of sex-based discrimination
- Generous maternity leave was legally required
- National network of child-care centers was established

1920 -

- 'Emancipation' of women
- Abortion was legalized (the Soviet Union the first country to do so)

1936 - Abortion was banned again until 1955

1940 - Tax on childlessness

THE WOMEN'S DAY

The festival of Women's Day, which was adopted in 1913 by the Bolsheviks. The celebration of this festival shaped the ideal Soviet woman as a strong figure.

CONSEQUENCES

- Attempts to create perfect Bolshevik woman fail
- The constitution declared the principle of equality of the sexes, but it does not contain a clear prohibition of sex-based discrimination.
- Women were still domestic leaders under Stalin's regime
- Bolsheviks originally wanted to reinvent the family, making more of a communal neighborhood environment. Eventually, this changed and more traditional family roles returned.
- Collectivization violating women - the householders
- More women entered the labor force, but they remained concentrated in certain fields, such as medicine, education, and domestic services, which were lower paying
- Propaganda claimed, accurately, that more women sat in the Supreme Soviet than in most democratic countries' legislative bodies combined,

BUT

- Only three women in Politburo (Yekaterina Furtseva, Yelena Stasova (who was later succeeded by Furtseva) and Galina Semyonova)
- To this day, the scope for free choice of occupation or type of work is still restricted for women in the Russia Federation, despite a number of remarks issued by the UN on the topic.

WOMEN IN MILITARY

- Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 - thousands of women who volunteered were turned away.
- Before the severe manpower shortages of 1942, women were prohibited from serving in combat positions. Soviet propaganda put women on the home front
- After several defeats' women are more welcome, but mostly to medical units
- 800,000 women in the Soviet Armed Forces during WW2
- 89 women later on received the Soviet Union highest award, the Hero of Soviet Union
- Soviet propaganda encouraged women to undertake paramilitary civil defense training
- Magazines for proletariat women, such as Rabotnitsa, called upon readers to take up arms like other brave female soldiers - Selective system of the State

EXTRA ORDINARY WOMEN

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

- Great feminist
- The only female member of Lenin's Central Committee
- First female ambassador
- First woman elected to Party's Central Committee *People's Commissar for Public Welfare (after Oct. Rev.)

NADZHDA K. KRUPSKAYA

- Russian revolutionary, writer,
- Educator and Secretary of the Bolshevik Fraction
- Wife and advisor to V.I. Lenin.
- Secretary to the Board of Iskra beginning in 1901.
- In 1917, Inessa Armand, Clara Zetkin, and N. K. Krupskaya pressured Russia officials to sanction International Women's Day.

This text comes from a PREZI presentation: <https://prezi.com/fbyls-omgofi/family-and-women-under-stalins-rule/>

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