They throw pebbles in our garden: Women and consumerism in the Soviet Union from Lenin to Khrushchev

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They Throw Pebbles in Our Garden:
Women and Consumerism in the Soviet Union from Lenin to Khrushchev

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Master’s Thesis
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Introduction

The Soviet Union faulted on many founding principles of the ideology on which it was based; luxuries, class divides, and consumerism permeated a Socialist system intent on building communism. These Socialist capitulations, which were introduced as benevolences for the people, in fact expedited the fall of the Soviet Union. Unable to fulfill its promises for abundance, particularly in the realm of modern fashions and conveniences, the Soviet Union resorted to false advertising and empty assurances of its growth. Khrushchev’s regime, which lasted from 1954-1964, was an exceptionally intriguing time for women involved in the Cold War conflict. The Khrushchev regime, as a culmination of previous Soviet attitudes, had to forge ahead in a Socialist state where social inequities became part of the culture. Khrushchev attempted to ameliorate some of the disadvantageous political and economic conditions, which existed for much of the population, and became a utilitarian reformer and revisionist in his own right. However, Khrushchev was also put to the test with a continued rivalry with the non-Soviet world; Khrushchev needed the Soviet Union to emanate and expedite economic health and strength.

The quality of life for women became a contentious standard in the Cold War competition and was monitored attentively during the Khrushchev era. Hence, in the Soviet Union, women’s desires and needs became a barometer for the health of the nation. Furthermore, women and youth were seen as a volatile variable in the stability of the regime; their susceptibility toward materialism (and the West) was considered potentially destructive.
The Khrushchev era exhibited the starkest contrast in the average lifestyle for women in the Cold War. In the West, women were experiencing a return to traditional gender roles, betraying the progress begun through their activity and work during World War II, and portrayed their Cold War patriotism through staying at home and nurturing American, anti-subversive, nuclear family values. In the Soviet Union, women were consistently encouraged to work and educate themselves with the same rights and responsibilities as men. In fact, women’s equality was a major campaigning issue that began with the Bolsheviks, and later became a matter of pride, even a propaganda tool, for the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, while Soviet women were encouraged to seek education, work, and champion their equality, American women were enjoying a pampered lifestyle with more conveniences, amenities, and abundance that threatened women’s satisfaction with the Soviet structure.

Khrushchev’s regime believed that historic and contemporary riots and revolts by the Soviet populace directly related to inadequate consumerism and their inability to purchase the goods and products needed to satisfy their needs. Hence, Khrushchev promised the post-Stalin era an overall improvement in living standards as he became oversensitive to Western advancement, figuratively proclaiming that capitalists “throw pebbles in my garden” to mock the floundering material state of the Soviet Union.\(^1\) My research investigates consumerism and gender in the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era—Khrushchev’s policies of material and consumer gain and its relation to the anxiety of satisfying Soviet women and upholding a competitive image and lifestyle, and the state’s attempts at reconciling its reforms with socialist ideology.

My research explores the Soviet government’s stance on women’s issues following the Bolsheviks’ campaign to attain full equality for women, and the actual realization of this goal. I

\(^1\) Segei Khrushchev, ed. Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 387.
have combined research on consumption and gender. However, my research also attempts to
examine ideological reasoning and official party justification to Marxist-Leninist reforms that
allowed for stratification. I investigate the methods that Khrushchev used to create Post-Stalinist
systemic alterations during his regime and the objective behind his motives. I depict the
increased consumerism in this era of peaceful competition with the West, how these materialistic
enhancements related to women, and reveal insights into the discouraging reality of life for
women, even amid the consumer improvements of this era. Furthermore, I discuss how material
well-being varied significantly by social strata, as well as by republics and satellites. Material
imbalance, in all its forms, created the conditions that initiated the demise of the Soviet Union.

**Historiography**

Susan E. Reid, Professor of Russian Visual Culture at the University of Sheffield in
South Yorkshire, England, created the historiographical foundation on which my research was
built. Reid edited collections of essays in works such as *Women in the Khrushchev Era,*
*Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc,* *Style and Socialism: Modernity
and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe,* *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in
the Eastern Bloc,* and *Women in the Khrushchev Era.* Reid also wrote numerous articles such as:
“Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the making of Cozy Homes in the Khrushchev
Era,” and “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the
Soviet Union under Khrushchev.”

Reid’s work combines the spheres of consumerism and gender studies in the Khrushchev
period. For instance, the essays in *Pleasures in Socialism* relate to the expansion of commodities
in the post-Stalin era, while noting that Khrushchev attempted to regulate and balance
consumption based on Socialist principles while peacefully competing with the United States. The essay entitled “Dior in Moscow: A taste for luxury in Soviet Fashion under Khrushchev” by Larissa Zakharova argues that peaceful competition with the West inspired the Soviet Union to attempt to mimic luxury goods such as elegant fashions. Zakharova states that in order for the Soviet Union to present Socialism as a favorable, worthy option to the West, it needed to offer worthy options as alternatives to idolize, comparable to Western luxurious items and fashions.

The Soviet Union introduced its designers to French fashion models, held fashion shows (which Khrushchev once attended) and hosted various exhibitions that displayed and introduced products from the West. The rare luxuries that did become available to people within the Soviet Union were often sold at exclusive retailers and at prices out of range for the majority. In this way, the Soviet Union was able to advertise its capability for luxury, yet maintain exclusivity for obtaining these amenities, which were reserved for the Socialist elite.

The historiography of consumerism and its social implications originated with the work of Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*. Investigating the relationship between labor, product, and consumer, Marx deduced that the capitalist places social value on a commodity in accordance to its price, and not its labor value. Hence, capitalist society has managed to glorify money, and the commodity as its symbol, versus the spirit of labor that it took to create the products. The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood delves deeper into the study of how consumerism affects society by illustrating how people use goods as a form of communication, and how these goods and this form of communication create

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societal nuances.\(^5\) *Acknowledging Consumption*, edited by Daniel Miller, reviews theories, critical analyses and the latest research on consumerism through a broader, interdisciplinary examination.\(^6\) *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*, also edited by anthropology Professor Daniel Miller, contains theoretical outlooks and case-studies on the impact of consumerism through a macro and micro level, and various illuminating experiences with the production and consumption of goods.\(^7\) *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local*, by the same editor, explores how global institutions such as beauty contests, bureaucracy, soap operas, and business, affect different cultures and regions. This work creates an understanding for how the incorporation of these foreign, yet global elements engage with more traditional, local cultures.\(^8\)

Furthermore, I have surveyed works specific to the histories of Russian and Soviet consumption. For instance, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* by Catriona Kelly revealed Russia’s relationship to the West through the advice literature that sought to refine Russians under Western standards for generations\(^9\). The advice literature reflected evolving attitudes toward the acquisition of possessions, and appropriate behavior. This work depicted the complicated, cultural entanglement that Russian society developed with the appeal of the West. In addition, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* by Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* by Jukka Gronow, and *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* by Svetlana Boym, probe into the complex

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history of the intricacies of Russian/Soviet culture and consumption.\textsuperscript{10} These works bring clarity to the various consumer dealings and norms of Russian/Soviet people, their aesthetic choices, and how this has formed their identity and culture. Through a lens of both everyday life, and government authority, these works demonstrate the ranging influence of consumption on Russian/Soviet culture and attitude.

I employ the works of social/cultural theorists Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu, and the collection of essays in Victoria de Grazia’s and Ellen Furlough’s *The Sex of Things*, to comprehend the general sociological significance of consumer behavior, its history, and its symbolic, social value, in order to disclose the significance of materialism, and how its influence can shift and inform power relations. Consumer theory is applied to the Soviet case in *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* by Herbert Marcuse, which offers a Marxist study of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{11} This work discusses the development and progression of the Soviet Union through a Marxist perspective, notably emphasizing the existence of a non-Soviet world as a crucial element of its survival. Marcuse illustrates that Soviet ideological or political revisions were grounded on Marxist-Leninist intention, and how, on the other hand, authoritarian control has created a repressive regime concentrated on augmenting state power by neglecting the individual and the proletariat.

The historiography of Soviet Women’s history is a separate, but equally valuable foundation for my research. Pioneered by Russian cultural historian Richard Stites, Soviet women’s studies originated through his work *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*, in which Stites provided an analytical study of


Russian women from Nicholas I to Stalin. Soviet historian Elizabeth A. Wood contributed to the historiography further with *The Baba and the Comrade*, which delivers an overview of the Russian women’s question prior to October 1917, while focusing on 1917 to 1924, and the initial engagements Russian women had with the policies of the Bolsheviks. Wood argues that the Bolsheviks’ main interest was to utilize women in their proselytizing, while they managed to evade gender parity by applying traditional female gender roles in the public sphere.

Carnegie Mellon University history professor Wendy Goldman published two important works on women in Soviet history. Goldman’s work, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Policy and Social Life*, deconstructs the realities that women suffered in the first twenty years of the Soviet Union’s existence. Goldman’s other work on women’s Soviet history, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin’s Russia*, argues that Stalin’s state favored women entering the workforce for capital accumulation, but was not interested in female rights or interests, as male managers, union members, and party official domineered over women’s economic fate. The history of peasant women has also built a strong foundational knowledge for my research of the woman’s question. *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period* by Christine Worobec illuminates the traditional, ingrained Russian peasant family values and customs by analyzing previously unexamined judicial, folklore, and household records. Worobec demonstrates that active community participation in peasant tradition informed peasant tenacity against modernization. Frances Lee Bernstein’s *The Dictatorship of Sex* contends that although

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seeking “Socialist enlightenment,” the USSR was built on firmly traditional gender roles.\textsuperscript{17} Bernstein argues that the search after the revolution to define appropriate sexual behavior resulted in only affirming conservative gender norms that existed prior to the states’ inception. Integrated, these principal works reveal the innumerable obstacles the Soviet Union would incur in attempting to enforce egalitarianism. The difficulties and consequences the Soviet Union faced in constructing social parity will be discussed in the first chapter; as a result of its weak Socialist foundation, the Soviet Union began to fragment together its policies and structure, and after the acute miseries of the first years of the Soviet Union’s existence, the Soviet populace began to grow accustomed to discontent.

\textsuperscript{17}Francis Lee Bernstein. \textit{The Dictatorship of Sex}. Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, 2007.
Chapter One

A Mistake of the Privileged: the Woman’s Question and the Bolshevik Party

Prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917, which overthrew the Czar, women’s issues and activism were demarcated according to class interests, with working women and peasant women mostly avoiding politicking; this divide also existed amongst the Social-Democratic party, which drew its female members mostly from the educated, upper-classes. However, the Social-Democrats slowly envisaged revolutionary potential in the disunity of the general feminist movement in Russia, which was caused by lower class women’s alienation from the middle and upper class Feminists, and with passionate working class spokespersons such as Alexandra Kollontai, gradually attempted to persuade more lower class women to join the Social-Democratic cause instead of remaining loyal to the Russian feminists in the fight for full equality. The Russian Imperial feminist movement presents an interesting timeline. In the beginning of the women’s movement, Russian women had achieved unrivaled rights for their gender, particularly in education, in comparison with some of the most progressive European nations. Unfortunately, due to changes in government and a lack of cohesion between different socio-economic classes, the feminist movement in Russia was unable to continue its progressive momentum. These class factions became a heavy problem for the Russian feminists, who began to lose their influence and relevance as divides between the classes deepened; the Revolution of 1905 added to the rift as dynamic shifts and a surges of diverse activism increased discontent with the status quo.
The growth of large industries had brought women heavily into the workforce, where they faced different concerns; “bourgeois feminism”, as the Social-Democrats coined it, began to look less and less appealing for the working-class woman dealing with severe workplace injustice. The Social-Democrats, the Party based on the writings of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, emerged as an underground and illegal body agitating against the Tsarist government and championing a different kind of equality than the Russian feminists advocated for, an equality based on the elimination of class-systems, and the whole, discriminatory régime. The Social-Democrats claimed that eliminated capital would bring complete equality to women, and not an insufficient equality based on their social class. Working women would not have to endure subordination to working class men, or the bourgeois women ignorant of their sufferings. Their inclusive rhetoric and proselytizing compelled certain feminist members, those who were not bound to the bourgeois class, to lean toward the Social-Democrat left, which seemed perhaps more liberating and appealing than the increasingly unconnected bourgeoisie. However, in actuality, once the old Tsarist system was demolished after the Bolshevik Russian Revolution in October of 1917, poverty and devastation would rein on an unparalleled scale, affecting women and children with particular brutality.

*Gender Equality: Socialist Solutions*

Although women from different classes experienced various degrees of oppression and discrimination, as a whole, women in Russia all faced discriminatory inheritance rights, restricted guardianship rights, retributive divorce laws, and a barbaric internal passport system (used for travel, employment, and renting a residence) that legally subjected married women to
seek the approval of their husbands before obtaining a permit they needed for their basic needs. These discriminations received specific attention from prevalent Socialist theorists such as Frederich Engels, August Bebel, Vladimir Illich Lenin and Clara Zetkin, who all built off of Karl Marx’s concepts of the fluidity of social systems and the structures that uphold them. Understanding these leading theories on the liberation of women and the expected role of women in a Socialist society are fundamental in order to observe Soviet policy variation of Socialist theory and the realities for women in a nation that claimed Socialist equality.

Karl Marx disseminated theories that advanced the abolition of private property, which he argued pitted people into unjust class systems that continued to perpetuate and exacerbate disparity. In his writings, Marx advocated sweeping structural changes that would annihilate private property and completely revolutionize the social order. In his “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx enumerated how mankind’s progress may be judged by observing the relationship between men and women:

The direct, natural and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man to woman. In this natural relationship of the sexes, man’s relation to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature—his own natural function. In this relationship, therefore, is sensuously manifested, reduced to an observable fact, the extent to which the human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature has to him become the human essence of man. From this development one can therefore judge man’s whole level of development. It follows from the character of this relationship how much man as a species being, as man, has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being…Communism as the positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being…this communism, as fully-developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution

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of strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species.\textsuperscript{19}

Marx conceptualized that the relationship between men and women, as it is most inherent in mankind, can be used as a barometer for the progress of society; Communism, at the apex of civilization, according to Marx, engenders fulfilling, fully-realized relationships between men and women that translate to an enlightened society for all. Marx believed that capitalism produces a desire to objectify, monetize, and possess; a debasement, which informs everything from political processes to marriage; capitalism causes detachment from the integrity of work, which affects the quality of human relations. A scholar of human exchanges through the lens of economics, Marx whetted down male and female interaction to its designed purpose, which he claimed stood highest on the hierarchy of humanity’s needs. The level of inorganic alienation between the genders can thus stand as a symbol of the extent that other factors have contributed to create this distance. Hence, it is implied that Marx views Communism as the blossoming of human relations, where every individual, including women, lives with purpose in a meaningful life that satisfies their potential. Without the exploitation brought on by a false system, the acrimonious relations of humanity are resolved, reflected foremost in the most basic exchange between men and women. Marx’s insights on gender relations are profound and progressive, yet his theory dodges practicalities and logistics. Although theoretically this gender dynamic seems plausible, the commodification that has developed between genders has had a complex history long before modern society, and this objectification may arguably serve important evolutionary purposes, for men and women alike. Not delving into the details of how these human advancements would be established and reified, Marx chose to pass off the responsibility of planning to the working class as a whole. In an essay entitled “Alienation and the Social

Classes,” Marx wrote: “…the proletariat itself can and must liberate itself. But it cannot liberate itself without destroying its own living conditions. It cannot do so without destroying all the inhuman living conditions of contemporary society which are concentrated in its own situation.”

Wide-scale destruction was Marx’s limited advice for the end of the abominable state of the proletariat and fractured human relations. Marx’s continual emphasis on the abysmal human circumstances of contemporary society, in need of total economic and social reformation, encouraged other discussions by Social-Democrats on the significance of family life and women’s position in it.

Frederick Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, written after Karl Marx’s death, details the effects of commodity production and an economically based class and state system on the family. Engels discusses broad stages of human development, with monogamy as the standard form of marriage in the latest stage of human evolution. Monogamy, Engles claims, was informed by capitalism, which tailored all social systems for the benefit of men and their individual wealth.

Hence, Engels proclaimed, women were subjected to dependence on men and thus allowed foul liberties within their marriage. Engels, like Marx, believed that adultery and prostitution resulted from these loose capitalistic values, which plagued men and women alike. The solution, Engels proposed, lay in eliminating individual wealth through a social revolution which would refocus values in a more ethical direction. He writes:

> For with the transformation of the means of production into social property there will disappear also wage labor, the proletariat, and therefore the necessity for a certain—statistically calculable—number of women to surrender themselves for

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money. Prostitution disappears; monogamy, instead of collapsing, at last becomes a reality—also for men. In any case, therefore, the position of men will be very much altered. But the position of women, all women, also undergoes significant change. With the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike, whether they are legitimate or not. This removes all the anxiety about the “consequences,” which today is the most essential social—moral as well as economic—factor that prevents a girl from giving herself completely to the man she loves…if now the economic considerations also disappear which made women put up with the habitual infidelity of their husbands—concern for their own means of existence and still more for their children’s future—then, according to all previous experience, the equality of woman thereby achieved will tend infinitely more to make men really monogamous than to make women polyandrous.  

Engels directly revealed Socialist visions for women’s equality and the methods to obtain their social leveling. Economic dependence, rationalized as the direct cause for female inferiority, was theorized to disappear in a Socialist society where the nuclear family based on individual wealth would evolve into a shared social system of mutual aid and responsibility, where every person, man or woman, would contribute as equal citizens for the betterment of the whole civilization. Once again, similar to Marx’s theory, Engels’ is overly optimistic, and focused on relieving gender, particularly marital strife, without the acknowledgment that the existent interrelationship might be continuously relevant and valuable for women who might have different aims for their preferred balance. Women, without having had a truly autonomous experience in modern society, were not equipped with the skills to securely switch to an extreme social system that gave women liberty, but also full responsibility. Marx’s and Engles’ theories relied only on the assumption that the Socialist system would improve women’s condition.

August Bebel, another internationally recognized, leading German Socialist and founder of the German Social-Democratic Party, published his work *Women in the Past, Present and*
Future in 1879, a few years prior to Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which evidently established woman’s equality as a major platform for Socialist politicians and theorists. At the time that Bebel published his work, neither Marx nor Engels had yet attempted to methodically extrapolate Socialist theories to solutions of the woman’s question, hence Bebel’s *Women in the Past, Present and Future*, although lesser known, was groundbreaking and foundational for the Party. In briefly illuminating Socialist intentions for women in the future, Bebel prescribed the following ideals:

The woman of future society is socially and economically independent; she is no longer subject to even a vestige of dominion and exploitation; she is free, the peer of man, mistress of her lot. Her education is the same as that of man, with such exceptions as the difference of sex and sexual functions demand. Living under natural conditions, she is able to unfold and exercise her mental powers and faculties. She chooses her occupation on such field as corresponds her wishes, inclinations and natural abilities, and she works under conditions identical with man’s.  

Bebel wrote extensively on woman’s issues, and considered female degradation as one of the greatest evils of capitalist society. Bebel discussed the inequities women faced in a bourgeois society, and disclosed many in the area of employment. With sympathetic interest, Bebel detailed the exploitations of women entering the workforce in staggering numbers with appallingly low wages. Bebel disclaimed that married working women became invaluable employees; with children’s dependence weighing most heavily on female hearts, women often became ideal workers—attentive, focused, willing to submit to additional burdens, and docile. Bebel writes: “In general, the working woman ventures only exceptionally to join her fellow-toilers in securing better conditions of work: that raises her value in the eyes of the employer; not infrequently she is even a trump card in his hands against refractory workingmen…woman finds

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from year to year an ever wider field for her application—but, and this is the determining factor, without tangible improvement to her social condition.²⁴ Bebel, thus, preconceived of the issue which would later alienate the Bolsheviks from working class women in their efforts to proselytize on behalf of the proletariat. Aggravating those claiming to fight on her behalf, the working class woman often avoided joining efforts to incite political or social change and often attempted to persuade others to follow suit; she was therefore widely ignored by the Bolshevik Party. Socialist visions prescribed to her future were often not working class women’s ideals, but the ideals invented by theorists that were championed most often by women of removed classes and backgrounds. Proletarian women’s equality became a major platform for the Bolshevik Party to champion internationally as one of their greatest causes, although it was not sanctioned by the majority of Russian working class women themselves.

Heavily influenced by Bebel’s and Engels’ work on women and the family, fellow German Clara Zetkin, and the first woman to serve in the party executive of the German Social-Democrats, became a leading advocate for women’s equality under the banner of Socialism and the long-time editor of the Social-Democratic women’s journal, Die Arbeiterin (Working Woman), which later became Die Gleichteit (Equality). Zetkin zealously devoted her mission to disseminating the superiority of the proletarian women’s movement to the feminist cause, which Zetkin viewed as a superficial remedy to women’s issues that necessitated deep structural changes. However, the journal was criticized for its highbrow nature and made to incorporate, along with its usual content, supplemental material accessible for housewives and children.²⁵ Zetkin felt her most crucial role was educating leading women already paving the way for

²⁴ Ibid., 167-68.
women’s liberation and encouraging them to choose Socialist agendas in their struggle for women’s rights. Hence, Zetkin consistently worked to incorporate women’s suffrage and the vote for women in state and national legislative bodies into the official Social-Democratic party program.\textsuperscript{26} Fervently committed to women’s equal rights, Zetkin was exceptionally devoted to the Socialist cause in her resolute belief that the Socialist medium was the force capable of constructing genuine equality for women. Thus, Zetkin worked without enervation to tarnish the feminist movement and sought to dissolve their collaboration with the Social-Democrats.\textsuperscript{27} With her faith in the Socialist party’s capabilities to establish equality for women, Zetkin was an instrumental and vital cause in influencing the Socialist Party to sanction women’s right to work, as many Socialist men remained skeptical about the effects of a potential influx of women into the workforce. More employees, regardless of the integrity of Socialist equality, meant more completion for work, and fewer wages. Zetkin also helped approve a program for the existence of special organs for women’s political education within the Socialist parties, and was a strong advocate for Socialist political tutelage of women industrial workers, believing this was a necessary step in improving women’s situation while simultaneously advancing the entire labor movement.\textsuperscript{28}

Zetkin increasingly found discriminatory attitudes and practices in the German Social-Democratic party’s stance toward the female minority and grew more and more vexed with the party. Zetkin’s frustrations were not an exaggeration; throughout Europe the Socialist workers’ movement was resistant in accepting female labor. In 1863 in Germany, the LaSalle’s Workers’


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 238.
Association was formed on the premise that it would exclude women from the labor force; the Socialist party in Italy, which was established in 1892, ignored women’s issues to attract the conservative trade union movement.\textsuperscript{29} Zetkin’s disillusionment with the German Social-Democratic Party intensified. The German Social-Democratic Party became resolute in following a revisionary direction, compromising with the capitalist system in order to avoid the severity of a Marxist call-to-arms; the German Social-Democratic Party also voted in favor of the First World War, which, as an imperialist war, was an unforgivable grievance to Socialist aims.\textsuperscript{30} Zetkin viewed Marx’s principles and theories as the direct bridge to women’s equality, and their desertion among the German Social Democratic party was, in her eyes, heretical. In 1909, in an essay from her journal \textit{Die Gleicheit} entitled “What the Women Owe to Karl Marx,” Zetkin discussed Marx’s contributions to the women’s cause:

To be sure, Marx never dealt with the women’s question “per se” or “as such.” Yet he created the most irreplaceable and important weapons for the women’s fight to obtain all of their rights. His materialist concept of history has not supplied us with any ready-made formulas concerning the women’s question, yet it has done something much more important: It has given us the correct, unerring method to explore and comprehend that question. It was only the materialist concept of history which enabled us to understand the women’s question within the flux of universal historical development and the light of universally applicable social relationships and their historical necessity and justification…The old superstition that the position of women in the family and in society was forever unchangeable was smashed. Marx revealed that the family, like all other institutions and forms of existence, is subjected to a constant process of ebb and flow which changed with the economic conditions and the property relationships which result from them…But something else is clearly illustrated by Marx’s works: The proletariat is the only revolutionary class which by establishing Socialism, is able to and must create the indispensable prerequisites for the complete solution of the women’s question.\textsuperscript{31}


Clara Zetkin, by subscribing to Marx’s theories on the economic dictate of social relations, believed that the problem and solution to female equality also lay in economic structuring. Zetkin assumed that the hierarchical relations under capitalism caused the subjugated role of women, and not that women were subjugated by other, more historical and traditional forces that existed without capitalism. Zetkin full-heartedly embraced Socialism as the remedy for women’s ills.

Zetkin eventually left the German Social-Democratic Party for the German Communist Party, serving as a member of its central committee from 1919 to 1927, and was appointed International Secretary of Communist Women in 1920. Zetkin eventually found Socialist solace through Lenin’s politics. Lenin’s concern with the woman’s question and his parallel views on forming supportive organizations specifically centered on women’s issues encouraged Zetkin’s vision and lifelong mission, and Zetkin later moved to the Soviet Union where she died in 1933. Nevertheless, Zetkin’s trials and tribulations with the German Social Democratic party foreshadowed the challenges of establishing gender equality even amongst Socialist male laborers and politicians. Egalitarianism is a philosophical idealization, especially if it fully includes women, and applying such theories realistically would, with no doubt, result in grave consequences for many people, particularly the historically subjugated sex.

Indeed, as Clara Zetkin’s champion, Lenin sincerely supported full equality for women, and his views were clearly reflected in a draft of the constitution of the Russian democratic republic, written months before the October Revolution that finally gave the Bolsheviks victory and turned the Provisional government of Russia into a Socialist state. The constitution included:

32 Ibid., 39.
33 Ibid., 39-41.
universal suffrage for all citizens, men and women alike; equal rights for all citizens irrespective of sex, creed, race, or nationality; a statutory, weekly uninterrupted rest period of not less than forty-two hours for all wage-workers of both sexes in all branches of the national economy; complete prohibition of overtime work; prohibition of female labor in all branches of industry injurious to women’s health; prohibition of night work for women; women were to be released from work eight weeks before and eight weeks after child-birth, without loss of pay and with free medical and medicinal aid; the establishment of nurseries for infants and young children, and rooms for nursing mothers at all factories and other enterprises where women are employed; nursing mothers were to be allowed recesses of at least a half-hour duration at intervals of not more than three hours; such mothers were to receive nursing benefits and their working day to be reduced to six hours; full social insurance of for all forms of disablement, namely, sickness, injury, infirmity, old age, occupational disease, child-birth, widowhood, orphan-hood, and also unemployment; and, the establishment of a labor of inspectorate elected by the workers’ organizations and covering all enterprises employing hired labor, as well as domestic servants; women inspectors were to be appointed in enterprises where female labor is employed.34 In this remarkably ambitious program, Lenin took extensive care to ensure women were protected in the constitution, particularly in employment and labor. Lenin believed the capitalist system exploited women workers and caused the general degradation they experienced, which was akin to slavery or feudalism. Lenin wrote of the perpetual cycle of humiliation that woman experienced under capitalism, a cycle that capitulated in the abuse of their bodies all in the name of providing for their survival: “...as long as wage slavery exists, prostitution must inevitably continue. Throughout the history of society all the oppressed and exploited classes have always been compelled (their exploitation consists in this) to hand over to the oppressors, first their unpaid

labor and, secondly, their women to be the concubines of the “masters.” Wage-slavery, according to Lenin, was desperately low remuneration that forced workers to live in a panicked state of perplexity; their degradation and brute-like existence became necessity in order to fight for survival. It was thus, Lenin proclaimed, that the worker was kept debased, unable to flourish, to fight for their rights, and to demand justice. In 1919 Lenin would later boast: “Bourgeois democracy is the democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, lavish promises and high-sounding slogans about *freedom* and *equality*, but in practice all this cloaks the lack of freedom and the inequality of women, and the lack of freedom and the inequality for the working and exploited people. Soviet or Socialist democracy sweeps away these pompous but false words and declares ruthless war on the hypocrisy of ‘democrats’, landowners, capitalists and farmers with bursting bins who are piling up wealth by selling surplus grain to the starving workers at speculation prices.” Lenin’s concept of Socialism was fundamentally linked to women’s equality; women’s issues represented the ultimate wrong that only Socialism could resolve—oppression and coercion of the defenseless. In order to succeed in the complete rehabilitation of women as equal, contributive citizens, Lenin, in addition to legal rights, commanded a fundamental restructuring of the family. The full emancipation of women required liberation from their domestic loads of petty housework and only an unprecedented undertaking of Socialist proportions, Lenin derived, could implement the extent of transformation required to create equality for women. Women needed to gain economic independence and become full participants in both society and industry in order to develop as individuals and members of civilization. Under Socialism, society would become one entity sharing in household responsibilities and childrearing, while monogamy would be based only on love, because

economic dependence would evaporate without the existence of private property. No longer trapped by their extra burdens and dependencies, women would flourish.

*The Woman’s Question in Russia in the Late Imperial Era*

Women’s issues were initially brought to the surface in Russia with the reign of Alexander II. Upon his accession to power in 1855, Alexander II immediately engaged in debate over the serf issue, a polemical topic in the nation.³⁷ Women’s issues became linked to serf reform and liberation—how could a society liberate its citizens while half of its population remained without crucial human rights? Women’s and society’s liberation remained a linked issue, particularly for working women. This link became a greatly influential factor in the feminist movement; developing a separate, unified women’s liberation force would prove difficult when women’s needs were conflated with society’s desperate needs for holistic reform. Ultimately it was this obstacle—women’s issues colliding against the push for full societal reform—that made the Russian women’s movement more susceptible to absorption from radical political groups such as the Social-Democrats.

Large manufacturing dramatically changed the demographic of the Russian population; women were hired alongside men, and became a stronger entity in the working class. Beginning to face new concerns as independent wage earners, working class and peasant women’s lives further separated them from interest in the feminist movement. By 1885 women already formed 30 percent of the manual workforce, and in 1899 the proportion had risen to 44 percent of the manual workforce, 660,000 out of a total of one and a half million.³⁸ Women’s infiltration into the workforce and the migration of women into the cities created opportunities for collaboration

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³⁸ Ibid., 22.
with men’s organizations, and it also sparked the beginning of women’s inclusion into political activism.

Due to the breakdown of the serf system in 1861, which no longer involuntarily tied peasants to their landlords, poorer gentry migrated to the cities. Cities began to rapidly develop and expand; this exodus altered women’s position as well, for larger numbers of women had to adapt and learn to subsist on their own. The change in the economic system left more women fending for themselves; the poorer gentry that once supported various domestic female employments (with positions such as governesses) were unable to employ or support these women in their transition to urban life. A general trend ensued, especially in relation to the urban population, of a growth of women attempting to subsist on their own, and of women pursuing and pushing for more opportunities in work and education in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Women awakened to their potential for independent success and grew increasingly impatient with society’s limits. Nevertheless, through their progress, by the 1890s, Russia experienced a renewed expansion of opportunities for women to study and to take up employment on graduation: in 1897 the first medical school for women was inaugurated in St. Petersburg and the next year, women were given greater rights to practice; in addition, the first medical school for women was instated in St. Petersburg and the next year women were given greater rights to practice.40

It was with the 1905 Revolution that women ultimately became stronger activists for female equality; however, the interests of the lower-classes versus the mentality of the upper-class feminists continued to create dichotomies and struggles in building a strong, unified force

39 Linda Harriet Edmondson. Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1984), 12.
40 Ibid., 21.
fighting for women’s equality. The 1905 Revolution, which became notorious for its “Bloody Sunday,” was a wave of rebellions and strikers seeking improved working conditions and civil rights. The 1905 Revolution saw significant increase in the female dedication to the essential matters facing the Russian nation. Hence, thenceforth, women were less likely to conform to societal expectations of complacency and became increasingly more vocal regarding the systemization of female liberation and equality.

The participation of Russian women in Father Gapon’s Assembly of St. Petersburg Factory Workers of 1904, which amassed the city’s workers into a “mutual aid society”, disclosed female might as an equal force to be reckoned with.\footnote{Linda Harriet Edmondson. Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1984), 33-34.} In 1905, Gapon led 85% of the city’s workforce to strike with a day-long march to the Winter Palace, bringing retaliation from government troops that resulted in official estimates of 430 dead and wounded.\footnote{Ibid., 35.} Following the tragedy, women’s political actions accelerated in consequence. A sense of urgency and righteousness empowered the women’s equal rights movement. Two days after the massacre in St Petersburg, a private meeting took place in Voronezh at which 150 women signed a memorandum to the provincial zemstvo [local organ of self-government], urging it to petition for female suffrage “without distinction of class, nationality, or religion.”\footnote{Ibid., 35.} However, as Russian women moved to establish stronger organizations for women’s rights, disagreements mounted with the disparate Feminists--working women showed increase desire to unite with their kin and kith in the working class for a greater liberalization, similar to the united effort of the 1905 Revolution.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] Linda Harriet Edmondson. Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1984), 33-34.
\item[42] Ibid., 35.
\item[43] Ibid., 35.
\end{footnotes}
After the 1905 Revolution, Russian women starting organizing their own unions, however the unions branched off and became focused on class; vast differences formed according to class, and consolidating women into one solidified group remained a constant conundrum. The Russian Women’s Philanthropic Society, one organization that managed to linger from the first wave of Russian feminist activists, had become a weak force in the women’s fight for equality. Initially formed under the philanthropic banner in order to gain sanction from the Tsarist government that opposed political deviation, the Russian Women’s Philanthropic Society had become too complacent to sufficiently address the anxieties of the dawn of the twentieth century. The Russian Women’s Philanthropic Society was an outdated society by the time of the 1905 Revolution; it relied on petitioning ministers and bureaucrats and working within the existing political structure, which lost the organization loyal followers as the nation’s political climate started to ache for reform. It was in this new environment that the All-Russian Union of Equal Rights for Women formed as an attempt to bridge the diverging issues and sects of the women’s movement. In two months the Moscow group was able to establish contact with 18 other groups around the country. The first mass meetings of women in Russian history were held, and cities that established similar inclusive women’s groups multiplied. In Saratov on March 12th, the newly-established Society for Mutual Aid to Working Women held a meeting of 1,000 people, which passed a resolution calling for equal suffrage. Furthermore, women got involved in unions outside of the exclusive focus on women’s rights. The Union of Equal Rights developed a progressive relationship with the Union of Unions, an alliance of various professional groups, which was at its inception stages during 1905. Women activists would pressure newly joined groups to admit the clause “without distinction of sex” into their

44 Ibid., 37.  
45 Ibid.
constitution, and experienced relative success although even liberals sometimes rejected the women’s suffrage movement; nevertheless, in July of 1905, the Union of Unions formally recognized the campaign for women’s rights.\footnote{Linda Harriet Edmondson. \textit{Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917}. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1984), 40-41.} The Peasants’ Union also incorporated women’s suffrage into their platform, and gave the argument that women already often took care of all internal affairs when men were off in search of work; enfranchising women, the argument contended, would only further strengthen the peasant community. Although the women’s rights movement received positive reinforcement from important and formidable unions, other elements still remained which interfered with unifying the suffragists and feminists into a viable cause separate from the Marxists and Social-Democrats. Liberal groups and professionals (and certainly Moderates) often had nebulous attitudes toward women’s interests, and their uncertainty swayed the women’s union into pursuing ties with the Socialist Left, even if not all their political interests aligned. Nevertheless, the cleavages and friction in the fight for women’s equality finally erupted into an official schism in the spring of 1906; many women’s activists left the Feminists to devote their energies to the liberation of society, and not just womankind, through Socialism.\footnote{Ibid.,52.}

The Bolshevik Party fragmented from the Russian Social Democrat Party in 1903, and particularly after the wake of political interest stemming from the 1905 Bloody Sunday massacre and Revolution, it contained a noticeably high number of female converts from the upper-classes. In fact, many women that made up the Bolshevik Party after 1905 were highly educated, and most were literate. These women, such as Aleksandra Kollontai, became influential players in the Bolshevik revolutionary movement and frequently held key roles. Revolutionary fervor in Russia and the rising discontent toward the Tsarist government surrounding the 1905 Revolution
was exacerbated by the continuing lack of upward mobility and a downward spiral in living standards that began to affect the middle classes and nobility as well; in consequence, Russia contained the largest number of female radicals of any other nation in Europe from 1890-1910.\(^48\) The Social Democratic Party and the Social Revolutionary Party, in their peak year of 1907, held 137,000 members and 10% of these were women; approximately 20% of these women were from the nobility or intelligentsia, 60% were a combination of the middle ranks and the nobility, one-third came from working class backgrounds, and 10% were peasants.\(^49\) Hence, the Russian Social-Democrat Party, and accordingly, its Bolshevik factions, contained an exceptionally high percentage of well-educated, bright minds that had veered their loyalties toward the Socialist cause. Poorer classes of women, including the working class and peasantry, remained ambivalent to political organizations such as the Social-Democratic Party where they were welcomed as egalitarian members, because the severity and desperation of their existence prevented these women from getting involved—politics could not provide their critical daily sustenance; men from the working class and peasantry, however, found ways to join in higher percentages than did women. Perhaps because men were not burdened with the same fatiguing double duty that working women had--to labor for wages only to return home for another shift of cleaning and providing domestic comforts for their family--they had more mental energy to apply to political or recreational activities. Hence, the women in the Social Democratic parties did not adequately represent working class women’s needs because they were equipped with an education and the experience of loftier backgrounds, which was superior to that even of its male members.

Bolshevik women, prior to the 1917 Russian Revolution, were mostly educated, privileged members of society and politically active revolutionaries that championed an

\(^{48}\) Clements, Barbara Evans. *Bolshevik Women.* New York: Cambridge University, 1997), 29-32

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
egalitarian society where women would be equal citizens in a capital-less society; ironically, Bolshevik women and Bolsheviks as a party in general, were divided on the issue of proselytizing and including actual working women into their party. The Bolshevik Party, the party that specifically sought egalitarianism and women’s liberation did not raise their efforts to incorporate the women of the classes they were fighting to defend. Furthermore, these radical, advantaged revolutionaries were a miniscule minority amongst Russian women: 18,000 in an empire of 80 million women. Most Russian women, prior to 1917, though probably disgruntled and distressed by the disparity in their country, were unwilling to risk jail time and a precarious life on the run. Of the 72 percent of the female Bolsheviks whose history of imprisonment is available, 61 percent were jailed at least once, 38 percent twice or more. Even the Bolshevik women that came from lower class backgrounds were exceptional; they were literate and displayed a proclivity toward education and political literature. In a nation with a massive female factory work force, one-third of the industrial work force by 1914, the passions and desires of the Bolshevik women were foreign and suspicious to those with lives of hard labor and the double burden. Although the revolutionary fever that took over the country in 1905 encouraged new recruits, in addition to growing political activism amongst certain trade unions, revolutionary vehemence died down after the excitement of the 1905 revolutionary period. 20 percent of Bolshevik women dropped out of the party in the calm political climate after the 1905 Revolution. Hence, although the party adopted egalitarian measures in the function of its underground movement, with women holding important positions, and contributing as equal partners in work and party development, this politically egalitarian life did not provide enough

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51 Ibid., 91.
52 Ibid., 45.
53 Ibid., 57.
fulfillments for many women to remain committed. Moreover, working women failed to see the benefits of egalitarianism under an ominous existence in a radical party. In effect, the Bolsheviks largely ignored working class women until 1905, when political enthusiasm reached all class realms; nevertheless, proselytizing working women remained a divisive issue for the Bolshevik party. Most Bolsheviks considered working class women as a pernicious force that could damage party aims through their conniving tendencies and backwardness; working class women could manipulate their otherwise loyal husbands to follow along to women’s follies and fickle whims. Nevertheless, the Soviet program for women’s emancipation would come from a limited circle of progressive Bolshevik women within the party that encouraged the participation of proletarian women; these women became crucial contributors though they were few in number.

**The Peasant Class: Tradition and Patriarchy**

The existence of 60% of the female party members from the upper, educated ranks of Russian society represents the distaste that the majority of Bolsheviks displayed for lower class women. Hence, a minority party, with its female members chiefly advantaged women, debated and brooded over the fate of a population quite foreign to their comprehension; as a party devoted to the welfare of the working class, the Bolshevik party did not seek to incorporate or understand the actual needs and desires of those at the very bottom—the peasants, the class that developed into the working class. This was precisely because peasants, and women of the peasant class, were deeply entrenched in the traditional, Russian rural mentality, where women were subordinate to their husbands, men, the village commune, and the Russian Orthodox Church. Delving into a discussion of the Russian peasant women population is fundamentally important to understanding the complexities surrounding the Bolshevik or Feminist platform for women’s equality. Russian peasant women were the largest demographic of women, and their
engagement with the overarching society prior to the Russian Revolution depicts the difficulties that would arise with gender equality throughout the Soviet period.

Women workers, entering the factory workforce in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, had mostly peasant origins. As peasant land became more unsustainable, peasants left, starting with men for partial portions of the year, to find outside employment off their arable land. Burdened with heavy taxes, the peasant communities constantly struggled. In the 1870s, peasants felt the effects of industrialization, which struck their communities the hardest; by the 1880s, the peasant household could seldom support itself solely within its community.54 Men in the peasant communes initially left their villages to seek outside employment first due to women’s ties to the daily care of children and the hearth, men were also more likely to receive larger remuneration for their labors. The women who stayed behind picked up the tasks reserved for men, and worked creating what handicrafts or textiles that they could sell for extra funds. By 1900, in the central industrial region of Russia, only 6 percent of peasant families survived by the cultivation of their plots alone.55 In larger numbers, men began to abandon their peasant communities and families, while women also started to leave their villages permanently as the industrial landscape offered increasing opportunities. Even in the most prosperous agricultural region of the black earth provinces, most of the peasants turned to factory work in the cities; by 1912, 130,000 peasants remained in the factories compared to 34,389 that stayed behind in the villages to work in the fields and sell their homemade crafts.56

The peasant culture shifted and evolved; a large population of its community moved to the city,

56 Ibid.,65.
the strong connection to the land, which united the village and created its traditions, was
indefinitely altered. Nevertheless, peasant values and beliefs were part of an ancient culture that
sat deeply-rooted and entrenched in the mindset of those migrating out of their traditional
communities into the cities and factories, and this was a value-system based on a methodical
patriarchy ingrained in every member of the community.

Peasants lived communally, each sharing in the burden of taxes and fees that were often
arbitrarily imposed on their communities after the emancipation legislation of serfs in 1861.
Nevertheless, this tax helped to reinforce the collective system that the peasants abided by in
order to meet needs after sacrificing much of their sustenance to taxes. Each member of the
peasant village was answerable to another in the hierarchy of family, community and church.
The system was designed by mutual aid, where arable land was rotated amongst families for
equal contribution and labor; households often held multiple families, and a village assembly
presided over all affairs. Personal possessions were incredibly few, and shunning any form of
participation in the community was considered the greatest sin. Most importantly, the peasant
system of mutual responsibility, at its core, contained unwavering, deeply entrenched and often
sadistic patriarchy. Daughters were considered poor investments in a community focused on
farming land, where marriage matches did not often offer anything of significance for families of
the bride. This society based on male dominance and fraternity is best illustrated by the often
neglectful treatment of widows. As these peasant communities existed through pillars of mutual
support, widows often had to forfeit their allotments without the presence of a male head of
household because ensuring that land work was communally maximized took priority over the
well-being of individuals; the fear of destitution for all took precedence over the misfortune of
one. Although women were considered valuable partners with their domestic reign and child-rearing, they were completely controlled by men; their subjugation was enforced judicially and physically, which was all reinforced through traditions, teachings, and hierarchy. Village delegation and communal politics were reserved exclusively for men; men presided over all economic and public affairs in a patriarchal system that had sustained itself for centuries. The Orthodox Church bolstered this system of subjugation; it propagated that women were inferior due to their inclination toward sexual promiscuity and claimed that female bodies were vessels of infestation. Furthermore, religious services in the peasant villages were facilitated to relegate women to subordinate, repressed roles; men and women were segregated in church proceedings, all women were banned from entering the holy sanctuary because their presence would sully the sacred space. Menstruation was viewed as the pinnacle of filth, reinforcing the sinful nature of womankind; the Russian Orthodox Church upheld myths that menstruation signified women’s fornication with the devil. Hence, menstruating women were banned from taking communion, and only postmenopausal women could bake bread for communion. The Russian Orthodox Church bolstered the peasant’s patriarchal system and vice versa, because each depended on a delicate hierarchy maintained only by communal consent. A threat to one man’s authority challenged the authority of the village, the church, and the communal system. The communal system and its structure of authority was the only reality for Russian peasants (who were serfs

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 186.
61 Ibid.
before emancipation) for centuries, and its ancient rituals and traditions, no matter how debased, were the culture and setting of home for millions of Russian women.

Peasant women very infrequently united in their efforts against the ruthlessness of male dominance; in fact, women often respected and fully participated in all of the intricacies of peasant life and tradition. The frailty of the communal system resulted in a punitive system that embraced a strong work ethic and chastised weakness, laziness or apathy; both genders were reprimanded for certain behaviors. Hence, despotism over certain members of the community for the benefit of the village as a whole was a common, sympathized justification for innumerable wrongs, which most often included wife beatings. Women moved into the home of their in-laws upon marriage, most often into an extended or multiple-family home, and were the lowest members on the family totem pole; if she did not bear children and her husband left for an extended period, the in-law family would sometimes cease providing for her. Most often at the mercy of these merciless in-laws, these women were subjugated to the harshest chores and often to physical or sexual abuse by their father in-law; in fact, this occurred so often that the term “snokhachestvo” developed as a label for the amoral act. The wedding process and ritual itself were designed to symbolically reinforce the suppression reified throughout the life of a Russian Peasant woman. During the lengthy ceremonial wedding process, the bride was monitored to portray her complaisance by allowing her groom to take the first steps in processions, and was expected to genuflect down to the feet of her new spouse whilst proclaiming her endless deference for his authority. Numerous wedding rituals further solidified the Russian peasant woman’s eternal submission to male authority; for instance, one ancient ritual included the bride

removing her husband’s boots where there she would find a few hidden silver coins to remind
the bride of her reliance on her husband.\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, in the Kadnikov district, during
ceremonial consummations of a marriage, which were public events that occurred while the
wedding party was still celebrating, the bride was expected to ceremoniously beg three times for
permission to join her husband on the nuptial bed.\textsuperscript{65} Perpetual rituals abounded where women
bowed, kissed, and pleaded in a culture that symbolically secured the suppression of women and
the deification of men. The survival of the community depended on the interplay of many units
organized around a common goal: prosperous agricultural production. Men were lauded because
they were deemed more essential in reaping gains for the sustenance of the village. It was this
structure and mentality that peasant women inherently carried with them into the cities and
factories, and it was the attachment to this belief system that prevented the lower class Russian
women from aligning with the Bolsheviks or feminists. Russian lower class women did not wish
to witness major alteration to their values; hence these working women rejected the Bolshevik
mentality and mistrusted those women that chose a politically active life. These women often
provoked their husbands to follow suit and thus the Bolsheviks resented their interference and
ignored working class women in the majority of their proselytizing efforts. The difficulty with
which working class women were persuaded to become politically active or involved in
women’s rights issues, to the extent that the Bolsheviks widely ignored them, reflects the
difficulties the Soviet system would incur in attempting to implement a gender equal society;
prior to the 1917 Revolution, the majority of the working class female population expressed that
gender equality was not a desirable value. Nevertheless, the zealous efforts of Bolshevik women
who favored incorporated working women into the Party eventually began to have an impact.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.,169.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.,170.
The Bolshevik Party’s Gender Evolution

The organization of the Bolshevik party and its engagement with the female population advanced after the 1905 Revolution, and the party itself welcomed remarkable gender equality and freedom for its time. The Bolsheviks, after 1905, strategized to create appealing methods for campaigning and uniting working women under the Socialist banner. Due to the expansion of liberties allowed after the progressive policies initiated after the 1905 Revolution, the Bolsheviks began to form newly legalized, successful unions and workers’ clubs. Furthermore, a foundational working women’s newspaper created by the party gained momentum; the paper was called *Rabotnitsa (Women Worker)* and collaboration for the paper united an instrumental group of women that would lead the formulation of the Soviet program for women’s emancipation. Stirred from faith in the working women’s political potential, *Rabotnitsa’s* existence owed itself to the minds of those limited Bolshevik women who sought an alliance with the proletarian women. The newspaper received the approval of Lenin himself; the editorial board was formed with his oversight, and it even included his wife, Nadezhda Konstantinovna "Nadya" Krupskaya, and his sister, Anna Elizarova. The newspaper was banned due to its Social-Democratic content a year later, but it had further propagated the Bolshevik’s party stance on women’s equality.

The Bolshevik party, whether due to necessity from lack of active membership or due to integrity to the cause for women’s equality, developed a political group with considerable gender equality. Female Social Democrats were as likely as males to hold party office, were considerably present on city committees, and significantly more so on the most vital Bolshevik committees in Moscow and St. Petersburg; for instance, in St. Petersburg, from the end of 1904

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66 Barbara Evans Clements. *Bolshevik Women.* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997), 103-104.
67 Ibid., 104.
to June 1907, the committee had a total of 137 members, 27 (20 percent) of whom were women.  

However, although Bolshevik women were, in the majority, better educated and more often came from privileged backgrounds than Bolshevik men, they were still often placed in secretarial or supportive roles, while men were traditionally given decision-making, policy-making and technical positions. Inarguable advancements for women’s equality did exist within the Bolshevik Party; however, dubious semblances of patriarchal values remained. Women experienced constricted liberties as fully fledged party members of the Bolshevik underground movement. However, although feminists also fought for women’s equality, they chose to fight for these rights within the existing political structure; in essence, feminists sought amendment and not fundamental reform. The Bolsheviks offered reforms on a wider scale, where women could work side by side with support from a liberalized working-class. Perhaps it was this wide scale of societal remodeling envisioned by the Bolshevik’s that accounted for their desire to incorporate liberal gender values into their political party, despite Russian historic tradition. The Bolsheviks promoted the drastic extent of their liberalizations as their rallying cry; the Bolsheviks established a deep contrast between their utopic plans and the status quo. Ignoring Social Democratic goals of gender equality, in order to acquiesce to Russian tradition and potentially gain more followers, would have inhibited their image and nulled their message. The Russian Bolsheviks did not revert to a lukewarm Social-Democraticism in theory, but it remained so in practice. The Bolsheviks never implemented radical social policies; their social perspective was liberal and progressive, but in actuality a mere amelioration from Victorian ideals or patriarchal families. Bolshevik women did marry across class and religious lines, lived with their chosen mates without the sanction of clergy, and practiced de facto divorce while legal.

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69 Ibid., 66.
70 Ibid.
Although a significant improvement to Russian patriarchy, the Bolsheviks formed “gentler notions” of patriarchy, which were mild versions of patriarchy nonetheless; completely uprooting men’s control in marriage was incomprehensible even for the most liberal minds of the time.

Aleksandra Kollontai was one of the central figures of the Bolshevik movement who frustrated over the latent state of proletarian women and worked to incorporate their inertia into the political debate of the early twentieth century. Typical of many Bolshevik Party female members, Kollontai came from an upper-class background in St. Petersburg; her father was a general, and she took advantage of all the opportunities that came from a wealthy life. Kollontai received a superior education, learning several languages, and became well-versed in literature and art while socializing with the elite of Russian society. She would leave this cushioned life, which did not continue to fulfill her growing intellectual pursuits, in order to delve further into her interests in Marxism. Kollontai became instrumental in the Russian women’s rights movement, and joined the Bolshevik Party due to her faith in Lenin’s leadership and revolutionary potential. While still a Menshevik in 1907, Kollontai established the first of the clubs aimed at connecting proletarian women to an interest in politics and the women’s movement, the Society for Mutual Aid to Women Workers. Due to the widespread belief in working women’s backward and intransigent nature, the women’s clubs and organizations that began to proliferate in Russian society initially met with condemnation and criticism from predominantly working class men in the party; even Bolshevik women, who were mostly better educated and from wealthier backgrounds than working class women, were immensely divided

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71 Barbara Evans Clements. *Bolshevik Women.* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997), 86.

on the issue of merging working class women into the party’s efforts. Leaders such as Kollontai would need to demonstrate successful evidence of working women’s political worth in the Bolshevik cause order to persuade the men in the party to include the most neglected working class mass—women—into the party’s proselytizing. Kollontai consistently upheld the potential of working-class women for the Bolshevik party, and snuck in party propaganda into the working-class women’s clubs meetings. These efforts paid off; after 1907, working women’s participation began to depict encouraging growth.

The extent of working women’s political activity in the struggle for female liberation eventually surpassed middle-class women’s vigor; however, their activities were mostly restricted to the radical domain of revolutionary parties. Hence, Social-Democratic efforts to galvanize dormant, working-class women into a political entity mobilized in their favor progressed considerably. These gains were already evidenced in the first All-Russian Congress of Women in 1908. The demographics of over a thousand in attendance supported what has already been discussed: the majority of pre-Soviet women that sought to stay politically informed were from privileged backgrounds. The congress was organized through collaboration between the Mutual Philanthropic Society and the Union of Equal Rights, and although the Organizing Commission did not deliberately exclude participation from the lower classes, the congress was nevertheless overpoweringly middle-class, with a significant number of women from the noblest elite circles. Those without the funds to support an expense of attending a formal, elegant convention during working hours would not be willing or able to suffer the extraordinary sacrifices of being in attendance. Furthermore, participation required previous membership in clubs and unions, and students were also not permitted; women meeting such

73 Linda Harriet Edmondson. *Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917.* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1984), 77-78.
74 Ibid., 85-87.
demands were extremely scarce in Russian society. A group of working-class women, purposively selected by radical women amongst the Social-Democrat intelligentsia, did make a point of making a representation at the congress, and they were led by Aleksandra Kollontai. These women were told to make a stance on certain issues, particularly the root of all Socialist issues—capitalism and class war. Yet, the representation and participation of this Workers’ Group was a controversial topic amongst the Social-Democrats who squabbled over the integrity of attending a “bourgeois” event. Kollontai herself wrote shortly on the topic before the congress:

Certain economic factors once led to the subordinate position of women, with her natural characteristics playing a purely secondary role. Only the total disappearance of those (economic) factors, only the evolution of those economic forms that once caused the enslavement of women, can effect a radical change in their social position. In other words, women can only become truly free and equal in a world that has been transformed and based on new social and economic principles. This assertion, however, does not rule out the possibility of a partial improvement in the life of women within the framework of the existing system, although a truly radical solution of the labour problem is possible only with the complete restructuring of existing production relations. Nonetheless, such a view of the situation should not act as a brake upon reform work aimed at satisfying the immediate interests of the proletariat. On the contrary, each new gain by the working class is a rung in the ladder leading mankind to the kingdom of freedom and social equality; each new right won by women brings them closer to their goal - total emancipation.

Kollontai discussed the beneficial reasoning for being present in the congress and maintained its integrity to the Social-Democratic cause. In actuality, this middle ground was too idyllic a concept. The First All-Russian Congress of Women would reveal the incredible difficulty in compromising class issues in the name of gender equality; women from the upper-classes sought a gender-equality on par with the property-owning men in

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75 Ibid., 88.
76 Ibid., 88.
77 Ibid.
their class, a goal completely disconnected from the plight of the working and peasant woman. These privileged women were one of the sources of repression for working-class women that were often meagerly employed as servants in their upper class homes, under their management.

In the end result, the Workers’ Group managed to make a considerable impression on the congress; they dispelled the myth that these disparate groups were facing similar issues in their fight for women’s rights. The Workers’ Group did not miss any opportunity to enlighten the congress on the deranged degree of exploitation faced by the masses of women egregiously absent from the congress. The Workers’ Group bemoaned: unsafe machinery, dangerous chemicals, excessively long working days, low pay, the almost total absence of insurance for sickness and maternity leave, and unemployment; furthermore, they detailed the total apathy working women faced in comparison to men, the significantly lower wages (sometimes only half the men’s rate), the hazards facing pregnant women, the consequential fear that working women faced, which included the loss of their jobs due to non-existent maternity leave, the atrociously high infant mortality rate, reaching 64 percent in the first year of life, and the lack of protection or inspection in the workshops compared to the factory jobs where mostly men worked.79

The congress was further disgraced by the presence of only one peasant women in its congregation. Peasant women endured the starkest of human rights abuses, and their conspicuous absence was blamed on bourgeois women’s willing obliviousness to the fundamental issues facing their nation and gender. After the congress concluded, Social-Democratic women felt bolstered by their presence at the congress, while their presence had been a notable event, discussed in the press by the chief liberal newspapers, “Rech” and “Russkiia vedomosti”, who

79 Linda Harriet Edmondson. Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1984, 92.)
claimed their support for the liberationist elements, and stressed the significance of the event for
the general struggle against autocracy. Although the integration of the Workers’ Group was
carefully managed by the party’s intelligentsia, as working class women’s attendance at this
significant venture needed to be tactically monitored, the Social-Democratic women that
advocated for the inclusion of working class women in party maneuvers proved the efficacy of
their integration. Henceforth, the Social Democratic party would make a conscious effort to pay
more attention to working class women; between 1907 and 1914, the Social-Democrats
continually utilized legally-chartered congresses to pressure Socialist demands through the
attendance of a worker group delegation.

   Inadvertent Inequality: Soviet Gender Policies from Theory to Practice

Paradoxically, Socialist policies did not have the liberating result for which they were
intended. The Soviet government’s acquisition of power brought an onslaught of incomparable
devastation for exactly those most defenseless in society, women and children, which it sought to
free and protect. A couple months after attaining control of the Russian government, in
December of 1917, the Bolsheviks instituted civil marriage, banning the church’s role in
formalizing marital bonds, and established divorce at the request of either spouse; the Code on
Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship was ratified by the Central Executive Committee of the
Soviet in October 1918, which established a new doctrine based on individual rights and gender
equality. With these drastic measures, the Bolsheviks accomplished more than any
progressives before them, and instituted a revolutionary new system that shattered the ancient
order of patriarchal and ecclesiastical power. In effect, erasing centuries of ingrained cultures

80 Ibid., 102.
81 Ibid., 100.
82 Wendy Goldman. Women, the State & Revolution: Soviet Family Policy & Social Life, 1917-1936. (New York:
Cambridge University, 1993), 49.
and systems would prove considerably more problematic than Lenin had devised. The country was ill-prepared for a significant overhaul, while the nascent Soviet government would soon enter into a civil-war that would further stress its resources. Furthermore, the majority of the population lived as peasants in an intricate communal system that had its own entrenched social expectations. The struggle for survival exponentially intensified, it left thousands of children homeless, and drove massive hoards of women to prostitution, the apex of capitalistic evil that Marx, Engels and Lenin scathingly loathed.

The Soviet’s first Code on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship, the first of its kind, was voted into law in October 1918; a major attempt at social reform, it included measures that would backfire and inflict harmful consequences as well as offering advances. The Code gave all children, those born in or out of wedlock, equal rights, it forbade adoption in the belief that peasants would attempt to adopt children in order to exploit them for unpaid labor, and that the state would become their best guardian; in marriage, women had retained full control of her earnings, neither spouse had claim on each other’s properties, and limited alimony was fixed for the disabled poor.  

Suffering the escalating effects of World War, Revolution, Civil War, famine, epidemics, drastic infrastructure changes and War Communism, which inflicted food rationing on the populace and severe state control on all industry, Russia was thrown into a crisis which left millions of children orphaned and homeless, plunging millions of women into prostitution and despair. However, in its Family Code, which sought to initiate the construction of Socialism in the country, it made precisely these demographics self-autonomous in the belief that the state was creating conditions for their equality. By 1922, there were an estimated 7.5 million

83 Ibid., 50-52.
homeless, starving children in Russia.\textsuperscript{84} The Soviet government made attempts to aid the millions of dying children, but their efforts did not ameliorate the emergency situation on a large-scale. The New Economic Policy, instituted to alleviate the catastrophe that plagued the country, also added to the calamity experienced by women and orphaned youth. Less money and services were made available to the needy while unemployment rose for women; also, resources for existing children’s institutions were further reduced and thousands closed.\textsuperscript{85} All this strife resulted in an ultimate revision to Marxist theory that would endure for the duration of the Soviet Union’s—family became viewed as a necessity; it clothed, fed, and supported its members in a mutual bond that was unparalleled by what the state could ever provide. By 1925, the Commissariats of Land and Enlightenment crusaded amongst the peasant communities in an effort to persuade families to adopt homeless children from state homes and institutions.\textsuperscript{86}

Working women’s needs proved contradictory to the revolutionary women’s mission. The working women did not strive for anything more than the basic needs she struggled daily to attain for herself and her family. Given the severity in the social and state fluctuations of the 1920s, woman endured the harshest rate of unemployment, which further destabilized their already meager existence. The divorce rate exponentially accelerated, with the Soviet Union reaching the highest marriage and divorce rate of any European country in the mid-1920s: 26 times higher than England and Wales, 3 times higher than Germany and 3.56 times higher than France.\textsuperscript{87} However, women were the largest unemployed demographic, reaching 67% of those registered in 1922; the sharp NEP cuts had largely affected the social service sector where

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.,73.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.,197.
women were largely employed.\textsuperscript{88} Furthermore, the supportive legislation that Lenin initiated to ban female exploitation in the workforce also backfired. Paid maternity leave, the ban on night-work for women, and work restrictions for pregnant women and nursing mothers, often prompted managers to fire women and replace them with men. Hence, divorce, under such conditions of immeasurable obstacles for women’s self-sustenance, became all too often the harbinger of desolation and despair. Women turned painfully to prostitution in order to supplement their income. In the 1920s, prostitutes were mainly from working-class backgrounds; 45\% of working women entered prostitution from factories that experienced NEP cutbacks, and 44 \% of prostitutes, according to a 1925 study, lived with parents, siblings, or other relations. Hence, women were resorting to these dehumanizing measures in a desperate need to contribute to the survival of their family, who also could not make ends meet collectively. Socialist legislation and restructuring created insufferable, debased conditions for the working woman; her fears and suspicions foreshadowed her fate—the intellectuals that brooded over the future of the working woman had, in their ignorance, created the insufferable conditions that subjected her to years of agony in the 1920s.

\textbf{Separating Socialism from the Soviet Experiment}

Does the devastation wrought from the first era of the Soviet Union’s existence mean that Communism is a broken theory, and when applied will undoubtedly bring ruin to those it sought to enlighten? In his \textit{Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844}, Karl Marx warned of an initial phase of “crude communism” which would necessarily exist in the transformation of private property to universal property. Marx specifically detailed the presence, in this phase, of

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.,110.
an ominous “bestial” period that women would have to endure. Marx illustrated crude communism with the following insights:

The relationship of private property persists as the relationship of the community to the world of things. Finally, this movement of counterposing universal private property to private property finds expression in the bestial form of counterposing to marriage (certainly a form of exclusive private property) the community of women, in which a woman becomes a piece of communal and common property. Just as the woman passes from marriage to general prostitution, so the entire world of wealth (that is, of man’s objective substance) passes from the relationship of exclusive marriage with the owner of private property to a state of universal prostitution within the community…General envy constituting itself as a power is the disguise in which avarice reestablishes itself and satisfies itself, only in another way…How little this annulment of private property is really an appropriation is in fact proved by the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilization, the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and undemanding man who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even attained it.  

Marx conceived of the harsh vulgarities of the first transition of communism, and expected that its effects on the family would initially undermine the position of women; women would move from being the property of one man’s holdings, to the property of the entire society, but property nonetheless. Only the substantial leveling of capitalist society’s foundations would allow for humanist communism to culminate and thrive. However, adjustments to Communist principals would continue and inequities would endure, although differently, with Josef Stalin’s reign of power, and later, also with Nikita Khrushchev. Classical Russian culture would remain strongly present, a class system would develop, the family and gender inequality would persist, and material objects would be coveted and cherished.

Leon Trotsky promulgated rare critical analyses of the Soviet Union during the construction of its foundation, and presaged the adverse consequences that deviating from Marx

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would entail. In his work, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Leon Trotsky enumerated key criticisms, which captured the ideological disjunction between Stalin’s policies and Karl Marx’s philosophy. Trotsky also established and further elaborated on the existing dichotomies beginning to arise in the Soviet military-industrial complex. Trotsky emphasized the debilitating deficiencies of the Soviet industrial landscape, and their repercussions. He stated: “There is no correspondence between the different elements of industry; men lag behind technique; the leadership is not equal to its tasks. Altogether this expresses itself in extremely high production costs and poor quality of product.”

Trotsky further lamented the unfavorable circumstances that the Russian economic climate served for constructing Socialism; however, he specifically bemoaned the methods Stalin utilized to handle these egregious obstacles. In particular, Trotsky focused his criticism on Stalin’s policies that acquiesced toward the wealthier classes, especially the Kulaks, which were a peasant group blamed for harboring rural resources and creating a hierarchical system that Trotsky specifically attributed to undermining the Socialist cause. It was only later, Trotsky claimed, after the country struggled to collectivize, that Stalin took decisive action toward the Kulaks. According to the Left Opposition, this should always have stood as a preliminary measure.

Trotsky knew that unequal distribution of goods was the main anathema to constructing or maintaining Socialism. The awareness of inequality, the imbalanced access to superior goods and accommodations created the friction and social unrest at the root of capitalist societies; Trotsky argued that properly adhering to Marxist principles should lead to a universal acceptance that no superior lifestyle exists out of the Socialist sphere, and that this includes access to consumer products. He writes: “The contemporaries of Marx knew nothing of automobiles,

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radios, moving pictures, aeroplanes. A Socialist society, however, is unthinkable without the free enjoyment of these goods.\textsuperscript{91} Trotsky argued that in contrast, the Soviet state of affairs perpetuated bureaucracy and an unequal distribution of wealth, which resulted in the material longings of the old bourgeois system. Hence, in a Socialist system, the ideological contradiction meant not the existence of consumer goods common to the capitalist nations, but, in fact, it was the stratified consumption of these goods that posed the conflict to Communist ideology. Nevertheless, Stalin continued to construct his ambiguous Soviet system, and ensured the assassination of Leon Trotsky in exile in Mexico, in 1940. The political system that developed after the Socialist victory in October of 1917 transformed into, and functioned as, an unorthodox Social-Democratic entity; class inequality and gender parity were never absolved. Whether these shortcomings were the result of Soviet manipulations or the oversight of Social-Democratic theorists still remains a historical question to be pondered.

Chapter Two

Socialist Discriminations: Materialism, Gender Equality, and the Struggle for Authority from Stalin to Khrushchev

Stalin’s regime built a megalithic structure that attempted to elevate the prestige of the Soviet Union as a dominant entity on the world stage. Stalin wanted grandeur on a massive scale; however, this fixation on grandeur became more of a spectacle of appearances as class distinctions were revived and the population’s basic needs became eclipsed by the construction of empire. Stalin’s successors, after his death in 1953, noted that the Soviet people, especially after their unparalleled suffering during World War II, were growing anxious for material

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 44.
comforts and conveniences. Nikita Khrushchev, having achieved dominance over the Communist Party, worked to ease tensions internationally with the Western powers, and focused considerably on ameliorating material and consumer deficits domestically. This competitive interest in providing a comfortable lifestyle on par with that of the United States provoked an intensified Soviet quest to boost women’s beleaguered image. Soviet officials understood that negative reverberations caused by a lack of material capabilities could have dire consequences for the Cold War and the ideological world battle. The nation best able to satisfy its women would appear strongest in the ideological war over the betterment of circumstances and lifestyles across the globe. Hence, the Soviet Union leaned heavily on promoting its vision for female advancement both internally and externally; however, the attainment of that vision, its benefits, and its alignment to Marxism were vastly contentious.

**Stalinist Social and Political Stratification**

Josef Stalin’s ruthless measures in building industry and infrastructure would, after his death, brand him as a “traitor of the people.” During his era in power, the Soviet Union saw incredible mobilization, although it came at the expense of the sacrifices of many innocent people. Stalin adopted his own theories regarding the value of culture and consumption in a Socialist society, and promoted a social hierarchy with himself at the apex. Stalin’s Socialist regime consisted of customs oxymoronic to Socialism, including the exaltation and popularization of high culture. Ballet, classical music, theatre performances, champagne, the previous domains of the Russian aristocracy, thrived. It seemed bringing culture to the masses meant a reversion to the pleasures of nobility in Tsarist Russia. This appropriation normalized the Russian aristocratic *mode de vie*, and the desires and affiliations which came with it, instead
of instilling the people with new, Socialist aspirations of fulfillment. Nevertheless, the Stalin era saw tremendous industrial growth that mobilized much of the population and thus shifted values toward reaching self-actualization and education. The population specifically attributed these achievements and opportunities to Stalin.

As propaganda from the period reveals, Stalin was conscious of the advancements needed to make progress regarding the position of women in this nascent Socialist country, although many of his policies reiterated traditional gender norms and expectations. Antithetical to Marxist ideology, Stalinist demagogy successfully created an immense loyalty to the Stalinist model, despite Socialist transgressions. The Soviet state functioned under strange economic and political norms under Stalin; bewilderment and uncertainty raged in the ranks of governance: no one knew or understood what mode to follow. The party elite in Moscow put the blame on regional leaders; regional leaders accused their local enemies, and rank-and-file communists wreaked revenge on local leaders they despised. Without clear policies, goals, or laws, accountability for failed growth could arbitrarily fall on any party member. The creation of a confused state was essential to further aggrandize Stalin’s authority. Stalin maintained that a bequeathal of absolute power from the people into the hands of the state was a momentary necessity; the state needed to have full, unrestricted autonomy in vanquishing the bourgeoisie in order to build Socialism. However, the state’s bureaucracy continuously grew and the state’s power continuously accumulated. Exclusive echelons of power and wealth were formed. Meanwhile, the country struggled with crippling deficiency as the state experienced inverted sumptuary laws paradoxical to the Communist cause of meeting the people’s needs: chocolate and champagne were plentiful while common goods and products were rationed.

The period immediately following the Revolution had spread a culture enforcing ascetic beliefs, a complete sacrifice for the Communist cause, especially as its existence was in jeopardy during the Civil War and the devastation that followed; however, by the mid-1930s the dynamic turned: the Socialist culture became less revolutionary. In fact, a hybrid culture formed, one that was more reformist than revolutionary. An ironic hodgepodge of bourgeois, aristocratic and Socialist elements formed in the Stalinist era. Classical taste in art, music and architecture were canonized, while at the same time a mass culture of Socialist realistic fiction, state sponsored folklore, mass song, military bands, parades, movies, and radio was also fashioned. 93 Although hybridized and accessible to a broader audience, Stalinist Soviet culture promoted aesthetic choices of the higher classes antithetical to the Soviet mission. A wholly original working class culture was never created, perhaps because it lacked substance and cultural capital; hence, the potential for a working class culture to evolve richly and independently from aristocratic influences in the Soviet Union remains unknown.

Entertainment was not the only arena that incorporated old Russian elements incongruent with the Communist ideology; status also regained importance in education and politics. Symbols such as degrees and honorary titles, which were abolished after the October Revolution, were reestablished in the mid-1930s. 94 What formed was a hierarchical system with the Soviet intelligentsia and the Nomenklatura (those with key positions in the army, government, and other types of administration) serving as an exclusive ruling elite privy to an array of advantages. These privileged classes lived a lifestyle with amenities inconceivable for the rest of the impoverished populace and exhibited an eroded faith in Communist dogma by reveling in wealth.

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94 Ibid., 10.
and separatism. Furthermore, in 1931, the Stakhanovite system was instated to stratify the working classes. Named after a miner whose work output astounded authorities, the Stakhanovite movement transformed worker relationships, with those who were honored as Stakhanovites receiving access to a separate system of superior commercial shops, and priority access to various privileges, including rare housing opportunities. Although Stakanovites were supposedly simple and modest people who were not concerned about fame or personal enrichment, they were well rewarded for their efforts. They received extra pay, trips to the capital, holidays on the Black Sea, bicycles, radios, food parcels and books. Most important of all, given the worsening housing crisis in the rapidly expanding cities, they were given better accommodations. Although Stakanovites were championed as builders of Socialism, exemplars of altruistic work on behalf of the nation, in essence they constituted another social disparity. Were the Stakanovites extending themselves because of their commitment to the Socialist cause, or to gain privileges that membership in this honorary sect allowed?

The Stalinist Socialist system, with unequal access to and consumption of luxuries, masqueraded as Socialism. Marxist dogma decrees that law is never above the economic functioning of a state: laws are informed by economics. When the economy is utilitarian, parallel egalitarian laws will follow. Hence, with the existence of hierarchical access to goods, parallel, segregationist policies followed. The state did not maintain a utilitarian model; certain sects lived lifestyles that were extravagant and profligate in comparison to the remainder of Soviet citizens. In a system where the access to consumer goods was viciously safeguarded, a social design resembling a caste system formed—which those at the very top, the Nomenklatura, were privy to a

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covert trade in luxury Western goods and aristocratic services. The intelligentsia sought products through black-market means or rare access and received priority admittance to material benefits, and the Stakhanovites of the working class had diluted benefits, but nevertheless were better materially equipped than the rest—the proletariat. By 1939 Stalin’s politics became increasingly disassociated from the working class, as the educated intelligentsia, with all the instituted honors, degrees, privileges, awards and benefits, grew into an isolated class.96 A decree on October 2, 1940 abolished free education in the upper grades of high school and in institutions of higher learning.97 This decree was part of a larger State Labor Reserve System that attempted to control the direction of production. According to the law of June 26, 1940, voluntary resignation was eliminated and hiring became more strictly regulated.98 These restrictions all contributed to the formation of social strata, apportioning the managerial classes with further liberties, and sanctioning hereditary privileges. Material goods and access to them were the superlative status symbols and property of the elite; status was egregiously present.

Numerous Stalinist policies prohibitively affected the position of women. In 1931, the Peoples’ Commissariat of Labor segregated employment by regulating industries, endorsing those the state envisioned for women and banning certain occupations due to their level of danger for women; unsurprisingly, women were isolated within the lowest paid, low-skill sectors of the economy.99 Women faced many factors preventing their successful integration into better paying positions, which included the apprentice system, where traditional foremen were most

99 Ibid., 90.
apprehensive about training women.\textsuperscript{100} The Stakhonovite movement admitted fewer women due to the fact that these segregationist measures inhibited women’s access to many of the occupations that produced the greatest number of Stakhonovites, such as mining and the operating of heavy lathes. In addition, Stakhonovite wives were encouraged to dutifully stay at home to perpetually dote on their husbands by creating the comforts that would further kindle male heroic services to the country.\textsuperscript{101} These gender-specific policies prevented the liberation of women along equal economic and social grounds, particularly as they were juxtaposed with the state’s promotion of multiple-child motherhood beginning in the mid-1930s, and the outlawing of abortion in 1936.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, the 1940 laws that increased managerial power over employees further eroded the woman worker’s position by eliminating legal channels for addressing unmet needs or injustices, a particularly exploitive factor given that most leadership positions were held by men.\textsuperscript{103} These policies unequivocally did not work to establish the economic independence for women that Lenin equated with female emancipation.

\textit{Stalinist Promises: Illusions, Agitprop and Propaganda}

During Stalin’s regime, the nation attempted to placate the masses through illusions and promises of material comforts. The party also sought to incorporate products considered luxuries from the old regime on a grand scale, perhaps with the belief that offering pleasures previously reserved for the upper classes would create a sense of having achieved the ultimate improvement. In 1936-37, the country was facing an economic crisis while the Soviet party became preoccupied with producing mass quantities of champagne; in general, the production of celebratory products increased extensively, including: cognac, caviar, chocolate, and perfume,\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{100} Kenneth M. Straus. \textit{Factory and Community in Stalin’s Russia}, 75.

\textsuperscript{101} Lynne Atwood, 101-103.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 102-115.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 92.
items which wage workers in capitalist societies could not readily afford. Hence, Stalin’s regime focused on expanding isolated luxury products that did not benefit the overall well-being of the populace. Instead, to build legitimacy to reinforce the Socialist cause, Stalin’s regime held mass parades and carnivals that promoted the Soviet image, much like the tactics of Rome and the Coliseum. Image building and distraction became a major focus for the Stalinist regime.

The architecture, art, and material culture that came from the Stalin period strived for a magnificence lacking in the fundamental roots of the system. “Soviet Kitsch” was a term developed to describe superficial household products, including statuettes, dinnerware, and other collectibles and figurines, abundantly sold in the Stalin period, that reproduced luxury items formerly consumed by the upper classes. They were cheap replicas that provided aesthetic, bourgeois comforts in an otherwise harsh existence. Stalin’s regime integrated “luxurious” products on the premise of providing superior abundance; however, these products constituted claims to a false quality of life because they did not offer the remedial support the population necessitated. In contrast, because unequal access to goods existed, those who obtained the limited goods also experienced exponential status gains. This resulted in a heightened stratification that also affected gender equality, as women were relegated to passive ownership of important capital. For instance, although women contributed to the family purchase of an automobile, a rare commodity throughout the Soviet period, men, by a tradition that still endures in contemporary times, sat behind the wheel 90% of the time. This culture of obtaining status and symbols of prestige, which began to develop under Stalin, existed throughout the duration of the Soviet Union’s existence. Nikita Khrushchev would attempt to mitigate the outwardly

104 Gronow. 12-37.
bourgeois aestheticism of much of the popularized culture during Stalin’s rule; however, the
exceptional benefits of the Soviet elite remained intact. In fact, a core group of Communists in
prominent industrial, government, and Party leadership positions remained in power from the
Stalin era to the end of the Brezhnev period.\textsuperscript{106} Disparate distribution and quality of life existed in
Soviet Russia as it had in Pre-Revolutionary Russia, only Soviet Russia created the illusion of
evolving towards abundance and functioning on behalf of the people. If dichotomies were
evident while the population struggled to meet basic consumer needs, would the population
awaken to the masquerade? How would the Soviet system continue to promote itself to appease
the masses?

The Soviet state played an active role in promulgating or sanctioning all official material
distributed to the Soviet masses. In fact, a separate department existed for these aims. The
Central Committee Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) was responsible for
disseminating Party views, which included the surveillance of scholarship and its compliance
with Party standards.\textsuperscript{107} Hence, magazines, proper conduct pamphlets, posters, training
resources, and informative literature constitute an array of developed sources that can be used as
crucial tools in understanding the acting ideology and direction intended by the Party’s leaders.
These sources provide an insightful lens by illustrating how the state coached, whether directly
or subliminally, the recipients of the material to behave, instituting certain conventions and
trends. Although arguably flippant, these publications paint a clear picture of the attitudes and
norms pertaining to gender equality, as well as an understanding of established consumption
patterns. Following the Russian Revolution, distributed material focused on enlightening the

\textsuperscript{106} Fitzpatrick, Sheila. \textit{The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia}. (New York: Cornell University
Press, 1992), 150.
populace about sanitary medical methods, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, distrust of peasant traditions, and prioritization of a strong work ethic. However, the printed material of the period of the 1930s and 1940s centered on bringing “kulturnost,” or culture, to the masses, and setting various standards for achievements of Socialist aims. Those aspects of state promotion, which shepherded a culture devoid of the hedonism associated with capitalism, were juxtaposed against other literature that obscured the understanding of the proper Socialist lifestyle. The advice literature from the Stalin period reveals an adherence to bourgeois and Western ideals. Although publicly deriding the capitalist lifestyle, the training manuals of Soviet diplomats utilized Western textbooks, supplemented by training at the Ministry’s Academy, where the instructors, remnants of the Russian gentry, taught French and proper conduct.\textsuperscript{108} The Stalin era depicts a desire for refinement along Western terms while the objectives of Stalinist Soviet advice literature instated a behavioral ideal not far removed from those of the capitalist West. “Soviet” was applied readily in these materials as a term to veil the lack of Socialist intent and foundation.\textsuperscript{109} The terms appropriated to delineate or differentiate the Socialist good from the capitalist bad were arbitrary and artificial, and often the two ideologies had parallel codes and ethics. Exceptions did exist where Stalin era advice literature encouraged an ascetic approach to the everyday; reading, for example, was to be taken as a serious, pleasure-free business, utilized as a method for absorbing facts. Pavel Kerzhenstsev’s guide, \textit{How to Read a Book}, which was written in 1924, pioneered the austere practice that circulated in the Soviet culture for decades—reading was done sitting at a desk, taking notes, and memorizing facts.\textsuperscript{110} Nevertheless, in the era of political pomp and striving for social status, “Socialism” in the Union of Soviet Socialist

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] \textit{Ibid.}, 252.
\item[110] \textit{Ibid.}, 271-74.
\end{footnotes}
Republics had confused connotations. Although the new Soviet elite were mostly drawn from plebeian origins, the Party’s leadership still sought to emulate the cultivated prestige of high ranking classes in Western nations.

Palaces, parades, replicated luxury products were all meant to stand as lodestars for the Soviet populace as well as serving as confirmation to the world that the Soviet Union was a veritable giant, an established, modern force. Regal titles characterized the buildings and institutions of the era. Palaces were ubiquitous. Palaces of culture, palaces of sport, and palaces of labor were constructed as large, lavishly decorated, and imposing buildings to match their names.\(^{111}\) Elaborate parades were a common Soviet symbolic display of strength; parades were an easy mechanism to demonstrate Soviet inclusion and wealth. Not limited to state affairs, Moscow’s official parades were held for widely celebrated occasions; one such event included the All-Union Day of Sportsmen on July 18, 1939. For this jubilee, Soviet sportswomen participated alongside their male counterparts in a march in Red Square in Moscow.\(^{112}\) Women as far away as Azerbaijan were present to represent their republic, studded with accessories and matching, gilded costumes; these representatives were no doubt elated by their proud presence in the Soviet capitol, with full belief in the grandness of Stalin’s Socialist promise. In the burgeoning stages of Soviet development, Stalin’s regime could readily demand prideful participation and sacrifices for an altruistic cause that would create new opportunities for posterity, especially as the rest of Western society plunged into economic depression in 1929. Khrushchev’s promises would necessitate more actualized achievements and outputs as the population’s material needs diversified and patience withered.

\(^{112}\) Wide World Photo. Women from Azerbaijan, All-Union Day of Sportsmen on July 18, 1939. Hoover Institution Archives. Stanford, CA.
Stalin’s state exhibited ubiquitous propaganda and censure to control the information the populace received, which applied to the society’s understanding of gender equality achievements as well. For instance, women’s magazines of the period, such as Rabotnitsa and Krestyanka, corroborated the belief that Stalinist policies had instituted remarkable leveling conditions and opportunities for women; in actuality, the Stalinist period retreated to a double standard for women as equals only as toilers in the workplace. State manipulated jargon was used to maintain traditional gender norms, including the euphemistic notion that the domestic realm should be exclusively under the control of women in order to uphold an essential state-building service, that of instilling posterity with the integrity of feminine values. The Stalinist era omitted public discussion or policy initiatives that stressed the goal of the gradual dissipation of the family to allow for completely communal relations in Soviet society, a society that would exist without hierarchical social dominance.\(^{113}\) Perhaps this ideological bypass was a preventative measure after the desolation of the NEP era, which cemented the need for a family support system due to unprecedented levels of prostitution and child homelessness, or perhaps it was another instance of Stalin’s authoritarian molding of Socialism to strengthen his dictatorship—treading toward no family and full community would have meant the attainment of Communism and the end of the need for state control. During the 1920s, women’s magazines made legitimate strides in instituting honest conversations and an objective platform for women’s holistic issues in the emerging Socialist state; in the Great Break of the Stalin epoch, those women’s magazines became empty propaganda.

**Internalizing Stalinism: Internalizing “Socialism”**

Stalin’s totalitarian regime completely altered the landscape of industry and the population at large, creating incredible feats for the previously agrarian and illiterate Soviet populace. Although it was attained through coerced methods, the Stalin era population experienced a mobility that was astonishing; in combination with the inundation of propaganda and censorship, this filled many Soviet citizens with sincere, docile awe and obedience. Despite famines, purges, and mass incarcerations, the nation experienced leaps of growth in vital sectors during the 1930s, and the populace was trained to believe that these leaps would not have occurred without Stalin’s Socialist guidance. In fact, growth did occur, and stagnation was not inevitable, without the Bolshevik Revolution.\(^{114}\) From the end of the 1920s to the end of the 1930s, the urban portion of the population would rise from one-fifth to one-third; the total wage and salary earning workforce would triple, and the total figure for children enrolled in school would also triple; in 1939, 81% of the whole Soviet population was literate, while the 1926 census revealed that only 57% of the Soviet population aged 9 to 49 was literate.\(^{115}\) Although the realities of collectivization, collective housing, and access to material goods were extremely problematic, many people saw these changes as Stalin’s munificent contribution to their only opportunity for social or economic advancement.

Stalin’s constant insistence that the Soviet Union was a superior organism was pervasive; those within its orbit believed they were harbingers of a new, better world. By the late 1930s, the Party was instructed to publicize and proclaim only news about positions in which the Soviet

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\(^{114}\) For more information and statistical analysis of the progress of the Late Russian Imperial Era in comparison to Stalinist economic and infrastructural growth, see Nicholas S. Timasheff’s The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia.

\(^{115}\) Sheila Fitzpatrick. *Everyday Stalinism*, 70.
Union was leading in their reports back from foreign delegations. Although Lenin exhibited ideological hubris, he conceded to developmental inferiority; by the late 1930s that confession was no longer acceptable. Stalin prioritized establishing Communist experts so the Soviet system would not have to genuflect to bourgeois specialists. Stalin’s vydvizhentsy were members of the working class who moved to white collar, specialist, or administrative positions to replace people from other, typically bourgeois, backgrounds; it is estimated that there were 1.5 million of these trained Communist workers between 1928 and 1933. Stalin’s incubating methods, his information shield and political iron curtain maintained their purpose; the Soviet people, for the most part, accepted the conditioning and elaborate rhetoric about the Soviet Union’s superior strength. Stalin’s all-encompassing Socialist model created an isolated system that engendered the loyalty of those rising in its ranks.

The diary of Elizaveta Ykovkina Ivanovna, a woman who lived almost an entire century, from 1884-1982, and served as the national Lermontov museum director from 1937 to 1951, in Pyatigorsk, a city in the Southwestern region of Russia, provides exceptional posthumous insight into the hearts and minds of those dedicated to the Soviet cause. As the director of the museum honoring beloved Russian Romantic writer Mikhail Lermontov, Ivanovna was a writer herself, and her personal diary left behind extremely well-articulated accounts of a woman’s ruminations from before the Revolution through almost the entire epoch of the Soviet Union. Ivanovna discusses war, gender relations, politics, Stalin, the October Revolution, and Socialist ideology, all through the lens of her personal experiences. For instance, in 1949, one of Ivanovna’s entries revealed she shunned a lover due to her loyal adherence to Socialist ideology, which had

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117 ibid., 286.
stronghold over her heart. After discovering the man in question had an affair with his ex-wife, Ivanova writes, “In my conversation with F. ‘you require the impossible. We’re alive. Like everyone else we want to eat, sleep, and sometimes we want to have fun.’ He says to me. ‘No, you don’t have to live like everyone else. It’s not I that demand this, but the masses, in which you are an example. You are a role model; you don’t have the right to have deficiencies! You have to be ideal for the masses…’ It is something out of this respect that I responded to him.”

Ivanovna does not leave room for interpretation but provides her own reasoning for her unforgiving stance: she has been reared, and remains faithful to, the idealistic notions that trained her. She altruistically responds to a painful personal experience with concern for the masses and their loss of a proper exemplar. The hedonistic perspective offered by “F.” abrades the sacrificial, self-disciplined attitude cultivated by Soviet dogma that required not only the postponement of many material gratifications but also perpetual self-growth and mastery. Hence, in this case, his debauchery transcended Ivanovna’s personal grief; he had wronged the Socialist mission. Much like religion was used in the feudal ages, Stalin was able to manipulate Socialism as a tool to indoctrinate Soviet denizens with the belief that their current harsh conditions and sacrifices were worth delayed gratification, in this case the blessings of the impending Communist system as opposed to an afterlife.

In an especially introspective entry from August 1951, Ivanova discusses Socialism’s impact on her psyche, and comes to the conclusion that her life has found fulfillment through its system. She broods on her regrets in not approaching Lenin during a visit to Geneva prior to the Revolution, insisting that throughout much of her life her shyness has prevented her from obtaining success and insinuating that she had the capability to rise to prominent, influential

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119 Elizaveta Ykovkina Ivanovna. 22 August 1949. El. Iakoskina Diary Transcript, 1914-1957. Hoover Institution Archives. Stanford, CA. All archival documents are translated by the author unless otherwise noted.
positions. Her writing had the strength to mobilize the masses. Ivanovna bemoans, “These strengths of mine should have gone to important matters. Why did I not go up to Lenin in Geneva? I wanted to go up to him after his lecture and say: ‘I can’t find my place in life. Give me an occupation of that for which you serve...’” Although she found certain status through her role as a museum director, this was not a powerful position by any measure, and it was certainly not a way to enter the Nomenklatura. Curiously, Ivanovna does not attribute her failure to rise to a certain degree of rank to gender or class restrictions, but to her own faults. Self-critically, she proclaims, “‘What are you capable of, what do you know, what are you able to do?’ These are the words I believed L [Lenin] would respond with. And I would say: ‘nothing.’ Who needs a ‘nothing’ person?” On reflecting, Ivanovna understands her hesitations as mere youthful intimidations, and further regrets not applying her talents; nevertheless, she credits the October Revolution and its aftermath with resolving her frustrations: “Honestly though, after October, I don’t feel useless. In fact, never. Up until the past couple of years, I didn’t feel the effects of not being a Party member. I could have done something significant. Now when I have such plans in mind, when I want to bring to life a whole series of remarkable things—I have so little strength, and thus I have to ‘apply the brakes.’” Although Ivanovna admits not joining the Communist Party to advance her position, the Party itself remained absolved from any blame for creating her unsatisfactory status quo. However late her talents or ambitions blossomed, she does not view the fact that she remained politically removed as a crucial cause of the lack of fostering that her ambitions received. Quite the contrary, Ivanovna, with a writer’s lucidity of observation,

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reports the traumatized reaction of the Soviet population, including herself, to the news of Stalin’s death. On March 6, 1953, a grieving Ivanovna writes:

Stalin died. At 6am the whole world learned of this over the radio. In the evening there were constant notifications on the radio. Music of mourning...but the mind can’t comprehend this. It’s as if Stalin couldn’t die. What calm his existence brought. It seemed that whatever happened, no matter how tough it was, Stalin would solve, would smooth over. People could work and live in peace. And now Stalin’s gone.

I was returning along an empty street. I came across a military man with a small boy, who seemed to be his son. ‘It’s so hard, it’s so hard...’ he was repeating to his son. I had to hear these words a hundred times today. Everyone was crushed by this death.

Oh, if only this won’t cause confusion, if only the people will understand iron self-disciplined salvation. No, there can’t be confusion.  

Ivanovna captured the strong trust the Soviet populace placed in Stalin’s leadership— their sanity was dependent on it. Stalin had intentionally built this crazed devotion, a devotion powerful enough to shun lovers in its honor, and incapable of noticing weaknesses of state policy. The Stalin administration compulsively emphasized the Soviet Union’s strength and world dominance in order to create a sense of mission, a people heading toward greatness. Nevertheless, after the destruction of World War II in the Soviet Union, it was thought that the population’s uncountable, heavy sacrifices deserved a period of increased liberation, improved conditions, and lightened censorship. These desires were not realized at any point during the Stalin regime, as Stalin’s autocratic grasp was not flexible enough to compromise. In fact, in the late Stalin era, a movement known as Zhadanovshchina sprang forth; a cultural war against innovation, modernism, liberalism and Western sympathies, Zhadanovshchina prevented the

straying of the intelligentsia and threat to the existing structure by tightening the Party’s centripetal force. Stalin did not dare to ease his mind control or authoritarian ubiquity.

**Khrushchev: The Perplexities of Liberalizing**

After Nikita Khrushchev proved victorious in the triumvirate power struggle that began immediately after Stalin’s death, he took drastic measures to ease the brutality of the Stalin years. An amnesty was declared almost instantly, which freed more than a million people from the prisons and labor camps of the Gulag. Khrushchev sought to redirect the Soviet focus from defense to broadly felt material gains and improved living conditions. The United States was acutely aware that the Socialist model relied on material benefits. This was the key Socialist mode of obtaining power—they would create a system that fulfilled the material and spiritual needs of the impoverished, distressed classes. President Eisenhower knew that the Cold War that loomed before the world powers would be won indirectly, by a battle of standards of living. Eisenhower understood what lay at the core of the Communist claim and in 1953 predicted, “Hell, these boys HAVE to think in material terms—that’s all they believe in.” The Soviet Union’s economic benefits were few. Food, clothing, and housing were scarce. Khrushchev’s ensuing Thaw and the Destalinization period initiated a dangerously ambiguous Socialist modernizing period that competed with the West over standards of living. How was the Soviet Union to maintain the population’s belief in the superiority of its complex when the focus turned to material benefits? Could material desire be tempered to maintain a Socialist equilibrium?

Khrushchev fought a difficult balance. On the one hand, he wanted to create a more humane Socialism and attempted to ameliorate the harsh material conditions that beleaguered most of the Soviet population; on the other hand, he wanted to prevent an explosive disturbance

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124 Ibid., 106.
that would uproot Soviet authoritarian and centralized control. While inviting a relaxation of tensions and increase in communication with Western states, the Soviet leader also invited the risk of comparison. It was the acknowledgment of this inevitable comparison that culminated with a targeted concern for the feminine aesthetic; women’s comfort, their convenience, their style, and their level of contentment was understood to be vital to political success. Much as the Bolsheviks feared the incorporation of working women into their party, accusing them of backward and conniving tendencies that could aggravate Social-Democratic political gains, the Khrushchev regime assumed women’s needs were insatiable and potentially destructive; women were most susceptible to the bourgeois mentality. Realistically, at the outset of the Khrushchev period, many of women’s basic needs went unmet, and shortages plagued the country. The everyday life of Soviet women, as they were charged with domestic jurisdiction, consisted of astonishing encumbrance. Difficult to envision with the conveniences of contemporary society, these burdens were enormously taxing and laborious. Ivanovna illuminates the everyday experience of a woman at the dawn of the Khrushchev era. On June 14th, 1953 she enumerates:

15 minute aerobics, then airing out the bedding, the making of coffee, the cleaning of the kerosene stove and the pouring of the kerosene, the cleaning of the living room, the cleaning of the floor with a wet rag, dusting, the cleaning of the kitchen, the stairs, the corridor, the terrace (under the window), the beating of the doormats to dust them. Further?—Cooked a little jam, grounded some coffee, cooked breakfast, breakfasted, washed the dishes, made the bed, cleaned the sink with a brush and some kerosene, looked through the newspaper and it’s already 1 in the afternoon! Breakfast was at 9am, at 1pm I had a cup of tea (again lighting the kerosene stove, and washing the cup). All small things that require only a few minutes, but as a result 6 hours are spent! And fatigue…

These were the domestic chores that became known as the double burden. Women were expected to contribute as equal laboring citizens in the workforce, but when they went

home they had to work a second, sometimes equally or more laborious, domestic shift; even in the Socialist Soviet Union, domestic chores remained traditionally isolated to women. The majority of Ivanova’s diary is replete with exhaustive tasks and the psychological strains they created. Women painstakingly fixed their own pantyhose, often sewed their own clothes and clothes for their families, stood for endless hours waiting for food during perpetual shortages, and also endured the taxing impediments of water shut-offs for the sake of their families. Ivanova describes the all-consuming effects of these happenings. She writes, on September 9th, 1956, about an all-too-common occurrence:

No water came to us for five days. For two days there was no water in the yard. I wanted to “immortalize” these days. On the 30th, on Thursday, the water vanished at 10 in the morning. We somehow managed with “reserves” on that day. On the 31st, there was not a drop of water in the house. In the yard the yard janitress: “let’s go to search.” “Let’s!” …on the streets by fences figures rush with buckets, jugs, teapots in their hands. I returned without water.126

Khrushchev would attempt to straddle the fragile balance of initiating broad, refocused reform while preserving the authority of the Soviet Union. The task was ambitious. In 1956, the same year as Khrushchev’s “secret speech” that denounced Stalin’s regime as a heresy to the Communist cause, uprisings broke out in Hungary and Poland. Fearing the loss of these Soviet satellites as well as international clout, Khrushchev chose to respond with retaliating force and military presence to quiet the continuing revolt in Hungary. Nevertheless, Hungary and Poland were permitted liberalizations that began to shift the steel grasp and authority of Stalin’s control. The ice was broken. Hungary was allowed to legalize some private enterprise while Poland halted the collectivization of agriculture and reestablished the Catholic Church.127 Indeed, the Eastern European Soviet satellites would launch liberalizations and consumer and material benefits beyond the grip of the Soviet republics. The Soviet republics struggled with the harshest

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126 Ibid., 9 September, 1956.
shortages and material conditions; the proximity of the satellites and their visible prosperity in comparison to the Soviet republics glared as evidence against the credibility of Soviet (and Destalinization’s) claims of quality improvements. As the vanguard of Socialist utopia, why were the Soviet republics, which functioned within the heart of Socialism, the last to claim material gains? Khrushchev himself wrote on this predicament. Appeasing the satellite states in order to assert Soviet authority adversely affected the Soviet republics. In his memoirs, Khrushchev writes, “It was particularly expensive to keep our armies outside the USSR, and it was profitable for the state on whose territory our troops were stationed. We had to pay the Poles for the barracks they built for us and also compensate them for our bases by giving them the latest weapons and high-technology industrial equipment. All this amounted to a considerable sum. These expenditures put a great strain on our economy.”128 The satellite states’ comparative prosperity showed. Products from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany were sold in large quantities to the Soviet republics. A range of goods from the satellites, such as fabric and clothing, shoes, tableware, lamps, furniture, and decorative art, became highly coveted as products of superior quality.129 Furthermore, the satellites were more likely to attempt to wrangle free from Soviet censorship. For instance, Poland experienced an artistic and cultural invigoration during the Thaw and absorbed Western modernizing influences; these liberalizations were maintained until the end of the system in 1989. Soviet agitprop was not only repudiated, it was unfashionable and antiquated. However, instead of attacking such liberties and publicly declaring a separation from any incentive to capitalism, Khrushchev attempted to

rapidly modernize and compete in this arena. He also attempted to please the Soviet populace by leveling the access to goods and housing that had become heavily stratified under Stalin.

Although Khrushchev’s ameliorations can be interpreted as a corrective Socialist materialist approach, the Soviet infrastructure was still not sufficiently developed to satisfy the economic needs of the republics, especially when compared to the facilities and production quality of the Western powers and the Soviet satellites. Khrushchev’s regime attempted a utilitarian approach to improve material conditions, and infused aestheticism, from architecture to the appearance of women, with political intention. Khrushchev’s Seven Year Plan of 1958-65 focused on material improvements and raising the living standards of the Soviet population. In 1959, the USSR’s Council of Ministers and the Central Committee introduced a decree on measures to raise production, expand the range and improve the quality of products of daily cultural life. In addition to the material improvements that were supposed to lessen the petty stifles of household tasks, Khrushchev undertook other social initiatives for women. He regarded the de-Stalinization process that occurred after his secret speech of 1956 as encouragement to take new forms of initiative, including reducing the passivity and low political participation of women. From 1958-61, there was a period of intensification of growth for women’s organizations and councils, aimed at increasing women’s political identity and consciousness. Khrushchev’s regime made abortion legal again in 1955, made divorce more accessible, and introduced longer maternity leaves for women. Furthermore, under Khrushchev, the Soviet regime undertook a massive housing project which attempted to allot apartments to every Soviet

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family, which provided domestic relief from the communal apartments of the Stalin era. Ideally, the housing program would distribute an apartment to every family or new couple, and include the modern conveniences of an improved, more convenient lifestyle. The program, launched in 1958, pledged to build 15 million city apartments and 7 million rural houses. Indeed, over one-third of the entire population of the USSR moved into new accommodations between 1956 and 1965, while others improved their existing living conditions as these shifts took place.\textsuperscript{133}

In reality, many still suffered deprived living conditions throughout the Soviet regime. Difficult bureaucratic obstacles, queues, and the need for connections still played critical roles in access to better housing. A recirculating letter, signed by 30 Moscow workers of the Institute for Tractor Engineering, to Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Leonid Brezhnev (the 17\textsuperscript{th} iteration of the letter, which began in 1957 and included petitions to Khrushchev), describes the horrifying, unsanitary conditions that plagued many in the Soviet era. In 1961, after living a decade in basement apartments originally meant for temporary housing, the languished tractor engineers state their grievances to comrade Brezhnev, which included managerial and judicial indifference, and a plea for housing transfer: “Our basement is 1.85 meters underground; all gas, sewer, heating, water tubes are located in our hostel, the rooms in our hostel are flooded from the restrooms of the first floor, the 6\textsuperscript{th} porch of our hostel/basement contains the sanitary well, and when the rise is clogged, all the dirt from 6 floors spills over to our rooms.”\textsuperscript{134}

This letter included a statement from a sanitation inspection, stating that the premises were not fit for long-term occupation; however, it is not the atrocious conditions of their housing that is most appalling, but the lack of acknowledgment from any faction of the government, local


\textsuperscript{134} Письмо Рабочих Бреjневу Л.И. Посев. Но. 5, 1961. Hoover Institution Archives. Stanford, CA.
or federal, to address the case of 73 workers living in “debased” conditions with health and safety risks without the concerns of their employer.

Overall, like a football, the Moscow City Council and the Institute push us off. We were received at the Moscow City Council in September of 1959 with comrade Borisov. At the Moscow City Council he told us “If your office had more living space to offer, I, without thinking would move you out.” But the space appeared in 1960, and comrade Borisov already turned his head the other way. On August 11th, 1960, we went to his administration and he told us, “I cannot give your director orders.” Instead of making a decision about moving us out from this basement to the new living space, comrade Borisov gives orders to comrade Gonshirov, the Committee of Leningrade region’s chairperson, he registered us for five to seven more years of suffocating in this basement. This is not the way communists act, but real prostitutes. He’s deranged. Every time he lies without a fear of consequence. This does not suit his position as the Vice President of the Moscow City Council, not even a simple worker would act like this.\(^{135}\)

This letter reveals the conundrum of the Khrushchev regime and its material promises to the nation: maintaining the integrity of Communist ideology when these promises did not materialize was becoming more difficult. Khrushchev attempted a vastly complicated goal. In order to sustain Soviet Union power in the ideological battle with capitalism, bureaucratic, centralized authority had to be enforced. However, when privileged bureaucrats manipulated policy according to their own whims and with impunity, the masses would begin to question the integrity of the system. The Soviet system, with its reformist, anti-Stalinist direction under Khrushchev, was working to achieve a superior quality of life. The credibility of the Khrushchev regime lay in its productive material output. Khrushchev and the Western world were extremely conscious of this; Khrushchev would need to offer incentives and he would need to mollify women’s burdens.

Khrushchev attempted to alleviate women’s burdens as a central part of his quest to enhance the spiritual and material well-being of the Soviet people. The Khrushchev era

\(^{135}\) Ibid.
acknowledged the enormous difficulties that women experienced in combining motherhood, household responsibilities, and professional commitments. Women became increasingly relevant politically after World War II. As the Soviet Union suffered the greatest number of casualties during World War II, considerable demographic gaps were produced, as well as a sex and age imbalance that was not completely rectified until the end of the Khrushchev era in 1964. With such a divergent ratio in the population, the state became more concerned with the welfare of its women. Reproductive rights and maternal responsibilities were emphasized, encouraged and rewarded. The Soviet government, in its attempts to stimulate the birth rate, gave regular monthly social welfare benefits to mothers of large families, awarded titles and medals related to the quantity of offspring, and expanded the funding of childcare. Hence, single motherhood was not frowned upon and stigmatized like it was in the West, especially as women were becoming more independent both as a result of their numerical dominance and their increased educational and work opportunities. In 1956, women made up 45 percent of the Soviet labor force and were major contributors to education, healthcare, trade, public services, and light industries.\footnote{Natasha Kolchevska, “Angels in the Home and at Work: Russian Women in the Khrushchev Years,” \textit{Women’s Studies Quarterly} 33, (2005), 114-137.} By the end of 1964, women constituted 63\% of students with specialized education, and 54\% of the graduates with higher education. Women feminized certain industries in the Soviet Union, becoming the majority in particular fields such as healthcare and trade, and in public services such as catering, communications, finance, education, and lower-level scientific work. Women were making an instrumental mark in certain areas of employment, and were also being elected as deputies and representatives to
the USSR Supreme Soviet governing bodies. In addition, zhensoveti, or women-only
councils, were formed to develop a stronger connection between women and Party politics.

Khrushchev attempted to adjust state services to cater to women’s expanding demands by
creating public services such as canteens, childcare, and laundries; improvement in technologies
of domestic goods was also prioritized. Women, for the most part, had lived in primitive
conditions, which made their household work extensively grueling, and lacked basic appliances
that would lessen the time necessary for household tasks. The Khrushchev era attempted to
address these issues, but nevertheless, the domestic realm remained exclusively the concern of
women. The popular Soviet magazine Ogonek depicts a cartoon, which humorously exaggerates
the attitude toward women within the household; a child asks, “Father, why are you lying in bed
with your shoes on?” and receives the reply, “Well, you know your mother’s at work—can’t take
off my shoes.”

Khrushchev’s regime pioneered important Socialist modernizations and improvements
for the Soviet Union. The Khrushchev era focus on practicality and utilitarian use was infused
into most facets of construction of post-Stalinist society. In order to maintain a Socialist
ideological hold while initiating reforms and expanding the availability of material products,
Khrushchev increased Socialist rhetoric and applied more aesthetic concern to the entire scope of
society. Everything from architecture to furniture needed to be vetted and built consciously for
Socialist society; these shifts in material culture will be further discussed in the next chapter.
Although less blatant than those from the Stalinist era, ideological contradictions existed
nonetheless. Families yearned to live separately, in their own homes and not as part of a
collective; and unequal gender norms persisted, keeping women domestic subordinates. In his

137 Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood, eds. Women in the Khrushchev Era, 11.
memoirs, Khrushchev unintentionally reflects his gender bias in discussing the infamous “Kitchen Debate,” which supposedly championed the Socialist attitude toward women and its egalitarian benefits for society: “The conversation began like this: I picked up an automatic device for squeezing lemon juice for tea and said, ‘What a silly thing for your people to exhibit in the Soviet Union, Mr. Nixon! All you need for tea is a couple of drops of lemon juice. I think it would take a housewife longer to use this gadget than it would for her to do what our housewives do: slice a piece of lemon, drop it into a glass of tea, and then squeeze a few drops out with a spoon.”

Ironically, although the Kitchen Debate would become known for its public declarations of the divergent ideologies regarding access to goods and the role of women, for Khrushchev, household items were, in actuality, synonymous with women as well. In order to compete with the United States in the Cold War, the Soviet Union would boast on the world stage about Socialist benefits, which included free services and social equities; however, when the quality of these deliverables, including gender parity, were weak or hard to come by, and U.S. concern for civil and gender rights grew, the value of the Socialist lifestyle diminished in comparison.

Chapter Three

Khrushchev’s Ideological Utilitarianism: The Faithful Mobilization Open to World Scrutiny

Khrushchev’s regime instituted deep structural changes for the Soviet Union. Khrushchev’s reforms were aimed at recovering and advancing orthodox Socialist doctrines, while integrating modern desires, such as the desire of families to live in segregated, nuclear family units. Khrushchev sought to modernize while restoring ideology all the while daring to

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open the Soviet Union to Western judgments. The Khrushchev period increased the presence of exhibitions and fairs, which allowed for more travelers to visit the Soviet Union. This opened the Soviet Union to Western criticism, which often observed Soviet women’s roles with special scrutiny in the peaceful competition of this period. Khrushchev welcomed this material competition and accelerated his aesthetic fixation on the domestic realm and on women; this was both an ideological tactic to maintain the Party’s strength domestically, as well as an international maneuver for winning the battle of living standards. During the 1950s in the United States, women trended toward stay-at-home dependent lifestyles that championed the abundance of commodities and the economic growth of post-World War II industries. American women existed in an insular wife space that was unfamiliar to the toiling Soviet women of the 1950s. Khrushchev’s regime acquiesced to Western scrutiny by introducing double standards for Soviet women, which included the heavy weight the Khrushchev regime placed on everyday aesthetic concerns. Nevertheless, the Khrushchev regime was extremely concerned with the welfare of the working class and Communist ideals, and this was reflected in the policies of the Khrushchev era. Khrushchev’s regime restructured the education model toward a more proletarian mold by aligning education directly to work, factories, and production. Furthermore, Khrushchev worked extensively to modernize architecture away from Stalinist pomp and excess; Khrushchev established utilitarianism as the fundamental principle for modernist architecture—if it didn’t serve an essential purpose, it was eschewed. Khrushchev’s regime also concentrated heavily on the upbringing of children; Khrushchev took special interest in expanding the impact of Russian Communist juveniles’ organizations. Although Khrushchev worked to increase housing that would deviate from the Communist ideal of communal, shared living space, he nevertheless intensified efforts to ensure that that segregated living space was not isolationist by making
certain that nesting was discouraged through a myriad of methods. Khrushchev also turned this utilitarianism toward the government itself. Khrushchev executed a massive decentralization of the government bureaucracy, which created region-based branches of government. Khrushchev utilized rhetoric that emphasized a return to Leninism in order to build credibility for his reforms; in fact, many of his initiatives reinvigorated Pre-Stalinist activities, such as DomKom, which were housing committees centered on boosting communal activity.

Khrushchev genuinely believed in the uplifting power of Communism, and he sought to extend its influence by every possible method. Although Khrushchev liberalized the Soviet Union from the harshest Stalinist practices, he increased the ubiquity of Communist dogma. Khrushchev attempted to counter the destabilizing effects on governmental authority, which his liberalizations brought, by increasing the overall encroachment of Communism on everyday morality. Khrushchev’s regime also appeased its citizens by diversifying consumer goods, and allotting almost half of the country’s population with their own apartment; however, the problem of shortages and insufficiencies was never solved, and still remained an issue throughout the Soviet Union’s existence. Nevertheless, Khrushchev initiated the move toward indirect governmental authority, while eliminating the fear of the Communist dictatorship that the USSR experienced under Stalin; paralyzing fear tactics over the populace were never reinstated to the same extent. Hence, the Soviet population began to take more risks against the regime, which ultimately revealed the Soviet Union’s unsustainable authority.

**Khrushchev’s Strategic Destalinization: The Practice of Utilitarian Ethics**

The mechanisms of Khrushchev’s reforms reflected his faith in Communism as an ideology, not just as a pretense for power. Khrushchev’s reforms demonstrated his regime’s interest in returning to the interest of the people, and to nurturing their participation in an active
collective. Of course the motives of Khrushchev’s regime were not solely altruistic, evident by the Berlin Wall that was erected to separate the Socialist East Berlin from the Western supported West Berlin in 1961, and the suppressions of uprisings in Hungary and Poland in 1956. Nonetheless, Khrushchev pushed for deep reforms that demonstrated a concern to align to Communist principles. This concern of aligning to Communist principles combined with an increased magnitude of involvement in the everyday life of Soviet citizens, or “byt” in Russian. This intensified infiltration into people’s everyday lives presented itself in a myriad of ways.

Khrushchev’s bold reforms were preceded by bold declarations. After Khrushchev’s “secret speech” in 1956, and at the concluding speech of the twentieth party congress in 1961, Khrushchev officially recognized destalinization and underscored the regime’s refocusing on, what he proclaimed as, authentic Communist, Leninist aims. During the Twenty-Second Party Congress Khrushchev targeted the anti-Party group, those in the Presidium who opposed Khrushchev’s authority and anti-Stalinism, for their breach with the venerable Communist cause and for their aid in the Cult of Personality; by identifying specified scapegoats, Khrushchev was able to remove blame from himself and provide the cathartic relief that was necessary after the emotional uprooting of the Stalinist regime. Khrushchev, in the closing words of the Twenty-Second Party Congress, outlines the proper perspective for those holding positions in a Socialist society: “Us, Communists, highly cherish and support the authority of the correct and mature leadership. We must protect the recognized authority of the Party and the nation’s leaders. However, each leader must understand the other side to this matter—to never brag about their situation, to understand that to fill one or the other position, a person fulfills only the will of the Party, the will of the nation, which clad his position with the highest of powers, but does not ever
lose control over him.”140 With this statement, Khrushchev symbolically announced the restoration of the people’s control over the government; Khrushchev brought the Party back to its purpose—serving the needs of the people. Khrushchev emphatically discussed the importance of having those in power subject to checks on their authority, with no infallible person maintained in power.

Ironically, Khrushchev’s power was itself tested in 1957, a few years prior to the Twenty Second Party Congress, when the anti-Party group consisting of Georgy Malenkov, Lazar Kaganovich, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Dmitri Shepilov, attempted to agitate the Party against Khrushchev. This anti-Party group convened a meeting of the Presidium, the executive committee of the Soviet Union, to explicitly discuss the ousting of Khrushchev. The anti-Party group was able to garner majority support to overthrow Khrushchev, but Khrushchev strategically demanded that the Central Committee assemble, as it was the final arbiter for appointing and dismissing Party Secretaries.141 The anti-Party group was forced to acquiesce to the plenary majority, which supported Khrushchev. Khrushchev benevolently demoted those in the anti-Party group from their powerful posts to unfavorable director positions in the far reaches of the Soviet empire, but did not enact any severe measures.142

Those involved in the anti-Party group were most incensed by Khrushchev’s reforms, which in combination to destalinization included a massive decentralization of industrial administration. Khrushchev’s industrial management reforms altered the top-down autonomy that existed under Stalin, diversifying power, which would enable the gradual transfer of power to the people, and the realization of Communism. Soviet society was constructed to achieve

140 Khrushchev, Nikita S. “Заключительное слово на XXII съезде КПСС.” Государственное Издательство Политической Литературы. (Moscow, 1961), 41. All works translated by the author unless otherwise stated.
delineated production goals determined and distributed by a central command economy, and
Khrushchev’s industrial management reforms, announced in May of 1957 as the Reorganization
Act, was a considerable overhaul of power. Under Stalin, the planning process began with the
Council of Ministers, which was directly supported by the Politburo, the Supreme Soviet
executive committee controlled completely by Stalin, which was later expanded and changed to
the Presidium under Khrushchev. Based on political, social, and economic grounds, the Council
would outline the key branches of the economy and set their targets.\textsuperscript{143} The State Planning
Commission, or Gosplan, then drew up the orders for the Ministries, who worked to pass their
orders down the necessary chain of command—department, trust, factory, while Gosplan
circulated the Party orders to regional and local planning offices as well. These subordinate
bodies were permitted to offer counter-suggestions, with the Council of Ministers as the court of
appeals. Hence, the subordinate bodies, whether a factory or a locality, who would have opposed
the industrial planning decisions of the Council of Ministers, (which could have been based on a
range of needs: insignificant attention to a vital sector, a lack of infrastructure to meet target,
etc.) had to address these issues with the same body that initiated the policies in question.
Furthermore, the Council of Ministers was directly backed by the Politburo, and questioning the
decisions supported by the authoritative executive branch was undoubtedly a dubious position to
take. Khrushchev altered the industrial management landscape by adding 105 regional economic
councils, called sovnarkhozy. The sovnarkhozy were located in the region in which they
administered economic plans; hence, the councils would supposedly be more knowledgeable and
acutely aware of the needs of their locales, which would lead to informed decision making and

The sovnarkhozy became separate operating units, divided across industrial branches, and were formed with their own administrative and operational sectors. Each sovnarkhoz contained its own Party unit, which served to inform the provincial Party organization, for which it was directly responsible, of any alarming circumstances or dilemmas in the sovnarkhoz. During the old ministerial system, the local Party organ was not made a key player in the industrial development within their jurisdictions; ministerial operatives were performing all functions according to centralized command. With Khrushchev’s reforms, the sovnarkhoz was directly responsible for the industrial management in its region, a momentous gain for regional industrial autonomy, which was nonexistent during the Stalin era. Furthermore, the Communist Party’s power balance was further diversified by the fact that the sovnarkhoz chairman did not annex the provincial first secretary’s position, but the provisional first secretary remained the Party’s main representative in the area, the position which was more often appointed to Central Committee membership. Gosplan’s role evolved to coordinating the overall economic outcomes of the sovnarkhozy, while the sovnarkhozy managed their own output system and the general observation of local industry and the local soviets, in essence becoming the “central manager.” Although the sovnarkhozy had to function within the established confines of the basic plan set in Moscow, the methods that the local engine took to meet the over-all production plan were not micro-managed. Frictions did arise between the sovnarkhozy and Gosplan, but the restructuring symbolizes the expansive utilitarianism behind many of the reforms Khrushchev enacted. Reforms such as the industrial reorganization were

145 Ibid., 50.
146 Ibid., 54.
innovative, still within the Socialist framework, yet showed progress toward constructing communal ownership of production, and the ultimate goal—Communism.

Khrushchev also initiated substantial agricultural reforms, which intensified government attention to the agricultural demands of the U.S.S.R. Khrushchev experimented with policies in order to fill the agricultural production gaps of the Soviet Union, a long problematized issue. Khrushchev made it a primary concern of his regime to increase agricultural production. Khrushchev focused on several angles to drive agricultural production; he envisioned superior production power in further merging collective farms into enlarged units, the increase of state farming through the converting of collective farms, and in 1958, he decreed the liquidation of state-machine tractor stations.\(^{147}\) The state machine tractor stations, or MTS, leased modern farm machinery to collective farms that relied upon their services in order to operate. MTS functioned as a branch of the state, and were compensated by the collectives. On January 22, 1958, Khrushchev mandated that the MTS sell their equipment to the collectives; by December 1958, 81% of the collectives had taken ownership of the machinery by cash or credit.\(^{148}\) Much like the sovnarkhozy system, Khrushchev decentralized agricultural production. In addition to the removal of the collective reliance on MTS, and the state, Khrushchev limited central agricultural planning to establishing quotas. Khrushchev further incentivized agricultural production by dramatically increasing the price paid to collective workers for products and reducing their taxes; between 1952 and 1956-57, the general cash income of collectives doubled from 42.8 billion to 95 billion.\(^{149}\) The state then encouraged that the collectives use their increase in resources to invest in the necessary capital to grow their productive power. Finally, the Khrushchev


\(^{148}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 22.
agricultural reforms simplified the procurement process and established a price system based only on two options: a government price and a free market price, for those few items traded on the restricted private market. Previously, the state paid farmers higher prices if they reached production levels above their quota; the procurement system had established various intricacies, including a graduated price scale, which depended on the quantity of products delivered. Khrushchev’s agricultural reforms depicted a trend toward supporting the Soviet Union’s agricultural production from the bottom-up. More autonomy and responsibility was allotted to agricultural workers and peasants, while Khrushchev sought to consolidate the farming practices holistically.

Khrushchev believed that large-scale projects would transform the Soviet Union by vastly lifting the populace while modernizing Soviet infrastructure. This Soviet adherence to a large-scale model existed with Lenin and Stalin as well, and has become an essential aspect of Soviet Marxism, an adaptation of Marxist philosophy, as it represses the individual for the sake of the state; Soviet Marxism relies on technological economic forces to propel society forward and is led by authoritarians, not the masses. Soviet Marxism trusted that mass-production created the best circumstances in which technology could thrive, advance, and produce. Khrushchev sought to accelerate this vision as part of the impetus behind his constructivist ideology that also included strengthening research in science and technology. Khrushchev believed that modernization was propelled by science and technology, and that these advancements were the key factors that led to the evolution of an ideal Communist state.

Khrushchev drove the creation of research cities across the Soviet Union, consigning the efforts of party, government, and economic sectors to construct cities that became a conglomeration of

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150 Ibid., 27.
research institutes formed away from the centralized information powerhouse zones of Moscow and Leningrad.\footnote{Ibid., 540.} Although it has not been determined whether Marx himself was a technological determinist, as his stance on machine production was equivocal, Stalin took a broader perspective on the question of technology in the Communist context and believed that people involved in the production process were a large part of the productive force in society, that technology was not the singular aim in itself. Stalin was not an adamant believer in technological determinism, which was the belief that technology informs and develops social structure and culture as an everlasting power of influence molding society.\footnote{Donald MacKenzie. “Marx and the Machine.” Technology and Culture, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jul., 1984), 476.} Khrushchev adopted the belief that technology would ignite society’s evolution toward Communism, as a means to an end, and he set government resources to fund these movements. Khrushchev’s large-scale agricultural initiatives and his development of research cities also spread authority across the Soviet empire, revealing the efforts his regime instituted in driving fundamental decentralization and the diffusion of power.

Khrushchev further shifted the Soviet Union’s direction by aligning the education system to industry, in an attempt to form a state more reflective of proletariat rule. On December 24, 1958, Khrushchev’s regime enacted vast reforms of the Soviet educational system. These reforms sought to create a stronger tie between school and work. A mandatory eight years were established for Soviet students, with general education, labor and a polytechnical school curriculum; the first four years would become elementary schooling, and the second portion of the four year curriculum would become the first phase, out of an optional two phases, of secondary education.\footnote{Albert Boiter. “The Khrushchev School Reform.” Comparative Education Review. Vol.2 No.3 (Feb. 1959), 9.} New activities were added, which included: home economics for girls, school workshops for boys, lectures on labor, work-experience projects, visits to plants, field
trips, physical education, and youth organization (the Pioneers) activities. Before Khrushchev’s school reform, there were two separate systems that students were funneled through: the ten-year and seven-year tracks. The ten-year schools led to higher institutions and universities, while the seven-year schools led to “technicums” or vocational schools. Khrushchev’s reforms created two main methods for qualifying for institutions of higher learning: the Schools of Working Youth and Rural Youth, and Secondary General Education Labor and Polytechnical Schools with Production Training, while students also had vocational schools, and other limited options within specialized secondary education. The Schools of Working Youth and Rural Youth existed since 1943, and consisted of night classes that permitted students who had completed the eighth grade to enter into full-time employment; the Secondary General Education, Labor and Polytechnical Schools with Production Training became a new continuation, the second phase, of the eight year compulsory school program for students who have already declared their occupational field of interest. This three-year school combined an academic curriculum with polytechnical education, as well as an alignment to a factory or agricultural apprenticeship to match the chosen profession. Specialized secondary education, the technicums, under the Khrushchev reforms were rarely an option for qualifying for higher educations, as 95% of the enrollees from the technicums did not go on to receive further accreditation. Schools for the Gifted trained students showing talent in the fine arts, who then continued on to higher institutions of learning; although this was a continuation from the Stalin era, the Khrushchev reforms did not focus on the Schools for the Gifted, and controversy flared when suspicions arose in 1958 that tuition would be charged for enrollment in these schools. However, when the final draft of the school reform law was instated, the Schools for the Gifted were completely

157 Ibid., 11.
omitted from mention.\textsuperscript{158} Boarding schools were considered the ideal environment for educating Communist posterity, and were even expanded under the Seven-Year Plan of 1959-1965.\textsuperscript{159} Under the 1958 reforms, vocational schools were organized to offer instruction in a myriad of skills suited to various uses in plants and production. Furthermore, the 1958 reforms decreased the amount of students attending institutions full-time in order to increase and encourage the majority of enrolled students to pursue evening or independent correspondence work while working full-time in production for the first two years of their five-year overall course.

Khrushchev’s school reforms of 1958 considerably altered the educational landscape and significantly complicated entrance into institutions of higher learning. Khrushchev’s school reforms of 1958 intensified the education-work alignment and veered away from knowledge-based skills that were inapplicable in production; Khrushchev attempted to enforce work as a crucial aspect of the educational process, and was moving toward not accepting many exceptions. Unsurprisingly, the 1958 reforms were controversial and sparked much criticism. In 1963, new admittance rules were established for institutions of higher learning: the institutions were expanded to include a larger intake of students, with 20% matriculated directly from secondary schools, without the two-year work-training requirement.\textsuperscript{160} Soviet society repudiated Khrushchev’s attempts at revaluing higher education and enforcing a more immediate pipeline for production roles; Soviet culture instead demanded a restored avenue for the attainment of higher education and the prestige that it represented.

Khrushchev worked to increase the role of Soviet youth as a formidable Communist agent as one of the pillars of his reforms. In 1957 Khrushchev separated the Pioneers from their

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\textsuperscript{158}Ibid., 11. \\
\textsuperscript{159}Ibid., 12. \\
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role in the school system, thereby mandating the increased importance and the responsibility of
the organization.¹⁶¹ Students could no longer casually participate in the Pioneer organizations
conveniently blended with their schools; participation was made an integral part of adolescent
rearing, and more time was spent away from their homes. Hence, from the crèches, to the
children’s corners, to the successive children’s Party organizations, juvenile Soviet citizens were
pulled away from their families in order to develop as fully-socialized Communists.
Khrushchev’s increased attention to youth was epitomized in the construction of the Pioneers’
Palace, which opened in Moscow in 1962. In many ways it was the embodiment of the
Khrushchev reforms—it served a utilitarian function; it was designed aesthetically for purposeful
use, and it removed people (juveniles in this case) from their private tendencies. The Pioneers’
Palace was a large horizontal structure designed for functional use. No decorative main façade
subtracted from the building’s purpose, while its location in a meadow far from the city center
allowed for a camp-like retreat atmosphere. Pioneer activities, gloriously sanctified by the
Pioneer Palace, were a method of indoctrinating Communism by building an autonomous haven
for children.

Khrushchev’s regime took tremendous interest in children and adolescent participation in
the Communist Party; in fact, this was an essential element of Khrushchev’s Leninist
legitimation as Lenin declared that children should be the only pampered class of society.¹⁶²
Khrushchev promoted children’s corners in the Khrushchevki apartments, while not emphasizing
the need for other personal nurturing, like couples’ relationships, for example. Furthermore,
Khrushchev expanded Pioneer organizations’ camps, and revised their system of operating in

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 148.
order to inculcate more youth for integration into the Party. The Pioneer Organization was part of the Komsomol, also known as the All-Union Communist Youth League, which was the Communist Party’s method of socialization for juveniles; there were several branches of the Komsomol: the Octobrists recruited children from ages seven to nine, the Pioneers recruited those children in the fundamental ages of ten to fifteen, and the Komsomol recruited youth from ages fourteen to twenty-eight. Beginning in 1954-1955, the Komsomol took a large part in monitoring the leisure initiative that was put forward in order to check immoral behavior in everyday life, often loosely defined as parasitism. The Khrushchev regime promulgated and utilized the Komsomol newspapers, *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* and *Moscovskii Komsomolets*, as social change agents by consistently promoting model behavior and rules that would lead to a strong, autonomous New Soviet Person. Khrushchev relied upon mass assimilation to foster allegiance to the Communist mission. The fear of social ostracization was to work as the mechanism to build compliance and social support for the regime. The newspapers followed the Party’s ideological perspective of how young people should model their lives, while Komsomol patrols galvanized groups of exemplar young Communists that conducted surveillances for the Party. The Komsomol patrols attempted to mitigate the *Stiliagi*, or style obsessed youth, that were drawn to Western consumerism and culture. However, in 1957, the Soviet Union hosted the Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students; 31,000 foreigners arrived from 131 countries. Soviet youth were allowed to interact with foreigners in an open environment unheard of prior to the Thaw. Ten years prior to the festival, marriage to foreigners was a


164 Ibid., 634.

For the 1957 youth festival, 1,000 foreign correspondents were also present to relay the significant event, and half were from capitalist countries. Although the openness and relaxed censorship of the event encouraged sincere cultural exchanges, the Khrushchev regime was still cautious about controlling the image of feminine youth, particularly. 107 Soviet girls were detained for dishonorable behavior that would have perpetuated the idea of a “loose girl,” a girl that was given to loose morals and values and easily influenced by Western cultural influences. Although the Khrushchev regime allowed for a liberalization that created important and memorable experiences for impressionable Soviet youth, it still anxiously combated the liberalization in order to keep it within the Soviet Socialist confines. Many of the regime’s anxieties were focused on women, as it was believed women were inherently more vulnerable to capitalist advances, literally and figuratively.

Khrushchev’s reforms were not all rooted in the fundamental functions of society; Khrushchev also prioritized aesthetic post-Stalinist reform. In December of 1954, prior to Khrushchev’s infamous vilification of the Stalinist Cult of Personality and the cruelty of that system that purged and murdered its own denizens, Khrushchev attacked Stalinist architecture in a speech to the All-Union Congress of Soviet Builders and Architects. In 1955, the Directive of the Party and Government Against Superfluity in Project Design and Construction was instituted, followed by the Union of Architects congruent directive against ornamentalism. These reforms followed a massive overhaul of the Stalinist approach to aesthetics and domestic culture. Khrushchev’s regime honed in on modernist constructivist practices, emphasizing

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166 Ibid., 77.
167 Ibid., 84-87.
simplicity, minimalism, functionality and utilitarianism in design. In his memoirs, Khrushchev chastises the Stalinist aesthetic excess that detracted from the mass needs of the people in his memoirs:

At Stalin’s orders, the skyscrapers were built. When they were finished, our engineers and architects reported that the rent would have to be very high in order to pay for the maintenance of the buildings. The rent was so high that not a single inhabitant of Moscow could possibly afford to live in them, so Stalin decided to reduce the rent somewhat so the apartments could be assigned to certain prominent and well-paid actors, scientists, and writers. The whole thing was pretty stupid, if you ask me…I’m not against all skyscrapers—it’s just that I think the design of a structure should correspond to its function…For the same amount of money we could have built ordinary buildings that would have housed three times as many students.\textsuperscript{170}

Khrushchev’s egalitarianism was visually represented in the construction of the colossal housing project, which revolutionized Soviet domestic life. This gargantuan building project moved 126 million, more than half of the country into “Khrushchevki,” T-shaped apartments with 3 rooms, with one large room and two smaller rooms off to both sides. The construction of the Khrushchevki was the epitome of the modern industrial building design, the concept of which Khrushchev intended to transfer to every facet of Soviet design—purposeful, economic, and efficient. These housing projects were built with prefabricated concrete panels for walls, as well as prefabricated stairwells, landings and roofs, which were then transported to construction sites.\textsuperscript{171} The designs for the housing projects were standardized, with buildings kept at a maximum of five floors, with small kitchens and low ceilings that expedited the building process and kept the construction cost-effective. Architectural residential building designs were not permitted to lavish attention to the exteriors that faced the street, but instead were authorized to move architectural attention toward the sides of the building that faced the neighborhood, in

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order to create courtyards with a neighborhood pull. Khrushchev’s functionality of design followed into interior conceptualization. “Petit-bourgeois” knick-knacks, prevalent during the Stalinist period, were stressed as hazardous to the development of the proper consciousness. The mantra for designers became form follows function. Importance was placed on Marxist materialist responsibility and the adherence to proper design value in the civilian environment, which was necessary in order to reinforce the Communist mindset.

The Khrushchev massive housing construction project became another method to activate additional government policies in order to ensure that the Communist vision was fortified in the populace’s minds. Khrushchev used the transitional opportunity of the exponential housing rearrangement to increase other Party influences over the lifestyle of the Soviet society. Khrushchev’s “byt” reformers revived emphasis on the importance of maintaining a children’s corner [detskii ugolok] in the home, a Leninist innovation from the 1920s, where children’s autonomy and development was encouraged to grow. Furthermore, conscientious, multi-functional interior design and spatial planning was advised over the less-functional, sedentary arrangement of Stalinist home planning. Khrushchev’s design practices were augmented by the formation of organizations that assisted in implementing the progressive lifestyles envisioned in the transformation. In 1956 the Gosstroi (State Construction) administrative branch of the Party was formed to manage and monitor the housing construction project; hence, the Party ensured that their role and presence in the new lifestyles of its people had not decreased. In 1962, the All Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics was founded to provide Party approved expertise from architects, industrial designers, planners, sociologists and historians for

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172 Ibid., 565.
Gosstroi’s use, and other sectors of the economy that produced consumer goods.\footnote{Ibid., 164.} Furthermore, the domkoms were reinvigorated and actively utilized by the Communist Party during the Khrushchev period. The Communist Party members of the domkoms utilized these committees to address and spread ideological compliance; the domkoms facilitated home inspections of apartments, and coordinated communal activities, such as libraries, health clinics, and children’s crèches.\footnote{Ibid., 174.} Hence, although the Khrushchev housing initiative appeared to abandon one of the essential building blocks of Communism—communal living—the initiative enabled other programs to flourish that enabled, inspired, and monitored communality.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, communal apartments failed to foster a communal spirit; in fact, they often created a fear of interaction. The NKVD, the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, which also operated as the government’s secret police organization, instituted rules and regulations for internal order in houses and apartments that were enforced by a senior plenipotentiary who was charged with their enforcement. Yard keepers also regulated relations in the communal apartment. This surveillance was not casual and could lead to prosecution in the comrades’ court, a disciplinary institution upheld by the housing authorities.\footnote{Katerina Gerasimova. “Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment.” Susan E. Reid and David Crowley. \textit{Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc}. (New York: Oxford International Publishers, 2002), 212.} Fruitful relationships were quite sparse in this communal setting, where most people retreated to their private corners, often resentful and suspicious of the other dwellers. Common spaces grew derelict as tenants ignored responsibility and adopted “parasitic attitudes” regarding shared upkeep.\footnote{Ibid., 218.} In effect, by allowing families to live separately with their own sense of security, they were more likely to participate in and appreciate the less burdensome communal life.

Khrushchev answered a severe need of the Soviet people while encouraging the ideology’s
development and its mission: active participation to attain collective unity and progress, while not losing sight of the need to regulate the building of the new Socialist model.

Khrushchev’s liberalizations and reforms did create changes that caused problems for the regime; however, Khrushchev was generally prepared to battle them. Khrushchev invigorated a campaign to battle so called “social parasites,” a reactionary measure needed to preserve the regime after his greatest liberalization, the release of gulag prisoners. The influxes of gulag returnees were often controversially received back into society. How was it possible that the government would allow for these embittered individuals, which surely were not all Leninist martyrs from the Stalinist regime, to integrate back into society? Khrushchev’s regime invented the “New Soviet Man” principles to promote the proper Communist image to emulate, which worked to assure citizens that the regime was not condoning looseness and vulgarity. In the Twenty-Second Party Congress, Socialism was announced as achieved and 1980 was set as the time Communism would be accomplished. Hence, in 1961, a twelve-point Moral Code was published in Pravda, the Soviet Union’s official Party paper, which enumerated the values and characteristics of a Soviet person progressing toward the future, toward Communism. The twelve points were as follows:

1. Devotion to communism and love for the Socialist fatherland and Socialist countries.
2. Conscientious labor for the good of society; he who does not work does not eat.
3. Concern for protecting and accumulating communal property.
4. A developed sense of social duty, intolerance toward those who violate collective interests.
5. Collectivism and a comradely attitude to helping others; all for one and one for all.
6. Humane relationships and mutual respect among people: each human being is a friend, comrade, and brother to all.
7. Decency and truthfulness, moral cleanliness, simplicity, and modesty in public and private life.
8. Mutual respect within the family, attention to the upbringing of children.
9. Intolerance toward injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, and careerism.
10. Friendship and brotherhood among all the peoples of the USSR; intolerance of any kind of nationalist or racial hostility.
11. Intransigence toward the enemies of communism.
12. Brotherly solidarity with all the workers of all peoples.  

Activists went door to door to lobby for the new Party program and the Moral Code. In Moscow, four hundred thousand propagandists and agitators were sent to work to endorse the new party program. These solicitations to join the Code were by no means unpremeditated. By 1961, the Soviet Union issued an “Anti-Parasite Law” of unparalleled proportions. This law worked to legally punish those avoiding socially useful work and leading a parasitical life; it was an extension of the 1951 Soviet law under Stalin which focused primarily on beggars, tramps, and prostitutes. The Anti-Parasite law allowed for a broad, legalized scrutiny of behavior, and it was followed in tandem with legislation that introduced the death penalty for especially significant economic crimes: those engaged in such un-Communist economic activities as embezzlement, covert trade, swindling, and other currency offenses. Khrushchev attempted to cover all bases on the road to Communism; pockets of instability would undermine the regime and the ideology. Khrushchev was fixated on Communism’s evolution in the Soviet Union and attempted to secure that various impediments did not prevent its progression. Khrushchev’s liberalizations left Soviet citizens with few liberties apart from the intensified building of Communism.

Although the effectiveness of Khrushchev’s reforms can be mooted, the ideological connotations are clear: Khrushchev was revolutionary in his disassociation with Stalinist

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180 Ibid., 388-389.
stratification and excess. His wide-ranging and wide-reaching reforms depict a concern for executing policies that align to sustaining working-class domination; Khrushchev focused on a worker as producer model of progress. Khrushchev’s general decentralization was the initial step in laying the groundwork for worker ownership of capital. Khrushchev’s struggle for legitimation would, however, result not from his level of veracity in committing to Communist tenets, but from the ever growing comparison to Western living standards, which was also a comparison he openly initiated after Stalin. In the concluding speech to the Twenty-Second Party Congress, Khrushchev declared: “Now the battle of two ideologies carries a completely different character than in the dawn of Marxism. The ideas of our Socialism have mastered over the masses and have turned into a great material strength. Come to life, the work of our people creates a material-technical base for the new society. The battle from the sphere of ideologies only has moved to the sphere of material production.”

Western Perspectives of Post-Stalinism: Women as the Arbiter in the Battle for Living Standards

Khrushchev came into power declaring the easing of military defenses, and a relaxing of tensions with the Western, capitalist powers. This entailed allowing for increased interaction and communication between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world. Indeed, the flow of tourism increased in the Soviet Union. The Kremlin opened to tourists in 1958. Tourism to the Soviet Union increased from 500,000 foreigners in 1956, to 1,500,000 tourists in 1967. The Thaw also encouraged the proliferation of foreign exhibitions in the U.S.S.R to share, demonstrate, and ignite peaceful competition; forty-two foreign exhibitions took place from 1946 to 1958, a

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181 Khrushchev, Nikita S. “Заключительное слово на XXII съезде КПСС.” Государственное Издательство Политической Литературы. (Moscow, 1961), 41.
twelve-year span, while ninety foreign exhibitions were organized only from 1959 to 1961. In 1957, Malcolm Muir, a lifelong journalist and executive editor of *Newsweek* from 1955 to 1961, traveled to the Soviet Union as one of the tourists in this new climate. Mr. Muir was given a grand diplomatic tour, meeting with numerous public officials and touring various facilities of his interest. His observations reveal vital Western perspectives in the dawn of the Khrushchev era. These welcomed Western observations would become the stimulus that built Khrushchev’s determination to improve aestheticism and consumer diversification in the Soviet Union. Muir writes, under the headline “The people in the streets are drab:”

The first think that strikes one, even though he was told to expect it, is the extraordinarily drab appearance of the people in the streets. They don’t smile often but, when they do, be prepared for a battery of gold, silver, and I suspect, stainless steel teeth. Their clothes are without color, except for some very cheap print dresses that women wear on warm days. If you start from their shoes, which are especially shoddy and let your eye travel on up to their heads which are invariably hatless, it is hard to go beyond the word “drab” to describe what you see. The women seem shapeless—there is no whalebone [corset-like hourglass shape] in Russia. They wear no makeup but, when you get a glimpse of their hair underneath the scarves, you find that they have given themselves a Soviet version of a “Toni.” The appearance of the crowds in Moscow is even grubbier than in Leningrad because of the fact that, in addition to the foreign tourists, they also bring in the country yokels from all of the outlying republics.

As the Khrushchev era became more involved in the overseeing of domestic affairs, the state also concerned itself with domestic aesthetics; women were influenced to feminize their appearance during the Khrushchev era. Although the Khrushchev regime inadvertently worked to create more freedom for women, by increasing the autonomy of youth, and by establishing more daycares and nurseries, the Khrushchev regime also patronized women and added to their expectations in order to compete with the West. The Khrushchev period focused on many

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elements of idealized womanhood, from looks to behavior to mothering, which became another method for internal control, implemented to drive a modern Communism. It was also another burden for women to incur. A 1956 publication entitled “Solution of the Woman Question in the USSR” declared that women’s integration into labor, and women’s realization of equality, should not denote a loss of concern over physical appearance; they had ceased to be the “weaker” sex, but had not ceased being the “fair” sex.185 Having correct attitudes towards aesthetics in style, taste, housekeeping and consumption were considered an important part of the Soviet person’s self-discipline in Khrushchev’s competition with the United States for living standards and lifestyle. This feminized homemaking interest on the part of the state is also evident in the school reforms of 1958, which mandated home economics only for girls, as part of the new eight year curriculum. Most of the aesthetic monitoring of the domestic realm was addressed primarily to women, who were still considered the primary consumer of products and the primary caretaker of the home and the family. Khrushchev’s regime did not deem the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and female stereotypes as an essential obstacle preventing the evolution to Communism.

In contrast, many of Khrushchev’s attempts for materialistic improvements relate to women stereotypically, and are reflective of his fear that America’s material culture was particularly enticing for women’s superficial wants. Khrushchev considered women’s role a potential weakness for the struggle for power in the Cold War. Khrushchev engaged the United States in a materialistic fight, with women as the symbolic figure connoting ideological supremacy. Khrushchev felt the threat of US comparison--material objects could seduce women to view the limitations of Soviet industrialization as their imprisoner, not liberator. In an election

address to the Supreme Soviet in March 1958, Khrushchev openly declared his apprehension over Soviet inadequacies, those clearly visible by the new influx of Soviet tourists, such as Malcolm Muir:

> Our backwardness in this area serves to some extent as a confirmation of the superiority of the capitalist mode of production over the Socialist. That gives the enemies of Socialism to “throw pebbles in our garden”—that is, to make fun of us, make snide remarks about us. And they have grounds for that, because we actually are lagging behind.\(^\text{186}\)

This anxious attitude reflects trends that visitors to Russia frequently noted. In an article entitled “Russia Revisited: The People Begin to Speak,” journalist John Scott, who attended a Russian engineering school and married a Russian mathematics teacher before being banished after the start of World War II in 1941, reported his observations after his first visit back to Russia, 17 years later. In the article, which was published on September 15, 1958, Scott noted, “Will the government be able to keep the population directed toward Communism? This is a major unanswered question. Ordinary Russians show signs of a to-hell-with-Communism, give-us-more-consumer-goods attitude that the government cannot ignore.”\(^\text{187}\)

Khrushchev’s regime worked to rapidly satisfy these demands, while attempting to mollify discontent. The state attempted to increase the availability of consumer goods and female luxuries such as perfume, high heels, and cosmetics. Fashion also became an increasing concern of the Khrushchev regime, which attempted to flaunt Soviet goods as just as bountiful and beautiful to Western variations. The GUM State Department store, which was turned into a headquarters for Stalinist officials during Stalin’s reign, was reopened in Moscow in 1953; in Leningrad, the Arcade (Passazh) department store sold luxurious goods, while in 1959 the local Soviet and Party


committee decided to open three shops by 1969 to specialize in clothes of superior quality.\(^{188}\)

Ironically, Khrushchev’s regime relied upon increasing living standards, comforts, and amenities as the main legitimation of the ideology, while openly acknowledging deficiencies and simultaneously welcoming comparison.

Khrushchev’s regime was preoccupied with housekeeping and aesthetics, and attempted to demarcate women as vanguards of the Communist system, because women were unequivocally in charge of these aesthetic concerns. However, much in the same way the Komsomol and youth were steered toward becoming pivotal pillars of Communism, women’s economic independence and diversification was unimpressive. Women were continually relegated with petty household tasks and domestic responsibilities, often receiving more grueling jobs in the workplace, and rarely attaining the best positions, even in feminized industries. The increased attention to women’s issues under Khrushchev did not in actuality increase their opportunities for authority in employment or real political power. By the late 1960s, 80\% of working age women were employed outside the home, while 7.5\% were studying.\(^{189}\) Although women were attaining higher education in equal proportions to men, they were still the majority of those working in hard labor; the proportion of women employed in under-mechanized work, such as warehouse workers, letter carriers, goods examiners and distributors was at 59\% in 1959, rising to 74\% in 1970.\(^{190}\) The high level of female employment in grisly factory work was often noticed by Western observers. Malcolm Muir writes, “The factory walls, roof and floor are very old and dirty, but the machine tools and all the rest of the equipment seemed to my non-technical eye quite modern…Throughout the plant, except where work required heavy manual labor, the


\(^{190}\) Ibid., 85.
workers were women. They certainly seemed to be about the same type of skilled labor as one would find in a similar metal working plant in America.  

A New York Times article entitled “Why Russian Women Work like Men” further harped on this issue, while also dwelling on the comparison of women’s image. The article elaborates:

   Of all the human sights in the Soviet Union, none makes a more lasting impression on a Westerner than the regions of stolid, dowdy, hard-working women. All through this country, where the system prefabricates an economic pattern and then fits its human resources into it, women are carrying the heavy burden. To be sure, many hundreds of thousands are in more familiar roles of housewives, mothers, teachers, doctors, researchers. But Socialist woman is also doing Socialist man’s work—often of the most back-breaking kind…Her role in life is reflected in her appearance.

   Though this article reflects American stereotyping and the pigeonholing of women that existed during the 1950s, it also notes the phenomenon becoming more apparent throughout the world as the Iron Curtain began to be pulled back: women in the Soviet Union lived comparatively unattractive lives. In 1959, Harlan Hatcher, who served as the President of the University of Michigan from 1951 to 1967, went on a six-week, 15,000-mile tour of Russia with a group of educators. He also took his wife, Anne, who publicized her observations in an article in the Ann Arbor News. The article, “Mrs. Hatcher Finds Russia Fascinating,” notes her amusements regarding women’s role in the Soviet Union. The article revealed the astonishment with which Mrs. Hatcher found that all women worked, in every form of employment, “from manual labor like street cleaning and construction work to the professions.”

   The article goes into detail recalling an interaction between Mrs. Hatcher and a Soviet female chemistry professor, who simply could not grasp that Mrs. Hatcher was just a wife. It was unfathomable that her role as a university president’s wife was a sufficient role in and of itself. Under the

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derogatory subject line “Lipstick Used,” the article continues to illustrate the deflated appearance of Russian women through a patronizing tone, “But the Russian women are now beginning to show signs of improving their appearance, she noted. Some are now beginning to use a modest amount of lipstick, and permanents are also making their appearance. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hatcher added, they’re frizzy permanents, but permanents nevertheless.”

Evidently, the Western media placed great emphasis on women’s role in the Soviet Union, noting with satisfaction the disgraceful material quality and aesthetic care women were privileged to.

However, not all American observations were quick to dismiss the Khruschev era’s material gains, which included feminine appearance as a vital measurement. In 1954, a CIA anti-Communist initiative was assigned the overall mission of conducting “Overt anti-Soviet activities designed to weaken the prestige and power of the Soviet dictatorship” with objectives that included: “identify and exploit the contradictions and difficulties inherent in the Soviet regime and its policies” as well as “eliciting from the emigration useful information concerning the Soviet Union and its peoples” and “to accumulate information on, understanding of, and experiences with the emigration, its structure, leadership, capabilities, attitudes and aims.”

In 1960, the Special Projects Office of the American Committee for Liberation conducted a report called “Soviet Attitudes: As Reported by Recent Visitors to the USSR” that revealed a growing overall approval of the Khrushchev regime’s material improvements. The report also noted astute disaffections, which included the distaste the intellectual class exhibited toward some of Khrushchev’s reforms, such as the education reform and the industrial decentralization, which displaced many prominent people across wide ranges of the Soviet Union. The report also noted a general ideological disinterest among the population, with the exception of Party members, of

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194 Ibid.
course. However, the report conceded that “there was no doubt in the minds of all concerned that many people like Khrushchev;” in fact, the proliferation of goods was attributed to a sense of national pride that “rebounds to some degree to the credit of the Soviet leadership.” The report continues, under a headline titled “The Soviet Living Standard:”

Despite the acknowledged gap in living standards between the privileged few and the non-privileged millions, there was a general agreement that the standard of living had risen. A German Soviet affairs specialist wrote in an article that “the masses are better dressed and fed than a few years ago.” An American historian, with a delegation of educators, “was struck by the general improvement in the clothing and appearance of Soviet citizens” since his last visit in 1957. In the large hotel in Moscow, for example, it was no longer possible to differentiate between Soviet and Western women on the basis of appearance.

Blatant attention and credence was ascribed to women’s material status as a Cold War barometer of life standards. With consumer products and living standards generally improving, the United States would have to demonstrate strengths in new arenas in order to further quell the Communist threat. The Soviet Union was playing on the United States’ turf—consumerism—and the US would have to innovate to triumph. Americans began to consider Socialism’s benefits, and how to integrate Socialist assets in the American system. By integrating the advantages of the opposing ideology while maintaining a stronger economy and gross domestic product, the world could no longer question the greatness of the Western model. In 1959 an American Relief Administration worker, Robert Cotner, wrote his thoughts on Communism and the world situation, and noted the importance of this internal mechanism for defeating the Soviet regime, he wrote:

I’m not one to believe that our society under capitalism has reached perfection and so I say let us keep trying to improve it and let us make sure that we can offer people something more attractive than Communism. I believe we are doing it now, and that, in consequence, we are giving Communism a run for its

197 Ibid., 9.
money. The government I understand now permits companies to withhold 15% of their income tax for a retirement fund...I gather that the chief weakness lies in what becomes of the employees’ portion if he terminates his employment before his retirement. You know how checkered is the average working man’s employment record. Well, some of my informants contend that the employee gets nothing if he changes employment...In any case, my overall argument is that we should devise some means for workers to increase their retirement by some voluntary basis and the government might profit if they hopped upon enthusiasm as it does in bond drives...further I think we can and should take measures to protect ourselves against depression. Another bad one might lead to Marx’s “revolutionary situation.” None helps us because the man without money starts thinking and starts grumbling. Then he is apt to start projecting his plights into a dream at which the Communists have demonstrated themselves as being experts at embellishing.198

The United States, by increasing and expanding Social Security, unemployment insurance, and other types of public welfare, was able to mitigate the fears that a capitalistic society presented. The security of the Socialist model, which appealed to beleaguered citizens of developing nations, would begin to weaken as the United States’ benefits began to outweigh those offered in the Soviet Union, where shortages and inconsistencies were rampant, and slowed economic growth emerged. Domestic U.S. reforms, such as President Lyndon Johnson’s Social Security Act of 1965, which introduced state supported health insurance for the elderly and the poor, bolstered the support of the disadvantaged groups that the Socialist model claimed to defend best.

Khrushchev’s success as a voluble reformer and a stalwart of the Communist Party began to diminish as the Soviet Union’s economic growth slowed. Furthermore, Khrushchev’s wayward international persona began to have an effect on his support in the Party. In the 1950s the Soviet gross national product grew at an annual rate of 7.1 percent, compared to the American growth rate of 2.9 percent; from 1958, however, the Soviet rate of growth slowed to

5.3 percent per year, where it remained until 1963.\(^{199}\) In October of 1964, while a seventy year old Khrushchev was vacationing on the Black Sea, he was summoned back to Moscow where the other members of the Presidium voted to retire Khrushchev. Foreshadowing his fate, in his peroration at the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961, Khrushchev, as the Party leader, remonstrated against unhindered power, he declared:

> It would not be right to raise apart this or the other leader, to take part in his exorbitant praise. This is against the principles of Marx, Engels, and Lenin…But one thing you cannot dispute through any text—the collective of leaders must well understand, that they cannot allow for a circumstance, when some or the other, even the most deserving authority (avtoritet), stops considering the opinions of those whom he put in control (vidvinyl)…In this instance, this person might stop listening to the voices of other comrades, promoted, like himself, to leadership roles. He might begin to suppress them.\(^{200}\)

Faithful to this declaration, Khrushchev sat listening to his regime’s criticisms enumerated by the Party’s Presidium. Khrushchev sanctioned the decision of the Presidium that removed him from power; he was, after all, not above the Party dictatorship. Khrushchev stated “a time has arrived when members of the Presidium of the Central Committee have begun to control the activity of the First Secretary of the Central Committee and speak with full voice…Today’s meeting of the Presidium is a victory for the party.”\(^{201}\) Khrushchev honored the reforms he initiated, despite the fact that they were ousting him from power. Khrushchev was able to appreciate the moment as an important action in the history of the Communist Party’s function: the Party held more authority than a single leader, and he would oblige.


\(^{200}\) Khrushchev, Nikita S. “Заключительное слово на ХХII съезде КПСС.” Государственное Издательство Политической Литературы. (Moscow, 1961), 42.

\(^{201}\) Ronald Grigor Suny. *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States.* (New York: Oxford University, 2011), 444.
Indeed, Khrushchev worked to empower the people and sought to elevate their state through utilitarian means. He declared that Communism would be built by 1980 and thereby advanced the destruction of the state as a Party goal. In “The State and Revolution,” Lenin harangues: “the state arises when, where, and to the extent that class antagonisms cannot be objectively reconciled. And conversely, the existence of the state proved that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable…According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it creates ‘order,’ which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the collision between the classes.”

Lenin focused on the notion that a state was created and exists because class inequity exists; the state serves to monitor or ease tensions that form due to class inequity. As long as a state as an organ of power exists, or is perpetuated, Communism cannot develop. Khrushchev understood the importance of this essential goal, and he championed a realization of a state-less society. Khrushchev’s reforms reveal his attempt at equipping the Soviet populace with the tools and knowledge it needed to administer itself while reducing centralized state power. Khrushchev believed in ideological solidarity and attempted to inspire it holistically, from aesthetics to Komsomol patrols, to inciting the distaste for “parasites”-- those unwilling to contribute to the strength of the move forward, the move toward realized Communism. Khrushchev’s repressions, as well as his liberalizations, were rooted in a deep faith to the Communist cause.

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Conclusion

Khrushchev’s successors, led by Leonid Brezhnev as the General Secretary of the Party, did not continue with Khrushchev’s reforms. Khrushchev’s successors revived the ministries, the sovnarkhozy were abolished, the education reforms were mitigated and the focus on transitioning to Communism was forfeited. Rehabilitating Stalin’s good name was even considered. In fact, KGB professionals went as far as to produce disinformation in order to confound Khrushchev’s reasoning for de-Stalinization in the first place. Deputy Director for personnel of the Ministry of Defense, Colonel General Kuzovlyov was told to publicize events that instilled Khrushchev with a personal vendetta for slandering Stalin.203 A period of chronic stagnation ensued under Brezhnev, and Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in 1985, attempted to address the economic sluggishness and corruption, which become increasingly prevalent in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev instituted reforms that bellied those of Khrushchev’s. Gorbachev’s reforms, however, were not rooted in ideology, as Khrushchev’s claimed to be. Khrushchev had a concrete culprit—Stalin and the cult of personality—while Gorbachev sought to reform the entire system in order to rescue it from further decline. Gorbachev’s reforms of Perestroika, or restructuring, brought forth another wave of decentralization and reform. However, the industrial planned economy suffered from a myriad of ills, the focus on output and not profit, for example, which developed a maladapted system for meeting demands; it was inefficient, illogical, and antiquated.204 Gorbachev’s Glasnost campaign removed censorship, which allowed for more

openness in general, an openness that was not buffered by other methods of government surveillance. The indirect or direct channels ensuring alignment to the Party were removed.

The Soviet Union relied upon friction with the outside world, as a perpetuated opposition helped insulate the empire while creating a sense of mission or righteousness. When the rest of the world became more exposed due to Glasnost and the voyeuristic capabilities of technology, the Soviet Union could not sustain its grip on its denizens as they awakened to their inferior status, both materialistically and in a humanitarian sense. The West had established laws and codes of ethics to protect its citizens, and showed increased concern for civil rights; the Soviet Union was ultimately controlled by those in power, who reigned above petty civil law. Western developed nations streamlined, automated, and outsourced their manufacturing while the Soviet industrial planned economy began to seem irrelevant and disconnected. Hence, the satellites who became more liberalized since Khrushchev’s reforms, Poland and East Germany, withdrew from the Communist Party as the Solidarity opposition in Poland disbanded the government in 1989; furthermore, the Berlin wall that separated Communist East Berlin from the Westernized West was dismantled as tens of thousands of people fled East Berlin.\footnote{Ibid., 88.} The Soviet Union did not intervene; with a few meek attempts to prevent the Soviet republics from following suit, nationalist movements took hold across the Soviet Union. After the failed 1991 coup, in which conservative Communists attempted to stall the growing instability of the empire, republics began to declare their independence as the Soviet Union lost its credibility. Gorbachev resigned in December of 1991, and the Commonwealth of Independent States was established. Structurally weakened and rocked by another deep wave of liberalization reform policies, the Communist Party was ultimately unable to maintain its hold over its empire, economically or ideologically, as the Capitalists claimed victory as the ruling global ideology. However, although
the Soviet Union’s unsuccessful reforms weakened its structure and precipitated its failure, its foundational issues and its greater emphasis on bolstering the powers of the state, and not the welfare of the people, always augured its demise.
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