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**FROM COMMUNISM TO DEMOCRATISATION?
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE SOVIET
UNION, RUSSIA AND CENTRAL AND EASTERN
EUROPE.**

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21 DEC 1995

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MA submission: March 1995

From Communism to Democratisation? A Comparative Study of the Political Participation of Women in the Soviet Union, Russia and Central and Eastern Europe.

Abstract

This thesis examines the scope of women's participation in politics both during communism and after its demise. It adopts a comparative framework of analysis in order to explore some of the differences and similarities in women's political activism in a variety of contexts. It reviews the participation of women in the national legislatures before reform, as well as examining the changes in women's share of representation following the introduction of new electoral laws in the Soviet Union, Russia and Central and Eastern Europe since the late 1980's. It outlines the implications of political change for women seeking to enter the new politics, and argues that, as under communism, women's experiences of political activity differ significantly to those of men. The legacy of the symbolic form of women's political participation in the old systems is discussed in relation to the scope of women's activity since reform. An examination of the sharp fall in women's share of representation since 1989, for example, includes an evaluation of the way in which the negative perceptions of women deputies and party officials under communism, continued to throw a shadow on women seeking election in the new regimes.

This thesis also evaluates the role of the official women's organisations before democratisation, as well as outlining the significance of the new women's groups now springing up throughout the region. The diversity and proliferation of these groups, it is argued, is helping to create an important base for women's politicisation and participation in informal politics.

Women's capacity for influencing policy is explored throughout, including an examination of women's relationship to social policy, and the ways in which the structure of social provision reinforces women's disadvantage in the home, at work and in politics.

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr Peter Kneen of the Department of Politics, for his intellectual support, encouragement, and endless patience. His timely advice and criticism helped me through many a difficult patch during the writing of this thesis.

My thanks also go to my husband William, and our three children, for their cheerful acceptance of so much neglect.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the political participation of women in communist and post-communist states in the former Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia before partition, and Poland (1). It will compare the nature and scope of women's political activity under communism with the forms of participation that have emerged since the introduction of political and economic reforms in the late 1980's. Women's interest in politics and women's access to political power has been examined in a number of ways. The under-representation of women in politics is a global phenomenon that has engaged the attention of political scientists influenced to varying degrees by feminism. Part of this discourse has centred on the position of women in electoral politics in liberal democratic regimes; particularly in relation to women's activism in party politics, women standing as candidates and the percentage of women in national legislatures (2). Another has explored dominant networks of state power and women's exclusion from key political positions (3). A further strand has been critical of what it sees as the 'masculine' bias in mainstream political theory and political writings, with its narrow focus on the political high ground (4). All would argue for a definition of political

participation that encompasses a broad range of activities, in order to include women's interests and concerns.

In addition, there has been a steady growth of scholarship concerned with analysing the situation of women in communist and post-communist countries. A number of important themes have developed from this literature in relation to women's political activity under communism. A primary theme has been the role of the communist parties in defining and managing the participation of women in politics. In the former Soviet Union, for example, Lapidus [1978] noted that women remained conspicuously absent from the higher echelons of power, despite a formal commitment to equality voiced by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU], and official efforts to mobilise women into political life, in both the party hierarchy and the local and national legislatures. More importantly, she drew attention to the different patterns of political participation between men and women, suggesting that in terms of background, recruitment, turnover rates of women deputies, and political roles, women followed a differential path to that of men; a situation that contributed to their lesser participatory behaviour (5). In addition, Jancar [1978] pointed out that the patterns of women's political participation in communist states shared

a number of similarities. At local level, for example, women were more visible participants in the communist parties and in local legislatures. The more powerful the political body, however, the lower the representation of women. In common with Lapidus, she also discussed a 'women's way' to political power. For Jancar, this was characterised by fewer choices and fewer opportunities for promotion in comparison to men (6). Heitlinger [1979], however, noted that although the similarities between states were significant, Soviet-type regimes should not be regarded as composing a monolithic bloc, as there were considerable differences in the social, economic and demographic structures as well as in the diversity of cultural traditions (7). This theme has been given more weight in recent years, especially since the collapse of communism, as will be noted later. Both Lapidus and Jancar, however, placed emphasis on the significance of the 'quota' system, in which the communist parties attempted to create a balance of representation in local and national legislatures in terms of sex and occupational status. Wolchik and Meyer [1981], in a study of women and political participation in Eastern Europe took this point further and suggested that women's mobilisation into politics depended substantially on this form of co-opted activity; a feature that helped to explain women's higher

turn-over rate as deputies, as well as their virtual absence from key positions of power (8).

The concept of the 'dual burden' of work and motherhood, and the limitations this placed on women's ability to undertake any additional activities, also underpinned much of the scholarship in this field. Formal equality for women under communism was not seen to be accompanied by a change in societal attitudes concerning the traditional role of women in the domestic sphere. At the same time, women under communism were drawn into the workforce in large numbers, in order to meet the needs of the economy. Thus women were heavily disadvantaged by their shouldering of a dual domestic and economic burden. Moreover, the lack of domestic appliances and poor availability of foodstuffs made the domestic role particularly time-consuming, leaving women with very little free time to engage in political activity (9).

The exploration of the extent of occupational segregation between men and women formed a further important thread, in that women's lesser status in the workplace, was seen to be mirrored in the political arena. Lapidus [1982] drew attention to the significance of women's experience in the workplace in the former Soviet Union by noting that the increase in female levels of employment over the years had not been accompanied by a

decrease in the extent of occupational segregation (10). Wolchik and Meyer claimed that the persistence of this form of segregation had had a significant impact on the ability of women to participate in political life on the same footing as men (11). In addition, the absence of an autonomous women's movement, including the lack of development of a body of feminist theory and practice, was also seen to be an important contributory factor in the nature and scope of women's participatory behaviour. The inability of social groups to organise outside the confines of the communist parties, meant that a women's movement was unable to flourish alongside the developments that took place in the West in the 1960's and 1970's. Official women's organisations, funded and supervised by the prevailing regimes were limited not only in the scope of their activities, but also as forums for the politicisation of women. Browning [1987], for example, has shown that the women's councils in the former Soviet Union were ill-placed to present a challenge to the predominance of men occupying powerful posts in the political system, and may indeed have gone some way towards reinforcing gender differences in politics (12).

The collapse of communism throughout the region has broadened the debate to include a focus on the ability of women to participate in the politics of the new regimes,

as the process of democratisation was accompanied by a marked decline in female representation in the new legislatures. Following the Polish elections in 1988, for example, the number of women in the Sejm fell from 20.2% to 13.2%. In the former Soviet Union, the number of women in the USSR Supreme Soviet after the March 1989 election was 18.2%, as opposed to 32.8% in the 1984 convocation. In 1990, in the former Czechoslovakia and in Hungary, women's representation in the National Assemblies fell from 29.5% to 6%, and from 20% to 7% respectively (13). Provisional analysis suggested that although women's share of representation had fallen, the new electoral laws and reformed national legislatures would at least appear to offer women an opportunity to participate more effectively in politics (14). Molyneux [1989], however, noted that women were likely to view the political changes with some reservation; welcoming new opportunities on the one hand, but fearing the abandonment of old commitments to 'equality' on the other (15).

Significantly, political and economic reform has enabled women social scientists in these states a greater opportunity to disseminate their own commentaries and analyses on the position of their sex in the new politics, thus adding further insights to the discourse on women and political participation under communism and post-communism (16).

A key theme to emerge from this is a further reinforcement of the need to recognise diversity between states. In addition, the problematic relationship between Western feminist theory and practice and the uniqueness of developments taking place in women's groups in post-communist states has been brought to the forefront as a timely reminder of the importance of 'difference' between women East and West, as well as between women within post-communist states (17).

This thesis will approach an exploration of the political participation of women under communism and since reform by drawing on this rich body of scholarship. It will also include references to some of the key themes concerning women and politics highlighted by feminist political scientists in the West. A broad definition of participation will be adopted throughout in order to incorporate all relevant forms of behaviour that may influence the 'politicisation' of women, by examining forms of participatory activity within the national legislatures before and after reform, the old communist parties and new political groupings, women's organisations under communism as well as the newly emerging women's movement since reform.

Women's under-representation in politics has, as noted above, been attributed to a number of causal factors; most

notably, the lesser position of women in society, at work and at home. Much of the literature on women and politics has also demonstrated that where women do participate in politics, they frequently adopt or are assigned roles which reflect their broader societal role; in other words, in policy areas such as health and education (18). This thesis, therefore, will also consider the relationship between women and the structure of social provision and social policy. An examination of social policy, it will be argued, not only illustrates the role of the state in defining women's social and political roles, but also incorporates an exploration of issues such as the persistence of occupational segregation, the relationship between social policy and employment for women, and the disadvantaged position of women in the workplace. The communist states' interpretation of women's role at work and at home, through the medium of social policy-making and social provision can be seen as instrumental in defining and reinforcing the spilling over of women's domestic role into the public sphere of the workplace and the 'proper' role of women in politics. Indeed, the definition of women's 'equality' under communism, has formed the basis of much analysis related to women's situation in these states. Scott [1974], for example, traced the inadequacies of the Marxist approach to the 'woman question' through an

examination of Engels' 'The Origin of the Family' and August Bebel's 'Woman Under Socialism.' According to Scott, women's emancipation was seen to be contingent upon the abolition of capitalism and the consequent economic independence of women. The causal root of inequality between men and women, therefore, was attributed to the mechanisms of capital, including the transfer of private property, the structure of the bourgeois family that supported this form of production, and women's subsequent dependence on a male breadwinner. Broader discussions concerning the site of women's oppression in other areas of society, including the home, were thus omitted (19).

Molyneux [1985], moreover, claimed that the 'emancipation' of women through participation in the workforce was implicitly based on a continuation of differential male and female roles in the domestic sphere. The family, therefore, by providing a form of social stability, was regarded as an institution of vital importance by communist states, despite calls for its abolition by Marxist followers; and thus continued as a base for the perpetuation of traditional gender roles within the home (20). Furthermore, Buckley [1989] noted that although 'equality' for women became enshrined in the law in the former Soviet Union, the representation of female roles under communism was treated in different ways

at different times. Thus although women's participation in the workforce remained a central feature of communist ideology, the emphasis on women as both mothers and workers varied in order to meet particular social or political needs. Women's reproductive role, for example, was promoted vigorously during the late 1960's and 1970's, through the extension of work-related social provision for mothers, in response to a fall in the birth rate (21).

Feminist analysis of social policy and social provision in the West has highlighted the ways in which state organised welfare policies have attempted to reinforce traditional assumptions of the structure of the 'family' and the sexual division of labour within it. Women form the majority of those in receipt of welfare benefits, and the majority of welfare workers, yet remain largely excluded from the higher paid administrative posts in welfare bureaucracies, and executive levels of government. Social policy is clearly an issue that touches many aspects of women's lives, although in terms of policy-making it remains predominantly a male preserve (22).

Social provision and social policy thus have a particular political significance for women. In the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe before reform, access to social provision was not only dependent upon employment, it was also instrumental in determining women's status at

work and at home. Since the collapse of communism, economic reforms have changed the context of women's 'rights' at work. The restructuring of social policy has become a major task of the new democracies; this will inevitably be accompanied by a change in circumstances for a significant number of women. The introduction of new forms of social provision, for example, have helped to generate a good deal of discussion concerning women's role in post-communist society. In addition, much of women's participatory activity before and after reform can be seen to be related to attempts to extend or defend women's access to social provision. In the new democracies, the clustering of women into political roles that are related to social provision and 'women's' interests may be exacerbated, as women experience the erosion of a number of 'rights' granted to them under communism.

This thesis, therefore, pursues a broad definition of participation in a variety of contexts. It adopts a comparative framework in order to examine the political participation of women under communism and post-communism, in order to draw out some generalisations concerning similarities and differences in women's political activity. There is, perhaps, a danger of appearing to over-simplify the position of women in these states by adopting such a methodology - particularly since reform. It is not the

intention of this thesis to underestimate the importance of the differing social and cultural contexts that influence women's political participation, however; comparison should help to trace some of the varying political strategies women have followed in individual states, as well as some of the common factors that have inhibited women's influence in the political arena, particularly under communism. Indeed, as a tool of inquiry, comparison should ultimately raise the importance of recognising and exploring significant differences in women's situation and in women's response to political and economic change.

Chapter one will outline some of the methodological issues associated firstly, with a comparative study of political participation before and after communism; and secondly, with the conceptual difficulties of defining 'participation' in such a way as to include significant and politically relevant activity in both regimes. Chapter two will discuss the limitations of political participation within the national legislatures before reform, and the role of the communist parties in controlling and defining electoral behaviour, candidate selection and the activities of elected representatives. This discussion will highlight the importance of considering gender differences in political participation, by noting the way in which

women were mobilised into electoral activity as a means of fulfilling 'quotas' organised by the communist parties, the higher turnover rate of women deputies, the paucity of women in executive positions and the health-education-welfare roles that women tended to play in politics.

Chapter three will examine the nature and scope of women's participatory activity since reform; particularly in relation to the position of women in opposition groups before reform, the difficulties women faced as candidates in the new electoral politics and, significantly, the implications of the new electoral systems for women's future participatory behaviour. Chapter four will outline the emergence of a new women's movement in the post-communist era, and suggest that women's politicisation, activism and influence may develop more effectively in this context, at least in the short term, rather than in the formal political arena.

Chapter five will explore the structure of social policy and social provision under communism, and examine the relationship between women's employment and social policy, in order to argue that the role of the state in structuring social provision - both before and after reform - has shaped and defined the avenues for women's participation, or potential participation in politics.

Chapter six develops some of the themes outlined in chapter five by discussing the position of women in relation to firstly, housing and secondly, health policy. It will examine the position of women in these areas by examining the ways in which women may experience disadvantage - in relation to men, or in relation to their reproductive role - as recipients of these forms of social policy, or as workers within the hierarchies of housing and health provision. The structure of social provision under communism, it will be argued, including assumptions made about the family and women's role within it, reinforced women's lesser status in society generally, including that in politics.

The conclusion will draw out the similarities and differences between women's participatory behaviour before and after communism, and outline the factors that prevent or encourage participation. It will also suggest ways in which women have been effective in influencing policy, particularly in areas of social provision. Finally, it will briefly review the insights to be gained by utilising some of the methodologies adopted in this thesis.

References

1. The terms 'communist and post-communist' are used in preference to 'socialist' and 'post-socialist' in order to convey the fact that the term 'communism' encapsulated a number of features shared by these states, including their official ideology, the leading role of the communist parties, and their centralised economic systems.
2. See for example;

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Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris [1993] Gender and Party Politics [London: Sage].
3. See for example;

Margaret Stacey and Marion Price [1981] Women, Power and Politics [London: Tavistock Publications].

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9. See for example;

Carola Hansson and Karin Liden [1984] Moscow Women [London: Chaucer Press].

Barbara G. Holland [ed.] [1985] Soviet Sisterhood [London: Fourth Estate].
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14. See chapter by Archie Brown in 'Alex Pravda and Tsuyoshi Hasgawa [1990] Perestroika: Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policies [London: Sage], p. 69
15. Molyneux, op. cit.
16. See for example, chapters in;

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Marilyn Rueschemeyer [ed.] [1994] Women in the Politics of Postcommunist Eastern Europe [London and New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.].
17. See for example, introduction in Funk and Mueller, op. cit.

18. See for example;

Jane Jacquette [1974] Women in Politics [New York: John Wiley and Sons].

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19. Hilda Scott [1974] Does Socialism Liberate Women? [Boston: Beacon Press].

20. Maxine Molyneux [1985] 'Family Reform in Socialist States: The Hidden Agenda' Feminist Review, no. 21.

21. Mary Buckley [1989] Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union [Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf].

22. See for example;

Elizabeth Wilson [1977] Women and the Welfare State [London: Tavistock Press]

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CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Adopting a comparative approach

Comparison is a tool of analysis that accumulates a body of knowledge by examining a set of political phenomena across a number of countries. By drawing out commonalities as well as differences, comparison draws useful conclusions that act as an aid to understanding the political processes within different states (1). This form of approach, for example, can compare the number of women that reach senior posts within political institutions; and it can also compare the scope of their participatory role. Similarly, it can examine commonalities and variations within the newly emerging women's movements; overall, however, comparison should serve as a guide to explaining the scope of women's political participation in these states. In doing so, it should avoid glossing over the heterogeneity of a region as vast as the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, by drawing out diversity in political behaviour as well as differences in the kinds of factors that influence women's activism.

For the purposes of effective comparison it is useful to begin by identifying a set of characteristics that

these states share in terms of their political structures and values, as these have had a profound influence on women's perception of politics and political activity. Before democratisation, there were generally four distinguishing features, as noted by White et al [1987], that were recognised as defining their main political characteristics. Firstly, the authority of the state was based on an official ideology derived from the works of Marx and Lenin. Secondly, the dominant focus of power was located within the communist parties. Thirdly, the economy was centrally planned and predominantly owned by the state. And lastly, the party exercised a 'leading role' over all aspects of society, so that the press, trade unions and the judiciary, for example, were directly under the influence of the state; by contrast, the existence of informal or unofficial groups was severely curtailed (2).

Political participation within this framework was directly manipulated by the party. This included the close monitoring of electoral activity. Single, or at best a limited number of candidates were sponsored for election to the national legislatures by the party officials. The act of voting, therefore, represented a ceremonial function rather than the expression of choice. In addition, national legislatures met infrequently, and held very little power. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, women

were often mobilised into electoral politics as part of the 'quota' system; that is the attempt to create legislatures that were roughly representative of all sections of society (3). Despite the carefully orchestrated election of deputies to the national legislatures under communism, however, it can be argued that this form of activity created a significant forum for the political participation of citizens, although women played a marginal role in comparison to men.

In East Central Europe communist rule dissolved in 1989, thereby facilitating the transition from authoritarianism to democracy; and the collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU] in August 1991 represented a significant step towards further democratisation in a process that had begun under Gorbachev in 1987. Political change of this magnitude requires a reconceptualisation of a common set of characteristics required to facilitate a useful comparative exercise. The transition to democracy, for example, has revealed more fully the contrasts that were partially veiled by the features common to communist states. And yet it is still possible to trace, through the rejection of communism, some characteristics common to all. Thus, although political transition in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, has followed a different path in each state,

contemporary analysis, much of it comparative in approach, has been concerned to show that the roads leading to democracy at least pass through similar terrain.

Linden [1990], for example, identifies three important stages that can be traced in all the countries under scrutiny, and it is factors such as these that make the comparative exercise a fruitful one in terms of gathering information for analysis (4). Firstly, Linden notes that each state has witnessed the mass politicisation of the population. Protests, demonstrations and public discussion, for example, brought politics onto the street and politicised groups in the population that had not been actively involved before; thus creating the rapid erosion of power held by the communist party, and paving the way for the birth of independent groups concerned with addressing new political issues.

Secondly, and closely linked with the first point, were the effects brought about by the loosening of media controls. Thirdly, Linden refers to the politics of symbols by noting that the removal of the visible symbols of Marxism Leninism, evidenced, for example, by the tearing down of the 'iron curtain', led in turn to the establishment of alternative symbolic gestures; such as the renaming of streets and cities and the rebirth of religious symbols. The rejection of one all-pervasive ideology, in

other words, has led to the search for new ideals, or to a reinstatement of those from a dimly remembered past.

Taken together, some of the common factors shared by states since reform would appear to present new opportunities and challenges for the political participation of all groups in these societies. A closer examination of Linden's framework of commonalities between states since reform, however, will reveal a set of circumstances that present a number of challenges for women, and, it will be argued, fewer opportunities for them to engage in political activity in comparison to men. Thus, commonalities that include factors such as the mass politicisation of the population, the loosening of media controls, and the politics of symbols, for example, are far from being gender neutral. The point here is that a comparative framework that examines the scope of political participation between states cannot do so adequately without being sensitive to the fact that one particular set of circumstances may mean different things to men as opposed to women.

The proliferation of opposition groups and political parties, for example, would suggest that as many women as men sought the opportunity to participate in forming and voicing political demands, canvassing for support and standing as candidates. The freer-style elections that took

place in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe from the late 1980's onwards, however, did not give women a significant place in the development of the new political institutions. Furthermore, there are few newly established political platforms that deal directly with women's issues. Indeed, Drakulic [1990] claims that there is a need to question what the newly emerging democracies will mean for women. She notes;

Many women in Eastern Europe believe their problems will be solved later, whatever that means. Many believe that higher standards of living - because of democratisation and a market economy - mean emancipation. Many simply want to stay at home (5).

Drakulic raises an issue that was a familiar theme for women under communism; namely, that full emancipation and improved rights for women would appear after the broader economic issues had been resolved. In much the same way, women's demands in the transitional stage of democratisation, are seen by many women as subordinate to the wider concerns raised by the emerging political parties. Women who were active in opposition groups within East Central Europe before reform, for example, have not translated this form of political participation into formal representation in any substantive way. Moreover, in contrast to Western liberal democracies, fledgling feminist

groups, where they do exist, do not have the advantage of an established body of knowledge from which they can draw a critical appraisal of their situation. Thus it can be argued that the politicisation of the population has not advantaged women to the same extent as men.

The loosening of media controls and the advent of a free press in these states has ably assisted the dissemination of information and provided a critical focus for political debate. The growth of an independent press, however, has also led to the spread of pornography. The availability of such material indicates a breakaway from the restriction of discussions on sexuality that existed under communism; but although this may be an indication of a more enlightened era, where the 'rehabilitation of sex' might lessen the ignorance that surrounds issues of sexuality, the images portray women primarily as sexual objects. Within the context of the former Soviet Union, Shreeves [1990] argues that the freer social and political culture of perestroika has led, not to the destruction of old stereotypes of women, but to the adoption of new ones. In this situation, men become 'viewers, definers, and judges, with women being viewed and defined.' The representation of women in the media under communism portrayed images of women at work, often in heavy industry; at the same time, contradictory pictures depicted women as

nurturers and carers - stereotypes that also need to be addressed (6). The implications are that women will be burdened still further with conflicting and damaging images of women's 'place' in society; a place that might appear to be incompatible with an effective political role.

The symbolic actions taken by new governments as a means of rejecting the past, has led, in particular, to a re-emergence of religious symbols; particularly in the Soviet Union and Poland. The reassertion of the influence of the church in society may reinforce the traditional stereotypes of women as subordinates to men. In Poland, where the Catholic Church pressed for a complete prohibition of abortion in 1989, a significant number of women reacted to this proposal by forming protest groups such as the Polish Feminist Association, in order to petition against a change in the law (7). In this instance, groups formed around a political issue that was specific to women; their purpose, however, was driven by the need to protect women's rights and not to extend them.

In Hungary, the return to a call for 'God, Patria and Home', tends to suggest a recasting of women back into full-time motherhood and housewifery (8). Thus the new 'politics of symbols', in terms of gender issues, are not neutral. Furthermore, a call to return women to the home in these states is associated with a pressing need to reform

ailing economies in the shift from socialist management to the free market. The shedding of 'uneconomic' labour, the closing of workplace nurseries and the cut back in expenditure on social policy, requires the additional unpaid labour of women. In the era of the 'politics of symbols', women may retreat into the position of trying to protect the 'rights' they were accorded under communism, rather than putting their energies into other areas of political activity. An awareness of the gender divisions within political structures, before and after communism, as well as the gender dimension that can be identified in events such as the politicisation of populations, the loosening of media controls and the politics of symbols, will help to inform a comparative study of women's political participation in an era of rapid political and economic change.

From comparative communism to comparative politics

The democratisation of communist states has posed a dilemma for the field of political analysis that had generally become known as comparative communism. Within this sub-discipline, cross-communist comparisons have been carried out in order to establish what is general and what is particular among communist states. In recent years the utility of this form of research has been open to

criticism. The basis of this criticism was grounded in the fact that the differences between these states were often more apparent than their similarities. Part of this stemmed from the assertion that the active promotion of an official political culture by the communist parties was sometimes at odds with the values and beliefs of the populations within their regimes (9). The diversity of language, race and ethnicity, therefore, were underpinned by cultural systems that had persisted alongside the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

Other scholars called for research to break away from the specialist field of comparative communism in order to engage in explicit East-West comparisons. Bunce and Echols [1986] argued, for example, that scholars needed to take the 'comparative leap' from comparative communism to comparative politics, in order to place their findings of the communist world into a broader political context (10).

The arguments in favour of comparative communism were, as noted earlier, based on the premise that these states shared a distinguishing set of characteristics that set them apart from Western liberal democratic states. As these dissolved, the justification for retaining comparative 'communism' as a sub-field of comparative politics was diminished. It is from this position that Agh [1990] argued that the fundamental changes that have taken

place in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe required a reconceptualisation of the framework of comparative communism (11). Agh also cited Lovenduski and Woodhall's [1987] claim that studies of comparative communism have generally suffered from a negative form of ethnocentrism (12). Indeed, for Agh, the 'final crisis of communism had thus become the cause of the final crisis of comparative communism itself.' (13)

However, while comparative communism may have lost the key focus of its subject matter, it can still be argued that comparative politics in Eastern Europe remains a fruitful area for research. Nelson [1993] puts forward a case for the development of a comparative politics of Eastern Europe, by stressing the long-term social, economic and political changes that were already taking place in these regimes before transition. For Nelson, therefore, the end of a regime type does not negate the relevance of comparative scholarship in Eastern Europe (14).

A comparative study of women's political participation that includes the communist and post-communist-communist era should, in particular, draw on the context of socio-economic development to demonstrate the impact this has had on female representation. New political structures and ideologies have had a marked effect on the levels of women's participation, but the significance of gender in

determining the nature of political roles for women is a feature that has endured regime change. A comparative approach to the political participation of women under communism and since reform, however, needs to begin by identifying the ways in which 'participation' in these contexts can be usefully conceptualised.

Defining political participation

The political participation of women before and after communism can be defined in a number of ways. Before reform, women's participation was closely linked with the access they were able to gain to key positions within the political system - a broad term used to encompass three structures; the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU], or the communist parties of East Central Europe, the national and local legislatures, and the governmental ministries. This term, used here in preference to 'state' or 'government', illustrates the nature of political structures that acted as intertwining hierarchies of authority, and demonstrates a number of ways in which individuals could exercise some form of political influence.

Since reform, the new legislatures have become the focus of much political activity. However, as will be discussed in chapters two, three, and four,

electoral office is not the only route that women may follow in attempting to articulate their interests and influence policy. Hence 'participation' as will be conceptualised throughout this thesis, includes behaviour that raises women's consciousness about relationships of power in a variety of social contexts; through, for example, the official women's organisations prior to reform, and the new women's movement that is now emerging.

Thus women's participation in 'the political', it will be argued here, includes informal activity as well as behaviour that is related to the formal electoral process. Traditional concepts of participation, as perceived by analysts of both liberal democratic and communist regimes will be examined below, in order to suggest that most mainstream definitions of political behaviour are limited in the insights they can offer to an explanation and understanding of the role of women. Indeed, feminist political scientists have argued persuasively for a conceptualisation of participation that includes a sensitivity to gender, and for a recognition that informal activity can be instrumental in the politicisation of women, and activity related to influencing policy.

The majority of studies concerned with political participation, however, have adopted a relatively narrow concept that is problematic both within the context of

communist and post-communist states, and in relation to the particular role played by women. These two issues will be dealt with in turn. The salience given to electoral behaviour, for example, is symptomatic of the fact that the literature in this field has been predominantly Western in both origin and orientation; hence the resultant pre-occupation with democratic concept of popular choice between competing parties offering alternative policy options. Verba and Nie [1978], for example, clearly state that their interest in participation is restricted to attempts that seek to influence the actions of government through the activities of voters and political parties; in other words, most of the emphasis has focused on the 'input' aspect of political activity within the formal political arena (15).

Participation in politics in pre-reform communist states, particularly in relation to voting activity, was not considered by the majority of Western analysts as being instrumental in influencing policy choices, due to the absence of competition between opposing parties and the high degree of control exercised by the ruling communist parties over the sponsorship of candidates to the national legislatures. This raises the question of the limitations of applying a set of criteria designed to investigate western phenomena to communist polities. Indeed,

because of the lack of any real choice between competing candidates or competing parties, voting within the context of communist states was dismissed by many Western analysts as nothing more than a ceremonial exercise designed to mobilise the populace and provide an outward legitimation of the regime. Pravda [1986] points out that electoral activity of this kind was almost entirely the result of organisational pressure from the top, reflecting the regime's pre-occupation with achieving a high turnout at the polls (16).

In the late 1960's, the 'interest group' approach was introduced as a conceptual tool for studying political participation in communist polities. Although still focusing primarily on the 'input' side of political activity, this method represented an important move away from regarding the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe as purely authoritarian regimes. Skilling [1971], the main proponent in this area of study, argued that it was possible to identify the presence of informal groups in these states working to exert their influence within society and politics (17). Groups, in Skilling's view, could be defined as 'loose groupings of like-minded or like-interested persons' working within the officially established organisations of party and state, and seeking to defend or promote their group interests in the

development of policy. This approach, according to Terry [1979], gave impetus to a range of 'hybrid' models, reflecting the image of Skilling's original concept; these included 'tendency articulation' [Griffiths 1971], 'opinion groupings' [Brown 1974], and 'institutional pluralism' [Hough 1977]. (18)

Despite the initially favourable reception of Skilling's model, the difficulties of applying a framework that was essentially pluralist to communist states later met with some reservation and not a little criticism. Solomon [1983] was careful to note that the concept appeared in the study of Soviet politics at a time when it was declining in use in the study of American politics (19). Janos [1979] stressed the limitations of applying such a concept to societies that were consciously lacking in autonomous private interests. In a pluralistic society, he claimed, the centrality of the pursuit of private interests in the political system justified the 'interest group' approach (20). The lack of autonomy of occupational groupings in communist polities, and the difficulties of assessing their effectiveness in influencing the formulation of policy, thus raised the most doubt about the applicability of the interest group model.

Apart from the warnings of 'conceptual stretching', the interest group approach attracted scholarly attention and

successfully highlighted the heterogeneous and complex nature of pre-reform communist polities. But women within such societies, because of the paucity of their numbers within the key posts, could not, firstly, be identified as a distinctive group able to organise effectively around a particular issue on the policy agenda; with the sole exception of the official women's organisations, which were generally unable to wield much influence. Secondly, women could not be heard as a significant voice in other, predominantly male, occupational groups. Despite the limitations of the 'interest group' approach, therefore, such a framework may be useful in shedding some light on the exclusion of women from such groupings in communist and post-communist societies.

The general direction of interest group analysis was to focus attention on the activities of loose groupings employed in the official institutions. Nonetheless, the emphasis remained firmly within the paradigm of 'inputism'. It was from this standpoint that Friedgut [1979], in a study of political participation in the USSR, argued for a broader approach, in order to focus on the most significant forms of participation. This particular view represented a move away from the 'input' approach to political participation, and explored the actions of officials entrusted with carrying out policy decisions formulated

from above. In particular, Friedgut turned attention towards the process of implementing policy, rather than to the initiation of policy. He claimed that:

The emphasis in participation in Communist polities must always be essentially on the implementation of established Communist Party policy rather than on the influencing of decision making (21).

This approach went some way towards ameliorating the difficulties of attempting to apply a concept designed to accommodate Western activities to communist states. Furthermore, a focus on the implementation stage of policy-making may help to incorporate the role of women working within the lower levels of the political structures, under the old political systems and the new, in contrast to focusing exclusively on the activities of those in the higher echelons of power. In addition, in areas of social policy, women have traditionally formed the majority of grass-roots workers in health and education, responsible for implementing policy initiated and formulated from above. The ability of women to shape and influence policy at this level under communism, however, was extremely limited, as will be argued in chapters five and six. Indeed, the nature of social policy-making in communist and post-communist states draws attention to the apparent lack of women's influence in areas that are likely to concern them most.

The importance of the implementation stage of the policy process has been examined in recent years by Western scholars anxious to investigate the role of actors involved at the 'grass roots' level of putting policy into practice. The discipline developed in the 1970's, partly in response to a growing concern with perceived 'policy failure' and partly because of the nature of 'governability' in complex industrial societies (22). Barrett and Fudge [1984], for example, noted that this approach can turn attention away from the 'top down' view of policy-making towards the actions of those whose interests are affected when change is proposed. The argument maintains that policy-makers are obliged to recognise that those responsible for implementing policy are potentially hard to control; and that any intention of change may be met with suspicion, recalcitrance or resistance (23).

Although it is clear that there are some valuable insights to be gained from each of the approaches outlined above, they all pay scant attention to issues of gender. In recent years, for example, feminist political scientists have questioned the findings of early electoral studies in the West which suggested that women were either apolitical or held significantly different political attitudes and beliefs to those of men. Women's participative activity is seen to be misrepresented or

distorted in these early studies because of a research methodology that implicitly accepted male patterns of political activity as the 'norm.' Lovenduski [1986], for example, asserts that such a negative bias was due in large part to the way in which the subject had been approached. She maintains that in order to reveal women's distinctive contribution, research methodology needs to challenge the traditional boundaries between the political arena and the private sphere (24). Thus a re-evaluation of women's political participation explicitly demands a re-conceptualisation of what is to be considered as political activity, and calls for a broader focus in order to include activity in informal groups.

The 'interest group' approach also exhibits a form of gender blindness by focusing on the way in which officials in key positions seek to influence government policy. This form of networking was almost exclusively a male activity. Yet although this approach may demonstrate the virtual absence of women from such activity, it fails to question the reasons for this, or to suggest ways in which women may engage in networks elsewhere.

Similarly, a model of participation that recognises the role of officials in the implementation of policy, implies that those who may be capable of resisting or delaying policy must be strategically placed in posts that have at

least some access to appropriate resources. The paucity of women in management positions in these states again suggests that such activity reflects male rather than female behaviour.

A study of political participation of women in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe needs to consider their role within a broad framework, in order to encompass a range of activities; thus facilitating an examination of the most valid forms of participatory behaviour. Insight may be gained by incorporating some or all of the approaches outlined above, but a sensitivity to gender differences in political behaviour will seek to incorporate behaviour that is most appropriate in expressing women's interest in 'the political' and women's attempts to influence policy.

This chapter has briefly examined some of theoretical and methodological issues associated with an examination of the political participation of women in communist and post-communist states, and some of the themes outlined above help to inform the remaining chapters. It has been argued here, for example, that it is still possible to adopt a comparative approach to the study of political phenomena that spans the regimes of communism and post-communism, as these states still share a significant number of common features. Furthermore, some of the

factors that influenced women's participation under communism were, as will be examined further in chapter two, grounded in traditional attitudes towards women's broader social role. The legacy of the nature and scope of women's political role under communism continues to be influential under reform; a feature that will be examined in more detail in chapter three. Chapter four will discuss the usefulness of broadening the field of inquiry to include other, informal patterns of activity, by reviewing the development of new women's groups. Chapter five will place women's political participation in a broader context by examining the relationship between women and the welfare state. Finally, chapter six will look at the provision of housing and health care - both areas of particular importance for women - and explore the organisational, social and political barriers that inhibit women from influencing these areas of policy.

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CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURES BEFORE REFORM

The framework of discussion

A focus on the role of women deputies in the national legislatures before reform will provide a fruitful area of exploration for three reasons. Firstly, to assess the way in which the closely controlled patterns of representation practised under communism shaped and directed women's formal political activity. As noted in chapter one, this form of representation appeared less than meaningful from a western perspective, but it played, nonetheless, an important role in the context of these states. The symbolic nature of women's representation, therefore, will be considered alongside an evaluation of the significance of women's legislative activity. Secondly, since the collapse of communism, the national legislatures have become key political structures in terms of setting the agenda for future action. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether there is a relationship between the enhanced status of these institutions and the marked fall in the number women in the reformed legislatures. Finally, it will form the background for the discussion in chapter three concerning the direction of women's future participation,

as they face fierce electoral competition in the emerging democracies. In sum, however, this chapter will attempt to answer a key question: to what extent was the role of women deputies shaped and directed by the political system before reform?

The limited role of national legislatures before reform

The principle characteristics of the old style national legislatures were threefold and can be summarised thus; the electoral systems were closely controlled by the ruling communist parties, the legislative output merely 'rubber stamped' communist party policy, and the majority of deputies were party members (1). The nature of such legislatures was therefore viewed as being largely symbolic with little scope for autonomous action outside the confines of party control. Real power and the impetus for policy-making lay within the higher echelons of the communist parties (2). Moreover, the election of deputies to the national legislatures was scrutinised by the communist parties in terms of approving the sponsorship of deputies, and manipulating the overall pattern of representation. In particular, the operation of a 'quota' system of representation within all these states provided a means of ensuring that occupational, language, gender, and sometimes geographical criteria were used by the communist

parties in determining the election of deputies, in order to reflect all shades of society (3). Thus the national legislatures performed an important function in being theoretically, at least, widely representative. It is important to add, however, that despite such claims, government and party officials formed a disproportionate number of deputies elected to legislative office; the implications of this in relation to opportunities for the political scope of women will be discussed later.

The point to make here is that the levels of female representation were sustained artificially by 'quotas' at both national and local level. In the former Soviet Union, for example, 32.8% of deputies elected to the USSR Supreme Soviet in 1984 were women. In the local soviets, this level of representation rose to approximately 50%; a pattern that was repeated throughout East Central Europe. The symbolic basis of female representation thus supported high percentages of women deputies in comparison to legislatures in the West, but it is the relationship between this form of symbolism and the nature of women's political activity that will be explored below.

The significance of female representation

The political significance of the gender dimension within all national legislatures rests primarily

on the fact that nowhere have women achieved equal representation (4). This has been a source of intense debate among feminists in the West, searching for both an explanation of, and a solution to this phenomenon. The salient features of this debate, which will be briefly outlined, focus firstly on the constraints that prevent women from entering politics, and secondly on speculation as to whether more women in national legislatures would make a difference to politics and policy-making. Both these arguments help to illuminate the particular difficulties women in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe faced when standing for election as candidates before and after reform, as well as the kinds of activities they tend to undertake in office.

The constraints that help to account for low levels of female representation encompass three levels of explanation. These are, aspects of socialisation, situational factors and structural factors. According to Welch [1977], an early exponent of this hypothesis, all are likely to be working together to produce distinctive patterns in women's participation in politics. Each, however, needs to be considered in turn. For Welch, the socialisation argument has been overplayed, mainly by political scientists searching for an explanation of gender differences in voting behaviour and finding it in the

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transmission of social 'norms' in childhood. Girls, by this argument, learn passivity and thus have low expectations concerning a political role (5). Randall [1987] contributes to this argument by noting that the link between patterns of socialisation and women's political behaviour is generally assumed to be strong, so that women's subordinate position in political activity is ascribed to sex role stereotyping in childhood. But although the internalisation of such roles may be a significant factor in preventing women from entering a political arena that is perceived as being a public, predominantly male domain, Randall is critical of such an overly deterministic approach, pointing out that;

[Some]... feminists object to this interpretation as faintly insulting but also inaccurate. It portrays women as passive subjects of a male-dominated culture and as retaining, long after they have ceased physically to be children, their childlike psychological dependence upon men. It thus implies that women lack the attributes of rationality, adulthood or aggression which ...have been identified as prerequisites of successful political participation (6).

The implication here is that the influence of socialisation may be significant, but not overwhelmingly so. In the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, however, formal equality was offset by the powerful persistence of unequal gender relationships in the home, so that girls growing up witnessed the hierarchical nature of gender

roles, including women's 'natural' responsibilities and domestic tasks. Women's 'equality' and 'freedom' to enter politics were thus underpinned by the images of women performing more perfunctory tasks.

Situational constraints, on the other hand, include domestic responsibilities and motherhood, both of which leave very little scope for women to engage in political activity. In the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, the scant availability of domestic appliances, and the time required to queue for foodstuffs, as well as women's full participation in the workforce, meant that women had limited free time. Time studies in these states, for example, demonstrated that women had, on average, three hours less a day than men to spend on their own activities (7).

The significance of both cultural and situational factors are no doubt open to a great deal of differential interpretation. The weight given to each also depends on contextual issues. However, an explanation that relies exclusively on these factors is clearly inadequate. A more comprehensive explanation looks at the way political systems work in practice, and women's lived experiences within those systems. On rather firmer ground, therefore, structural factors can be seen as instrumental in contributing to low levels of female representation. The

following discussion therefore, will focus the ways in which these restricted women's entry into electoral politics in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe before reform, and impacted on the political roles of women who were successful in gaining a seat. Within this framework, however, is a recognition that cultural and situational factors play an important part in legitimating the structural barriers to women's representation.

Women's entry into political life

Women elected to serve as deputies in the national legislatures were drawn from different occupational backgrounds in comparison to their male colleagues, and fulfilled different functions. Furthermore, the limited role of women in other sectors of the political systems created additional constraints to women's political activism. As discussed above, a key feature of women's recruitment to electoral office was the 'quota' system. The impact this had on women's political scope forms a major part of the structural argument. Nelson [1978] for example, has shown that many female deputies in East Central Europe were chosen through the quota system as a means of legitimating rule through the provision of a broad representational base; requiring women's symbolic

presence, but not necessarily their active participation. He effectively divided all deputies into 'participants' and 'fillers', placing women in the latter category, chiefly because women tended to have a shorter tenure within national legislatures, lacked the skills and resources required for an effective political input, and subsequently possessed less potential for advancement. This situation persisted even at local level where women were, on the whole better represented. As Nelson pointed out;

Recruitment in the status of 'filler' does not condemn a woman solely to manipulated or mobilised forms of political activism - but those are precisely the expectations of persons [most likely males] who control recruitment for local assembly seats (8).

Similarly, in the former Soviet Union, Hill [1980] noted that the symbolic nature of the old legislative system produced a significantly high turnover rate for the majority of deputies, dividing the pattern of representation into those that were 'strong' and those that were 'weak,' with women again falling into the latter category. Thus, for Hill;

The weak... tend to be younger, not party members, frequently women, in low-status occupations, probably with inferior educational attainments, and they acquire relatively little experience as representatives before being replaced by similar individuals (9).

In addition, the pre-reform legislative bodies of the

Soviet Union and East Central Europe, despite their claims to be truly representative of their societies, contained important political actors who, besides fulfilling their legislative role, also held key posts in other parts of the political system; a situation that was symptomatic of the interlocking pattern of power relationships within the institutions of party and state. The 'strong' deputies, therefore, formed an enduring elite; a group that was more likely to be re-elected on a regular basis than their lower profile colleagues, a disproportionate number of whom were women. This situation demonstrated the critical element of party control in manipulating the representational base of the national legislatures, ensuring that policy formulated within the higher echelons of the party was enacted in the legislative system. Hough and Fainsod [1979] have shown that in 1974, 84% of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU] Central Committee members in the former Soviet Union [a body in which women were poorly represented] were also elected to serve as deputies in the Supreme Soviet. The majority of women deputies were not included in this form of multiple post holding, and frequently only served a single term of office (10).

The numerical significance of female representation, therefore, was offset by the lesser status accorded to their participatory role. Furthermore, such a symbolic form

of representation does not guarantee fair representation if, in addition, there are striking differences between the educational and occupational backgrounds of 'strong' and 'weak' deputies. In the context of East Central Europe, Wolchik [1985] noted for example that;

Male deputies are far more frequently full-time party or governmental officials at the time of election to the national legislatures in these countries than women. Women deputies, on the other hand, account for a disproportionately large share of those persons of lower socio-economic status chosen for honorific, or symbolic reasons (11).

It can also be argued that the political role of women appeared to owe much to women's subordinate position in the labour force. Despite the fact that, for many women, full-time work was the norm, occupational patterns were marked by both vertical and horizontal forms of segregation. That is, women were clustered in the lower levels of the occupational hierarchies, and into a number of 'feminised' occupations, such as teaching and health work, which were characterised by low pay, low status and poor working conditions. Women working in the former Czechoslovakian retail sector and food processing industry, for example, - both typically 'female' branches of the economy - had much longer working hours than workers in heavy industry (12). In the former Soviet Union, women formed 75% of all teachers yet only 38% of secondary school

principals; and within enterprises, only 12% of managers were women (13). The daunting expectation for women in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe to combine a full time job with motherhood and arduous domestic responsibilities, led women to adjust their sights accordingly. Rimashevskaya's Taganrog study in the former Soviet Union illustrates this point well. Women began their working lives with similar educational achievements to those of men, but in undertaking domestic responsibilities, work became a matter of secondary importance.

This means that after marrying, the situation of spouses, and especially women, changes sharply. Men assume the role of principal provider, which requires them to participate actively in social production. Women as a rule diminish their occupational activity because of their duties as wife and mother (14).

The point here is that the form of occupational segregation women experienced in the labour force, was reproduced in the political system; vertically by the 'filler' role in the national legislatures, and horizontally, as will be discussed later, by the kinds of activities that women were expected to engage in once elected.

The nomenklatura system

The constraints that prevented women from participating

in the national legislatures on equal terms with men, can be examined further if some of the functions of the communist party are taken into account. Until the recent reforms, the access to key positions within party and state were controlled through the means of the nomenklatura system; in essence, two sets of lists; one outlining all the important positions within the political hierarchies, and the other containing the names of candidates deemed suitable to fill such posts. Not only did such a system function as a major source of communist power, it also appeared, directly or indirectly, to discriminate against women. Appointments could not be made without the sanction of the relevant party committee at national or local level; and positions of leadership were dependent, not only on the mechanism of the nomenklatura, but also on the system of patronage that supported it (15). This informal networking tended to marginalise women, not least because the burden of trying to combine a political career with domestic responsibilities left little time for forging informal links. Moreover, the communist parties were characterised by what Hough [1977] described in relation to the former Soviet Union as a 'gross over-representation of men in the party' resulting in a significant imbalance in the recruitment base (16).

In the former Soviet Union, women's membership of the

CPSU rose steadily over years and formed 28.8% in 1986 (17). However, in order to achieve full party membership, all candidates were obliged to undertake an active probation period. Furthermore, the age at which women became eligible to assume full membership, may have coincided with marriage and motherhood, thus severely curtailing their opportunities to fulfil party responsibilities.

At the top of the party hierarchies, women were markedly absent. The low percentage of women who were members of the central committees, moreover, has led some commentators to suggest that a pattern of discrimination operated to exclude women, although it is difficult to point to any firm evidence. Browning [1987] states, for example, that in the All Union Central Committee of the former Soviet Union;

The pattern of women's CC representation strongly supports the argument that it is planned and controlled. The consistency in the percentage of women on the one hand, and their selection from either a narrow range of low-status occupations or party and official posts on the other, has ensured that the sex factor remains a feature of the CC.
(18)

Before reform, the Central Committee formed one of the most important political bodies of the communist parties, and the membership reflected this authority. Jancar [1978] noted, for example, that the paucity of women in these

bodies clearly demonstrated where real power lay in these states. Women's membership fell far short of their numbers in the lower levels of the communist parties as well as those elected as deputies to the national legislatures (19). In the former Soviet Union, women's membership of the CPSU Central Committee hovered around 4% for many years before reaching 7.5% in 1990, after the Twenty Eighth Party Congress (20). In the former Czechoslovakia, female representation was marginally higher at 17.8% in 1986, although only 12.6% of these held full membership status (21). There is some evidence here, therefore, that women were gaining some ground. In other areas, however, the kinds of activities that women were involved in fell far short of the realm of 'high politics.' Indeed, the few women that can be identified at the top of the party hierarchies performed roles that had few associations with mainstream agendas. Urban [1989], for example, has demonstrated that women in the CPSU in Belorussia were over-represented in tasks related to political socialisation (22). In Poland, prior to electoral reform in 1988, two women [conspicuous by their presence] chaired commissions attached to the Polish Central Committee in areas removed from real power; Iwona Labowska for the Commission for Work among the Intelligentsia, and Gabriela Rembisz, for the Commission for

Complaints, Proposals and Reports for the Public (23).

Moreover, very few women gained a position within the Politburos or the party Presidiums, the key policy-making bodies. Once again, for the few women that attained this status, their responsibilities simply reflected their symbolic presence. In the former Soviet Union, Buckley [1992] notes that Ekaterina Furtseva served on the Politburo for three years under Khrushchev. More recently, Aleksandra Biriukova held a candidate post in the Politburo, with responsibility for Consumer Affairs; a term of office that lasted only eighteen months, as she resigned during the reorganisation of the party organs in July 1990. Galina Semoyonova, editor of 'Krestyanka,' was then promoted to the Politburo as spokeswoman on 'women's issues,' once again providing a lone woman at the very top of the party hierarchy (24).

In the former Czechoslovakia, Elena Livajova was a member of the Presidium of the Slovak Communist Party from 1971 until the end of communist rule. As she was also the head of the Slovak Women's Union, it is possible that her role was to act primarily as spokesperson for women's issues. Marie Kabrhelova, the chair of the Czechoslovak Women's Union until 1989, held a place on the Secretariat from 1974 until October 1989. Significantly, Kabrhelova's place as chair of the Women's Union was filled by

Miroslava Nemcova, who also went on to fill the post in the Secretariat (25). Furthermore, it seems possible that the President of the Hungarian Women's Council took a similar role, as she was responsible for reporting the activities of her organisation directly to the Politburo (26).

Highly placed women, therefore, frequently fulfilled the role of representing 'women's interests', although this kind of function can be said to contribute little towards incorporating women's issues into mainstream political agendas. The addition of a single woman at the top did nothing to promote the cause of women. In a sense, women's issues became marginalised by giving responsibility for the articulation of all women's needs and aspirations to one individual; a neat, but ineffective political solution for dealing with the 'woman question.'

It is clear that the official women's organisations, which were closely linked with the communist parties, played a significant role in providing an avenue for women to participate in politics, albeit in a limited form, within the party hierarchies and through the sponsorship of women deputies in the national legislatures. This particular route for women's entry into political life, however, may have contributed to the limitations of their role. The official women's organisations were committed to raising the difficulties faced by women in their day to day

lives, and seeking ways in which to ameliorate their lot, rather than challenge the status quo. Women may have found it difficult to contribute to policy areas that fell outside the concerns of their organisations. In addition, the strong association of women's immediate political interests with the private sphere, must have strengthened the very real differences between male and female deputies.

The inferior position of women in the communist parties represents two important points. Firstly, that the elite within the party hierarchies also fulfilled roles within the national legislatures. The predominantly male pattern of this form of political activity effectively strengthened the symbolic role of women, and created a form of gender segregation among deputies. Secondly, important positions within the party as well as the key committees and commissions attached to the national legislatures were, with the rare exception, occupied by men. These points can be illustrated by examining women's wider role in the national legislatures.

The scope of women's participation.

Women's different occupational background, recruitment patterns and affiliation to the official women's organisations, also appeared to restrict their opportunities to participate in the committees and

commissions attached to the national legislatures.

Lovenduski [1986] argued that an 'appropriate' educational and occupational experience was necessary for promotion to, for example, ministerial status or membership of the Supreme Soviet Commissions (27). Even at local level, the salience given to these characteristics would seem to have largely excluded women. In a study of local soviets, Hahn [1988] found that the executive committees were dominated by specialists, justified by the CPSU on the grounds that the complexity of the tasks involved required experienced and knowledgeable deputies. Thus;

The typical member of the executive committee is far more likely to be male, a party member, older and better educated than the deputies who elected him. The differences are even more accentuated at higher levels of the soviets.
(28)

In Poland, women deputies were under-represented in standing commissions dealing with budgeting and finance, construction and planning - key areas of economic policy - chiefly because their occupational background was not seen to have equipped them to deal with such issues (29). The work of the committees and commissions had more autonomy of action than the plenary sessions of the national legislatures, yet even in these smaller groupings women's participation was clearly less influential than that of their male colleagues. A simple explanation would be to

assume that women cannot spare the time for such activity or simply do not seek to undertake leadership positions in political life. Both Nelson [1985] and Hahn [1988], however, support the view that women's participation in the wider role of the national legislatures has increased steadily over the years. A brief exploration of women's contribution to policy debates will demonstrate that in certain policy areas, women's contribution has not been entirely insignificant. In other words, there is a relationship between women's participatory role and areas where their voice has officially been sanctioned.

Hough's [1977] research for example, demonstrated that women in the former Soviet Union comprised only 10% of all speakers in debates in the Supreme Soviet between 1966 and 1975 (30). A closer examination, however, revealed an interesting pattern in women's participation in discussion. Thus;

....while only 10% of all speakers in the Supreme Soviet session from 1966 to 1973 were women, the proportion of women participants in the discussions on health, education and family matters rose to 31%, and the proportion of women speakers in such committee sessions to 24% (31).

The implication is that where women had accrued some expertise, their contribution rose markedly. Nevertheless, as Wolchik [1991] has argued, many political leaders in East Central Europe defined women primarily in terms of

their relationship to the family, thereby pre-determining the kinds of roles that women were expected to play in politics (32).

In the same vein, Jancar [1978] noted that women themselves found it difficult to discard the cultural and traditional perceptions of the 'proper' role of women, thus compounding their lesser role.

Women cannot overcome the traditional male image of them when they themselves in part internalise this image and thus are poorly motivated to achieve in the political and economic worlds (33).

The conclusions to be drawn here are that women's political role in the communist parties and the national legislatures, was closely confined to providing an official woman reflecting a woman's viewpoint. The extent of segregation by gender appeared to be marked. Moreover, the structural constraints mobilised largely through the communist parties were driven by the deeply ingrained images of women as nurturers and carers. The implications of stereotyping women in political life, will be examined below.

The concept of 'role assignment' in political activity

Women's participation in politics prior to reform, therefore, was closely linked with areas of policy that

reflected their private role. For example, Wolchik [1985] noted that women deputies in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe were over-represented in relation to their numbers, on those committees that dealt with health, welfare, culture and youth; but were virtually absent from committees dealing with foreign and economic policy (34). The key point to recap here is that women appeared to play a negligible role in key areas within the national legislatures because of the limitations placed on their political activity. Yet women have been significantly active in areas traditionally regarded as falling within the sphere of 'women's interests'. Indeed, Hough [1977] has employed the effective 'health-education-welfare' label to describe the centre of women's political involvement in the former Soviet Union (35). It is this sphere of activity that Lovenduski [1986] suggests is a form of 'role assignment'. Women's role in the private sphere is superimposed onto their role in the public sphere, creating a perpetual disadvantage for women in the field of politics (36).

Changes in participative activity: from symbolic to substantive participation?

The collapse of communist rule and the introduction of new electoral laws, has empowered the national legislatures

to the extent that their functions are beginning to resemble Western liberal democratic models. Thus the new-style elections offered voters a choice between parties and between candidates. The subsequent loss of the 'quota' system and fierce electoral competition has been accompanied by a sharp fall in the levels of female representation, as noted in the introduction to this thesis (37). One response to this from political scientists has been to suggest that the reformed national legislatures may have fewer women deputies, but that their opportunities for participation have now been greatly strengthened. Commenting on the implications of reform in the newly elected Congress of People's Deputies in the Soviet Union in 1989, for example, Brown [1990] points out that the changes have led to the election of highly articulate deputies. The sharp decline in the proportion of women, by this argument, may be balanced by the authenticity of their new role, and the greater influence they may be able to wield. Thus, he notes that;

This may be a backhanded tribute to the vastly greater significance of the new legislature, given the generally weak position of women in Soviet political life: there has for many years been an inverse relationship between the power of an institution in the Soviet political system and the percentage of women to be found in that body (38).

However, women's fortunes in the newly emerging democracies depend on a number of factors; the voting

behaviour of the electorate, the ability and willingness of women to put themselves forward as candidates, as well as the attitude adopted by the new political groupings; issues that will be addressed in chapter three. The task here is to review the arguments raised by feminist political scientists in recent years concerning the best way to 'get women into politics'; and, more specifically, into national legislatures, and evaluate the relevance of these arguments to the nature of women's representation under communism and post-communism.

In the search for a new set conclusions about gender and politics, therefore, two major arguments have emerged from the debate in recent years, both based on the claim that women need to support the greater politicisation of their sex and consequently increase the level of their representation in national legislatures. The first, or symbolic argument, rests on a theory of representation that maintains a parliament can only function democratically if it reflects all the social strands of society. This view is premised on the simple grounds of justice, and underpinned many of the early campaigns for women's suffrage throughout Europe. The second, or substantive argument, claims that a greater representation of women is needed because women hold distinctive attitudes and beliefs that should impact on the policy agenda and effectively communicate a 'woman's

point of view' (39). Each will be examined in turn.

The symbolic argument challenges systems that produce elected assemblies that are decidedly unrepresentative of society, due to the number of seats held predominantly by 'white middle class' males. The paucity of women in parliaments, of course, is perhaps the most obvious category of all 'minority' groups under-represented in this way. Phillips [1991], however, in critically examining this view, points out that;

Those who challenge the system that produces this are usually faced with a form of reductio ad absurdum that queries how far the principle of proportionality should go. Are we supposed to elect students, pensioners, the unemployed, in numbers that mirror their proportion in society? Are we supposed to have proportional representation of every occupational classification, every religion, every racial and linguistic minority?..... The whole idea is patently absurd (40).

This statement is deliberately overdrawn, but it also overlooks the fact that women form by far the largest minority, and are also well represented within other minority groups, and hence lack an official voice in contributing to policy that directly impinges on the quality of their lives; in education, health, income maintenance and employment, for example. Phillips, however, also argues that in states which continue to support disproportionate numbers of men in the legislative assemblies, democracy is profoundly flawed. She notes

that different experiences create different values, priorities and interests, the majority of which remain unvoiced.

This sidesteps a more fundamental issue for some feminists; that is, that 'democracy' has never existed for women, and that the concept for many is no more than a 'men's club writ large' (41). The symbolic perspective also underplays the issue of 'difference' between men and women, as well as 'differences' between women themselves; a theme that is now a central concern of much contemporary feminist discourse. The simple association of equality with justice, for example, assumes that differences between men and women, and between women and women are unimportant. (42)

The substantive argument, however, moves away from the claim of simple justice towards a more speculative approach. This view emphasises gender differences in political opinion and in participatory behaviour. In essence, if more women were elected to national legislatures they would ultimately influence the political agenda by expressing interests that are significantly different to those of men (43). Thus, from this perspective, despite the differences between women, there exist a number of important commonalities that have emerged from women's reproductive and nurturing experiences, and

that only women can act for women in advancing and protecting these interests. In part, therefore, the substantive argument may be seen to support a broadening of the definition of the range of issues that can be considered as valid concerns for policy makers, and obtaining parity for them on the policy agenda. It is particularly relevant for feminists attempting to translate the objectives long held by the feminist movement - such as improving childcare facilities and furthering equal opportunities in the work place - into public policy.

Both the symbolic and the substantive perspective challenge the absence of feminist thought from conventional theory and practice within political science, noting that democratic theory does little to explore the gender dimension of citizenship and political participation. Both advocate a greater role for women in electoral politics, and yet seem overly simplistic in their claims. In relation to the symbolic argument, how far *should* governments go, for example, in ensuring 'representative' national legislatures? In the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, attempts to replicate society were accompanied firstly by institutional powerlessness, and secondly, by the persistence of a core elite, producing effectively two-tier systems in terms of the power and influence of

elected members. Thus, 'quota' systems have been abolished on the grounds that they are undemocratic, although in the West, the introduction of a range of 'quota' systems within political parties or national executives has proved to be an acceptable and effective way of drawing more women into political activity. Equally, who is to say that women have objectively different interests to men in politics? In many respects, it is convenient to assume that they do, as this legitimates the kinds of roles that women tend to undertake in political life. Yet women are not a homogeneous group with similar concerns and agendas. They are divided by occupational class, race, ethnicity, age and experience. This suggests that a 'women's perspective' is far more multi-faceted than the substantive argument will allow for.

In addition, the notion that more women would change the persona of national legislatures is frequently based on assumptions that women are more moralistic, humane and inherently pacifist in their political beliefs than men. Yet research that has attempted to test these assumptions has been largely inconclusive in its findings; where sex differences do exist, they are small (44). The point to stress here, is that women's range of interests in politics is likely to be as diverse as that of men. Furthermore, the assumption that more women equals better policy-making

- especially in areas of social policy - has often been raised in connection with the Nordic states, where high levels of female representation co-exist alongside an extensive range of social welfare and gender-equality initiatives. In relation to Sweden, however, Eduards [1991] has argued that the way in which women organised themselves in groups both within and outside the Swedish parliament formed an important characteristic of women's capacity to transform politics (45).

Thus, in order to effect a transformation, a 'critical mass' in terms of numbers may not be sufficient to ensure an effective change in policy-making if women remain divided by party groupings of separate interests within national legislatures, and poorly organised outside. The basic assumption that more women in representative politics would make a substantive difference in bringing 'women's issues' to the fore, therefore, is based on dubious evidence, and needs to take a broader, strategic view of women's political role. Despite the theoretical dilemmas facing feminist political scientists, the universal phenomena of male dominated national legislatures must represent a gross under-utilisation of talent, not just for promoting women's concerns but for contributing a voice towards all political issues.

To conclude, the symbolic - substantive debate offers

at least a useful starting point from which to place the political participation of women, as the significant changeover from symbolic representation to democratically elected power is completed. Although it is disconcerting to witness the decrease in the levels of female representation, it may now be possible to determine a greater authenticity of women's role in influencing politics and policy-making. The question of women's emerging participatory role, therefore, will be considered in the next chapter. The fall in female representation, the concerns expressed by women themselves as well as the kinds of activities women have engaged in to make their voice heard, will form the basis of discussion. The main purpose of the following chapter is to assess the kinds of developments that have taken place since the collapse of communism and relate these to the future prospects for the political role of women in these states.

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CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION SINCE DEMOCRATISATION

Introduction

The fall in women's share of representation in the national legislatures since reform can be partially explained by the removal of the 'quota' system. Yet women formed a significant percentage of the membership of opposition groups, such as Solidarity in Poland, and Charter 77 in the former Czechoslovakia; and came out to support the new political parties and groupings that emerged in the first round of new style elections from 1988 onwards. Women's political interest and active participation in opposition movements before reform, however, has not been translated into formal representation in the new legislatures.

This chapter will explore a number of inter-related themes. Firstly, it will examine the impact of electoral reform for women candidates and deputies in the former Soviet Union. Secondly, it will discuss the virtual exclusion of women from the round table negotiations that took place in East Central Europe prior to the transition to free elections. Thirdly, it will outline the implications of the new electoral laws in relation to

women's share of representation. Fourthly, it will consider the disadvantages that women candidates faced in comparison to men in electoral competition, including an assessment of the way in which women politicians are portrayed by the media. Fifthly, it will evaluate the activities of women in opposition groups before the fall of communism, and suggest that women's lesser status in these groups has been mirrored by their diminished role in the new electoral politics. Finally, it will discuss the nature and extent of women's formal participation since reform as well as some of the conceptual difficulties confronting a feminist analysis of the impact of 'democratisation' and 'transitional' politics.

In addition, it is important to note that women in these states share a number of common experiences that are related to the fall of women's representation across the region. Yet the few women who were successful in the new electoral politics, achieved success by a variety of means. Thus, the patterns of women's participatory activity in the new legislatures seems to be unique to individual states. This chapter will conclude, therefore, with an overview of the marked diversity of women's political practice, in the sense that women have adopted different strategies of political activity in each state.

Electoral politics and electoral reform: the former Soviet Union

The drive to introduce radical political reforms in the former Soviet Union, began to emerge in January 1987. Gorbachev's proposals for change were designed to raise the status of the soviets, in order to shift some power from the CPSU to the legislative bodies, and 'democratise' the internal structure of the CPSU itself. Following the 19th Party Conference in July 1988, a new electoral law, introducing multi-candidate constituences, was adopted in the December. The law also stipulated that elected members could no longer hold a government post in addition to fulfilling their representative duties (1). Through changing the structure of the political system, Gorbachev claimed that the impetus of 'perestroika' would be furthered by partially by-passing the conservative elements within the CPSU and gaining support from the 'democratically' elected soviets (2).

The restructuring of the soviets thus formed an integral part of Gorbachev's reform strategy and included the creation of an entirely new representative structure in the Congress of USSR People's Deputies [CPD]. The Congress, designed to meet annually, was a tricameral body with a total of 2,250 seats. Of these, 750 were for deputies elected from the territorial okrugs; 750 for deputies

elected from the national-territorial okrugs and 750 'saved seats' for representatives nominated by social organisations. The Soviet Women's Committee [SWC], for example, was allocated 75 seats in this last category (3).

The first national multi-candidate elections to be held since those for the Constituent Assembly in 1917, took place during March 1989. In turn, the newly formed Congress elected the USSR Supreme Soviet from among its numbers, to act as a working legislature. The election of women to the Congress, however, and subsequently to the Supreme Soviet, still owed something to the importance attached to their symbolic presence, as the number of saved seats for the SWC suggests. Nevertheless, the percentage of female representation in the USSR Supreme Soviet fell from 32.8% in the 1984 convocation, to 18.2% after the 1989 election (4). The number of women deputies in the Supreme Soviet would in all probability have been lower still if all had been subject to electoral competition. In the Council of the Union, for example, where women occupied 16.2% of the seats, 31.2% of women deputies held a saved seat through the SWC; and another 20% held a saved seat through sponsorship from other organisations, most notably the trade unions. Slightly less than half of the women deputies in the Union chamber, therefore, had faced electoral competition in the territorial okrugs.

The pattern of representation within the Council of Nationalities, where women formed 20.2% of the membership, was slightly different. Here, only 13% of women gained a seat through sponsorship by the SWC, and 17% through other organisations. 70% of women in this half of the Supreme Soviet were elected from the national-territorial okrugs. [Table 1] This suggests, perhaps, that the SWC sponsored a disproportionate number of Russian women, as opposed to women in other republics; partly because many regions and territories did not put women forward for a saved seat (5). In addition, women facing competition as candidates in the national-territorial okrugs seemed to have achieved more success than those standing in territorial okrugs. In part, this may have been due to the influence of local party leaders in rural areas managing the electoral process to the extent that many candidates, in spite of the new electoral law, ran without opposition.

Other social organisations were not so forthcoming in putting women into saved seats. Both the Writers Union with 10 seats and the Academy of Sciences with 25 seats, filled their quotas with men (6). Furthermore, the legacy of women's symbolic presence can be detected in the appointment of Bayan Iskakova to the post of Vice Chair of the Council of the Union following the 1989 election. In the first session of the newly reformed Supreme Soviet

of the USSR, the proposal speech given by Primakov contained a direct reference to the reasons for Iskakova's sponsorship;

First of all, we expressed the thought that a rather active person should be Vice Chairman. It is not mandatory that this person be a specialist in managerial affairs. In addition, things must be done so that all the various regions of our country are evenly represented. In addition, Bayan Seilkhanova is a woman, and this too, is a definite plus (7).

The persistence of attitudes that continued to place importance on the creation of a balanced legislature, may well have been accompanied by a continuation of a narrow conception of women's place in electoral politics. Certainly women continued to be under-represented in the key commissions and committees attached to the Supreme Soviet, as will be shown below.

Women deputies serving on the committees and commissions attached to the Supreme Soviet

Of the 18.2% of women in the 1989 convocation of the Supreme Soviet, 22% served as members of its committees and commissions. The distribution of membership by gender, however, shows that women were disproportionately clustered in the Women's Affairs committee, rather than being represented across the board. In high profile policy areas, for example, such as the Committee for Defence and State

Security, there were no women. Only two sat on the Committee for Economic Reforms, whereas the Women's Affairs Committee held 22 women and 2 men. [Tables 2 and 3].

Women's political representation was not enhanced by the new electoral process, despite claims that competitive elections would create opportunities for 'real' participation. Buckley notes that many commentators hoped that the old 'yes-women' of the past, who were largely excluded from key policy debates, would give way to those who were able to express an independent opinion, even if the number of women had decreased overall. However, she also observes that the initial feeling of optimism may have given way to some concern.

Fewer energetic women were preferable to a higher percentage of hesitant ones. Within a year this position sounded rather hollow. Many female deputies still seemed reluctant to speak out or assert themselves in policy debate (8).

The dominant male culture that clearly pervades the formal political arena, may have acted as a barrier to women's political activity, by dampening enthusiasm and restricting initiative. Moreover, it can be argued that the first wave of electoral reform in the former Soviet Union, preserved a form of 'quota' system for groups in society, albeit a limited one, and that the persistence of this form of electoral management and control was not

entirely beneficial for women's political participation. To a certain degree, it guaranteed a limited number of seats for women, whilst at the same time keeping the share of female representation artificially high. Women were still regarded, therefore, as a token presence without any substantive influence to contribute to policy-making.

The 1990 election to the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies rejected the principle of reserved seats for official organisations, and perhaps as a consequence of this only 5.4% of seats were gained by women as opposed to 35.3% in the previous convocation; a pattern repeated in many of the other republics (9). The issue of 'quotas' for women has since been raised by Russian women politicians as a means of protecting women's share of electoral representation, although there has been no substantive discussion on this issue (10).

In September 1993, Yeltsin dissolved the Russian Congress of People's Deputies in order to call an election to a new bicameral parliament. The December 1993 Russian elections to the State Duma or lower house, and to the Council of the Federation, or upper house, introduced a system of proportionality to the electoral process. The 450 seats in the State Duma were filled in two ways; 225 through a simple plurality system in single-member constituencies, and the remainder through party lists. The

13.5% share of women's representation following the 1993 elections, however, was largely due to the entry of the Women of Russia party, who polled a respectable 8.1% of the vote through the party lists, thereby gaining 21 seats. They won an additional seat through the constituency vote (11).

The Women of Russia political group was founded two months before the December 1993 elections, by Alevtina Fedulova, Ekaterina Lakhova and Natalya Gundareva. This grouping is attached to the quasi-official Women's Union of Russia; the successor to the old Soviet Women's Committee. Their 22 seats, however, fell short of the 35 required to form an officially registered faction within the State Duma, although this does not appear to have disadvantaged them unduly when the key administrative and committee posts of the Duma were distributed, as was at first assumed (12). Fedulova became one of the three deputy chairpersons of the Duma. In addition, Galina Klimantova became chair of the Women's Affairs, Family and Youth committee (13).

Women were elected in small numbers in other parties; 13 through the list system and 26 through the single member constituencies, bringing the total number of women to 61. Of these, women were appointed to the committees attached to the Duma in proportion to their numbers, although their allocation seems to suggest once again the broad

health-education-welfare sphere of participation; with one exception. Of the eleven women who filled the position of deputy chair to the seventy available positions, one was to the International Affairs Committee (14).

As a political party, Women of Russia helped to increase the share of women's formal participation as it had stood in the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation. One of the factors that sparked the formation of this group, however, was the realisation firstly, that women's issues were not being adequately addressed by other parties; and secondly, that women only constituted 8.8% of candidates on party lists and were usually placed at a level that minimised their electoral chances (15). Moreover, despite the increase in numbers, women remain a minority voice in the new parliament, whose influence seems likely to remain limited, particularly in view of the fact that the new Constitution of December 1993 has weakened the legislative institutions in favour of the executive (16).

Planning change in East Central Europe: the round table discussions

In contrast, the round table discussions in Hungary, Poland and the former Czechoslovakia in 1989, paved the way towards electoral reform and the formation of new political

institutions. The role of women in these discussions, however, was minimal, as can be seen from an examination of the negotiation process in Poland and Hungary. At the inaugural session of the Polish round table, for example, there was one woman delegate [Anna Przeclawska] out of a total of fifty seven. In the sub-teams, women had only a token presence. For example, only one woman was represented on the 'Trade Union and Pluralism' team out of a total membership of thirty two; similarly, on the 'Political Reforms' team, a single woman's name appears on the list in contrast to thirty five men. However, some teams were co-chaired by women, including 'Health' [Anna Grzymislawska and Zofia Kuratowska], and 'Electoral Reform' [Janina Zakrzewska] (17).

In the final speeches delivered by the Polish delegates - one of which was delivered by a woman, Grazyna Staniszowska - there is some evidence to suggest that the position of women in the new economic and political era had at least merited some discussion. One delegate noted, for example that;

... there is a wish to alleviate the burden of Polish mothers and wives, on whose shoulders rest the greatest weights and inconvenience of today's state of the economy.
(18)

The sentiment expressed above is reminiscent of the rhetoric voiced by generations of officials anxious to

appear concerned with the 'woman question;' indicating that democratisation was likely to adversely affect the material conditions of women without recognising that women themselves might have welcomed a more substantive role in reshaping politics and policy. The Hungarian national round table attempted to include all the political interests of society, and participants included representatives from the National Council of Hungarian Women, whose input was perhaps less representative of Hungarian women as a whole, and more indicative of the framework of the old regime. In the absence of alternative women's groups at this stage of democratisation, the Women's Council was the only one representing women to take a place at the table. Indeed, according to Tokes [1990] there was a general lack of concern for the well-being of those groups unrepresented at the discussions and likely to be economically disadvantaged by the reform process (19).

Part of the brief of the round tables was the drafting of new electoral laws. The relinquishment of all obligation to create a form of balanced representation in the new national assemblies in East Central Europe, appears to have been accomplished without any discussion concerning the implications this was likely to have for women. The round table discussions were overwhelmingly male discussions, negotiating the framework of the transition to democracy

through new electoral systems, which, as will be shown later, had differential implications for women and men.

Electoral reform in East Central Europe

The type of electoral system adopted by individual states can go some way in helping to determine the extent of women's political representation. Lovenduski and Norris [1993] have demonstrated that women tend to do best in multi-member constituencies with a high number of seats per district. In addition, countries which operate a party list system, also facilitate women's entry into national legislatures. Lovenduski and Norris claim, for example, that parties have an incentive to present party lists which include women candidates, as their absence may cause offence. Moreover, where parties are committed to helping women to enter politics, the introduction of a quota system in drawing up party lists is a simple and effective method of implementing such affirmative action (20). In the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, however, the democratic process is still undergoing a great deal of change. In Poland, for example, the electoral law was modified between the 1991 election and the one held in September 1993 (21). Thus, the form of the new electoral systems may yet undergo further change and cannot adequately be compared with systems that are well

established in the West. However, the placing of women on party lists, as noted in the previous section, may be a significant factor in shaping women's share of representation.

The East European states all followed a different path in devising their electoral systems. In Hungary, the new electoral law was drafted during the round table discussions in 1989, and consisted of a number of different principles, reflecting the conflicting opinions of the negotiators (22). The 386 seats of the unicameral Hungarian parliament were filled in three ways. 176 deputies were elected in single-member constituencies; 152 from regional party lists and 58 from national party lists. Voters had two votes, and cast one for a single-member constituency and one for the regional party list. The 58 seats from the national party lists were distributed between the parties in proportion to their residual votes (23).

In Poland, the 1989 election was transitional in the sense that it only made a proportion of seats available to the opposition in the lower house. The first fully free elections held in October 1991, tested a highly complex proportional system drawn up only five months beforehand. Each of the 37 electoral districts contained between 7 and 17 seats for the Sejm. Voters indicated their preference by

selecting a party list and placing a check beside the name of the candidate for whom they wished to vote (24). 69 of the seats in the Sejm were reserved for parties gaining at least 5% of the national vote or winning seats in five or more districts, with candidates gaining a seat through a regional list.

In the former Czechoslovakia, election to the Federal Assembly took place through a party list system. In order for parties to qualify for inclusion, they had to demonstrate either a membership of 10,000, or, if membership fell below that threshold, a sufficient number of signatures to make up the shortfall (25). Voters, besides being able to express their choice of party, were also able to indicate up to four preferences for particular candidates.

Clearly then, the avenues that led towards electoral success in individual states differed markedly, and the opportunities for women to gain a seat in these circumstances were also varied. In Hungary, the communist regime had already introduced a limited reform of the electoral system in 1985 with the expressed intention to increase the numbers of women and young professional party members in the National Assembly. Allowing voters a choice of candidates under the umbrella of one-party rule, however, failed in its main objective, as voters tended to

favour middle aged males who were university or college educated managers and professionals (26). The results of the first free elections held in March and April 1990 demonstrated a similarly negative trend; particularly for women. Most significantly, the new system effectively created two major avenues for election: candidates could face competition in the constituencies [as a member of a political party or as an individual] or hope for a favourable placing on a party list. However, as Rona-Tas [1991] observed, in reality many candidates took a safe course and followed both routes, in order to increase their chances of election (27). Overall, women secured 28 of the 386 seats, thereby forming only 7.2% of deputies in the newly elected National Assembly. As can be seen in table 4, women gained some representation in all the main political parties, although the variation is marked. Women gained 8 seats for the Hungarian Democratic Forum party, for example, although this only represented 4.8% of the total number of seats. Within the Hungarian Socialist Party, the successor of the communist party, women took 5 seats, representing 15.1% of the total (28). Women appeared, therefore, to stand a better chance of being adopted as a candidate and gaining election to the National Assembly through the remnants of the old regime.

More importantly, of the women who were successful, only

one-fifth secured a seat through the single-member constituencies. The majority of women won through their placing on party lists (29). Moreover, Bollobas [1993] points out that women elected through the party lists have an entirely different kind of responsibility, unlike members who are held to be accountable to a specific constituency; although she remains optimistic about the long-term future for women in political life.

Yet in spite of these small beginnings, I see an unmistakable awakening. Women in Parliament, government administration, or political organisations are not puppets moved by some greater power: they must act for themselves, as they were elected or appointed for themselves, and can thus be vocal in an unprecedented way (30).

As indicated, the first new style Polish elections, held in June 1989, represented a transitional form of electoral change; allowing a formal opposition to take its place alongside the Communist Party in the Sejm. Thus, 35% of seats in the Sejm were to be made available for Solidarity, as the overwhelming leader of the opposition forces, with the remainder reserved for the official coalition (31). In the absence of a national list system for all parties, women who stood as opposition candidates, relied on Solidarity sponsorship in order to win a place in the Sejm. Some key political women, such as Barbara Labuda, one of the initiators of the Parliamentary Women's Circle, and Hanna Suchocka, Prime Minister from July 1992

until May 1993, were originally beneficiaries of this form of sponsorship. At 13.5%, however, the level of women's representation in 1989 compared unfavourably to the 20.2% of the previous regime (32). [See table 5]. Under the new regulations for the 1991 elections, women relied firstly, on political groupings or parties for sanction to stand as a candidate, and secondly, on voter preference for election. Overall, women's share of representation fell even further, so that they only formed 9% of deputies in the Sejm (33). In 1993, however, the number of women rose again to 12.8% (34).

In the former Czechoslovakia, women formed 9.4% of deputies in the new 1990 Federal Assembly. Within individual political parties, women comprised only 4.4% of the Communist group. This was despite an attempt by the Czechoslovakian Women's Union to focus on women's role in the new legislative bodies by setting up a timetable and a procedure in 1989 aimed at achieving women's equality within the new constitution and within the new representative assemblies (35). In minority parties associated with issues of nationalism, women were better represented, forming 26.7% of deputies in the National Slovakian Party and 25% of the Autonomous Moravians and Silesians (36). [See table 6]

As can be seen, there is no discernible pattern in

women's political participation in electoral politics in these states. In Poland, a handful of women in 1989 were able to gain a substantive foothold in the Sejm through Solidarity sponsorship, although Solidarity did not actively espouse women's political representation. In the 1991 elections, however, women fared less well, suggesting that, despite the existence of large multi-member constituencies, open competition favoured male candidates rather than women. The introduction of party lists for 69 of the 460 seats in the 1993 election, may have been a contributory factor in raising the level of women's representation, by offering an alternative route to election.

In Hungary, the majority of women deputies secured their seat through the list system and therefore appear to be following a lesser representative path which may subsequently result in a lack of influence in debates, both within the National Assembly and its committees and commissions. In the former Czechoslovakia, women are clearly active in minority groupings but have yet to make any substantial inroad in other political parties. In Poland, the fluctuation in the number of women elected to the Sejm is perplexing, although in comparison to Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia, Polish women have a higher share of representation. The kinds of problems women face

as candidates in these states, however, do share a number of commonalities which is worthy of further evaluation.

Issues of gender: women as candidates in the new elections

It is possible to argue, firstly, that women face significant disadvantages in electoral politics because politics is still assumed to be a predominantly male preserve. Thus, women have to overcome a certain degree of prejudice in standing as candidates and in facing electoral competition. Indeed, women's role in the newly emerging systems seems to be an organisational one behind the scenes, rather than a front line bid for election (37). Secondly, in an environment that favours male candidates, male political behaviour is implicitly accepted as the 'norm'; candidates that exhibit attitudes that deviate from this narrow conception of political behaviour can persuasively be labelled as hysterical or inept. Finally, the form of women's activism and status in the opposition movements before reform, particularly in Poland and the former Czechoslovakia, can be seen as an influential factor in determining their lesser share of political representation in the new regimes.

In relation to the first point, Buckley [1992] has noted that women in the former Soviet Union were disadvantaged as candidates simply because they were women.

The Soviet Women's Committee tried to overcome this by issuing an appeal to voters to back women candidates (38). Overall, therefore, women fared badly as they were seen as less desirable than male candidates and often had to withstand pointed criticism. In Kazakhstan, for example, a committee set up to examine new grass-roots organisations within the republic, passed harsh judgement on a woman candidate standing for election.

Many extremist groups are led by members of the scientific and creative intelligentsia. For example, the Chairwoman of the co-ordinating council of the Alma-Ata People's Front and the Front's emissary to the Moscow organisation, is one LM Sherova, a researcher at the republic's Academy of Science's Institute of Philosophy and Law, and who is notorious for her hooligan escapades and dubious scholarship (39).

This form of prejudice can also be found in East Central Europe. Following the 1990 election in the former Czechoslovakia, a representative of a woman's coalition complained in a television interview about the 'disastrously low' level of women's representation in the new Federal Assembly (40). Yet women may have been disadvantaged by their poor placing on the list system that formed the basis of the new electoral system. Siklova [1993] reports, for example, that;

In October 1991, one woman deputy of the Federal Assembly conducted a poll and discovered that 89% of her political party believed it would lose votes if a woman were listed at the head of a ticket. Female members of the party held

this opinion more often than did males (41).

It can be argued that women in these states lack confidence in themselves as potential politicians; not altogether surprising in systems that openly advocate 'male' values as opposed to 'female' ones in the characteristics required in a successful politician. Within the former Soviet Union, this situation was neatly described as 'manocracy' by the sociologist Elvira Novikova, herself elected to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies in 1989. For Novikova, the situation of *muzhekratiya* [government by men] excluded the concept of democracy because it failed to take account of the majority of the population (42). In addition, the negative images of women officials in the old party-state hierarchies lived on to influence the opinion of the electorate;

'Puppet-women' in representative organs of power and 'iron ladies' in the director's chair, women elected by no-one but appointed by one or other state institution, obedient to the will of the bosses and always ready to carry out any directive issued on high - thus has a negative image been created of the woman director, the woman political leader. They have built an invisible and unappealing barrier for women as candidates in the reformed soviets, which every female candidate felt and which allowed only a handful of individuals to win (43).

Furthermore, the image of a woman deputy seems to veer uncomfortably between one in which 'male' behaviour is seen

as undesirable, and 'female' behaviour as unsuitable for political office. One woman commentator appears to confirm this view by noting that;

There are...calls for women to be in positions of political power. But let's look at what happened during the elections and the recent Congress of USSR People's Deputies. When a woman ran against a man she usually lost. And although there were some women at the Congress, they didn't represent the "living female soul." They were mainly functionaries or excitable sorts who didn't get a chance to speak anyway (44).

The marginalisation of women and consequently, women's issues, suggests that women face enormous difficulties in getting their voices heard in a dominant male atmosphere. In July 1990, Tatyana Merzlyakova, a delegate at the 1990 Party Congress in Moscow, noted in 'Moscow News' that the mere mention of women's problems in the hall was enough to amuse an otherwise sombre audience. It was the form of women's contribution to debate - portrayed as being unsuitable or near hysterical - that was held to be at fault, although the plea for a more 'substantive' role for women was clear;

Those of us who did manage to get nominations shoulder a heavy responsibility. We must prove that we are capable of just as much as the male delegates. And let me tell you, we are! (45).

Hence, women's political behaviour is frequently held up against an idealised male 'norm' and is found to be

wanting. Yet until such time as more women are able to gain political experience or increase their numbers in all areas of political debate, this situation is likely to continue. The result of women's 'different' approach to politics is assumed to be inferior and results in a form of tokenism that women find impossible to break, and ultimately ineffective in solving women's problems. Thus for Merzlyakova;

Women are the first to feel the effect of Party and government policy. We feel it through the burden which we carry on our shoulders. We appreciate their solicitude, but we are against the window-dressing whereby some of us get elected to the presidium or to working bodies of the Congress (46).

The fall in women's representation may be due in part to women candidates being seen as less effective than men, either by the electorate, the new political groupings or both.

The position of women in opposition groups before reform

Another contributory factor to women's fall in representation, is that women candidates were not drawn in significant numbers from the recruiting ground of the popular opposition movements. In part, this might be explained by examining the role women played in these organisations. Women formed a significant part of the

membership of Solidarity, for example; an estimated 50% prior to the imposition of martial law in December 1981. Yet the number of women in the top levels of the organisation were small. In 1981, they formed only 7.8% of delegates at the Solidarity Congress, and only one woman was elected to the National Executive Council (47).

Women in Solidarity had scant opportunity to raise women's issues within the movement, and a women's section formed in September 1989, proved to be short-lived. In 1990, the Solidarity Congress passed a resolution concerning the necessity for anti-abortion legislation. The women's section claimed that this decision had no mandate as 90% of the delegates were men, and that women in the movement, representing 50% of total membership, had not been consulted. This critical stance was repeated in 1991, when the section called for an independent women's movement, as a response to a form of politics within Solidarity that was 'monopolised by men.' The Solidarity leadership responded by disbanding the women's section (40).

Women were much better represented in the Charter 77 movement in the former Czechoslovakia, constituting around 21% of the total number of signers, and of the three spokespersons throughout the 1970's, one was generally a woman (49). The women holding these posts, however, were

benefiting from what appeared to be a form of positive action. As Jancar [1978] noted;

Equally significant is what appears to be a Charter policy of giving women permanent representation at the highest leadership level. The fact that these positions are not elected but appointed suggests that opposition women may fare better outside the electoral process (50).

There is also some suggestion that women's role within opposition movements may be similar to that of women in electoral politics; that is, women support male participation or accept roles assigned to them by male colleagues. Nevertheless, women who supported political change through their activism in opposition movements and in popular demonstrations, have not seen their efforts rewarded in electoral politics. Kiss notes, for example;

Paradoxically enough, the spectacular political changes of 1989-90 seemed to emphasise this negative trend for women. They were present at the big demonstrations, on the happy streets, but disappeared from the negotiating tables. In the heroic battle on the behalf of democracy, the male fighters tended to forget about the biggest, oppressed minority, their other halves (51).

In Hungary, Goven [1993] notes that members of dissident groups under communism, many of whom had menial jobs, relied on women's work in the unofficial economy as well as in the home, to free time for men to engage in political activism. Indeed, Goven touches on a crucial point in relation to women's role in the new electoral

politics. Much of the opposition to communism was based on a celebration of a 'private' world, that was seen as sustaining a haven from the oppression of the state; hence encouraging a greater division in society in relation to gender roles. Moreover, for Goven, the communist state was willing to sanction some autonomy for the family, as this helped to compensate for inadequate or deteriorating provision of social-welfare benefits. Thus opposition to the state not only reinforced the gender divisions in the private sphere, but also obscured inequalities that already existed. For women, the new politics was very much a public affair in extending male forms of political activism, rather female ones (52).

Images of the new women politicians

The media coverage of the new women politicians appears unable to resist raising questions either about their 'dual role' or about their place in a male domain. The need to reinforce the legitimation of women's primary nurturing and caring role in society seems to form a central objective of the profiling of women politicians in particular. Galina Starovoitova, for example, elected to the CPD in 1989 and Yeltsin's advisor on relations between nationalities until her removal in December 1992, was asked by 'Moscow News'

about the the difficulties she had in adjusting her private life in order to fulfill a public role. The newspaper noted that 'The sense of guilt for neglecting her family for the sake of politics nags her constantly...' (53). Ella Pamfilova, Yeltsin's Minister for Social Protection in 1991, was asked by one Western observer to comment firstly, on how she managed to combine running a ministry with her duties as wife and mother, and secondly, on the way her Cabinet colleagues treated her. Her reply was revealing;

On the whole, very well. But sometimes I surprise them by my decisive, courageous, man-like behaviour - even more masculine than they dare to be themselves (54).

Similarly, in a profile of Kazimiera Prunskiene, a prominent economist and former Prime Minister of Lithuania, the interviewer for 'New Russia' weighted his questions heavily in an attempt to draw out comment concerning her 'womanly role' in an essentially masculine context. Hence he begins by asking;

So, who are you? A politician, an economist? Or, first of all, an attractive woman, a wife and a mother? (55).

Subsequent questions suggest that Prunskiene's place in politics as a woman is somewhat freakish. More than one question refers specifically to her physical attractiveness and charm; another seeks an explanation of her success by relating it to the importance of women's intuitive and

spiritual qualities.

It seems that women are representative of a different world. You have a deeper and more sophisticated emotional world and a higher intuition. As a politician and as a prominent economist you often come into contact with men. Does your female intuition help you at least because you divine us well before we know it and easily read into our thoughts? (56)

These attitudes are symptomatic of the virtual absence of role models of successful women politicians. Prunskiene, Hanna Suchocka, the former Prime Minister of Poland, and Anna Petrosovits, a deputy in the Hungarian parliament, for example, have all been compared to Margaret Thatcher (57). Furthermore, the number of roles that women continue to fulfil in the home may tend to overshadow their political activities. Judit Juhasz, appointed by the Hungarian government in 1990 to act as spokeswoman for the Ministry of Welfare, observed that;

..... interviews often start by suggesting that a casual chat about my private life would be preferred - with the stock compulsory questions of where do you shop, how often do you have your hair done, and then I'm finally asked why I accepted this job [and] how long do think I'm going to stay in it..(58).

The unfavourable images of powerful women in public life under communism may also have persisted under reform; creating a further barrier for raising the level of women's share of representation. Tolstaya [1990] expresses this view by noting that;

Women in the West always ask why in our country so few women hold top jobs in government or management. They have no idea how many women tyrants are comfortably ensconced in such posts, tormenting their neighbours of both sexes. Many teachers.... doctors, inspectors, shop assistants, whose power in our impoverished country is real and great, are tyrants without being aware of it (59).

In addition, some women see the new women politicians as unrepresentative of women and women's problems, in that women deputies in the new legislatures are atypical of many ordinary women as they were overwhelmingly highly educated and successful in their own field before entering politics. [See appendix 1 for profiles of selected women deputies elected since 1989]]. Alena Valterova, for example, founder of a women's party in the former Czechoslovakia, expressed some doubt about the new women being able to represent the majority of women's needs (60).

Women who have stepped outside their 'traditional' role when they enter political life, are frequently viewed in disparaging terms by both men and women. The role model of a woman holding a position that gives her some power in these states is unattractive. To a degree, women's image can be 'softened' by placing her role within the context of domesticity; hence the attention given to family details and personal appearance in profiles or articles of women politicians and spokespersons. Politics is still viewed as predominantly a male affair, and women who enter this field may feel they are relinquishing part of their 'femininity'

if they are labelled as 'iron ladies' in the competition for power. Indeed, after the 1990 election in Hungary, an opinion poll showed that 47% of people agreed that national issues were up to men (61). Women, therefore, are hampered by images and stereotypes in which the traditional role of women overshadows their political activism.

Finding a 'voice' for women's issues in the new regimes

A fall in the representation of women was accompanied by a lack of concern with women's interests in the election campaigns. In the former Soviet Union, a survey carried out by the Soviet Women's Committee [SWC] in 1990, suggested that there were few political groupings willing to campaign for women's issues (62). In Hungary, women's issues received virtually no consideration from any of the parties during the 1990 election campaign, and there was no committee set up to review and monitor women's issues in the new government as there had been under the communist regime.

Eniko Bollabas, a former member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, claims that male politicians do not think that women's issues are important enough to be included in the agenda of the new political groupings, and fear that taking women's issues more seriously would not go down well with voters (63).

In the former Czechoslovakia, some political parties are giving attention to women; the Social Democrats, for example, introduced a special programme called 'Women Can Do It,' in 1991 in response to concerns expressed about the low numbers of women deputies elected to office (64). In Poland, however, the passing of the new abortion law in 1991, effectively reduced any serious consideration of a broad range of women's issues to one of reproductive rights. Moreover, a half-hearted attempt to introduce a ministerial post with responsibility for women's issues proved to be ineffectual due to lack of official commitment (65).

From symbolic to substantive representation: women's influence in the new legislatures.

Despite the fall in women's share of representation, and the patchy attempts to include women's issues in the new electoral politics, there are instances of women's effective participation in contemporary political issues. In April 1991, for example, some of the Polish women deputies in the Sejm joined forces in order to form a Women's Parliamentary Circle, and temporarily blocked the passage of the anti-abortion Bill during the May 16th Parliamentary debate. Ultimately, the Bill passed on to the statute book, but not before a spirited attempt had been

made to introduce a more liberal version. The Women's Parliamentary Circle also tried to delay the passage of the Bill by putting forward a very long list of questions to be answered before a vote was taken, including the financial consequences of implementing change (66).

In addition, women in the Sejm appeared to have a reasonably high profile after the 1989 elections, when a number of them were given key posts. Barbara Labuda, a former Solidarity leader, became spokesperson for the police, the army and foreign affairs. Malgorzata Niezabitowska was appointed spokeswoman for Mazowiecki's government and held a weekly press conference to discuss issues concerned with proposed government policy. In 1990, the new Minister for Culture was the former dissident, Izabella Cywinska. Two of the three deputy speakers were women; and Hanna Suchocka, also a Solidarity protege, became Prime Minister from July 1992 to May 1993. Women were also active elsewhere. The first ombudsman, Ewa Letowska, for example, was able to speak out critically against government policy, particularly in relation to the reinstatement of religious education in schools (67).

With some conspicuous exceptions, however, women have been sparsely represented in executive positions, thereby limiting their scope for a substantive role in the new electoral politics. In the former Czechoslovakia, one

woman, the first in many years, was appointed to a ministerial post following the 1990 election. Dagmar Buresova, previously a lawyer and well-known for her defence of dissidents in the old regime, became the new Minister of Justice (68). In Hungary, high profile women are harder to find, although the leader of the Social Democratic party is a woman [Anna Petrosovits]; as is a founding member of the Hungarian Green Party, Zsusa Beres (69). The influence of the new women politicians in Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia is as yet difficult to determine. The new opportunities opening up for women elected for their own qualities, may be limited by the fact that, at present, they are so few. In fledgling democracies, however, the issue of women's representation within the new political groupings, as candidates and on party lists, will probably develop alongside the growth in women's activism outside the formal political sphere, as will be discussed in chapter four.

In the former Soviet Union, Galina Starovoitova appeared regularly in the media at home and abroad until her resignation in 1992, in her capacity as Presidential advisor for ethnic affairs. Similarly, Ella Pamfilova, previously active in rooting out incidences of corruption in the government in her role as co-chair of the committee to investigate Communist party privileges, went on to head

the Russian Ministry for Social Welfare, charged with the responsibility of the most vulnerable members of society (70).

In the former Soviet republics, women have made gains in some areas. In Latvia, in the first competitive elections of 1990, women only formed 5% of the Deputies elected to the Supreme Council of the Latvian Republic, and women's issues were not visible in the election campaign. During the 1993 campaign, however, women's issues made a tentative appearance in the campaign of some political parties, and 14% of the newly elected deputies were women (71).

Re-conceptualising women's political participation under transition

The scope of women's political participation in the new democracies, has initiated some discussion concerning policy that directly affects women. In the former Soviet Union, three women from the Centre for Gender Studies in Moscow in 1989, wrote a critical feminist analysis of women's disadvantaged social position (72). The article highlighted the inequality of gender relations in the labour market, in training and in the home. Following its publication in the party journal 'Kommunist', the women were invited to play an advisory role to the Supreme Soviet

Committee for the Protection of Maternity, Childhood and the Family (73). Although this represented an important step in gaining official recognition of women's needs, it also, as the women themselves pointed out, contained an important contradiction. The kinds of issues discussed in the Supreme Soviet Committee were not those of equality, but specific issues of maternity, or protection or the social control of women who deviate from the desired 'norm' of female behaviour (74).

In the spring of 1990, the Centre for Gender Studies began to hold a monthly seminar under the broad title of Women, Politics and Policy. As women representing informal groups began to attend, the idea for founding the Independent Women's Democratic Initiative was born [NEZHDI], in order to provide a forum for developing a policy agenda for women; primarily in response to the fact that the discussion of political issues and policy-making was largely carried out by men on behalf of women (75) .

The Independent Women's Forum is a separate development to the Women of Russia party, although both are concerned with the political activism of women. Women of Russia has succeeded in putting more women into parliament, whereas The Independent Women's Forum appears to have a wider set of goals, and seeks to raise awareness of women's disadvantage in social and political life. The formation of

women-only political groupings, however, may be symptomatic of the marginalisation of women's interests as well as women's concern over the fall in female representation. Moreover, the Women of Russia party is not an isolated initiative. In Leningrad [St Petersburg] in 1990, the establishment of a women's party was reported on television; at the same time, a similar grouping emerged in Perm (76).

In the former Czechoslovakia there was an attempt to form a women's party in 1990 in order to create a specific electoral agenda. The Political Party of Women and Mothers in Czechoslovakia was founded by Alena Valterova, in response to the growing number of disadvantaged women living as lone parents, on or below the poverty line. For Valterova, the new political party was intended to be a forum to create a voice for such women, in a way that other political parties had failed to do. Thus Valterova claimed;

The 'velvet revolution' has been 'a male affair.' Who wants to hear of women's problems? There are too many other more 'interesting' problems to solve. If we don't speak for ourselves, if we don't let everyone hear us, we shall be faced with the same situation for years to come (77).

Valterova's attempt was unsuccessful, yet the presence of all-women parties suggests on the one hand that women are recognising their disadvantage in political life and are

actively creating alternative avenues to formal participation. On the other, it suggests a further marginalisation of women in mainstream politics, voicing women's concerns from the sidelines. Unless they are able to inject a decisive input into other areas of political debate, and gain recognition as a legitimate political grouping with a significant electoral base, women's parties may be less effective at influencing the political agenda than the informal groups working outside the formal political system.

Women's participation in politics; similarities and differences between states

In the former Soviet Union, the Women of Russia party emerged from the structure and activities of the former SWC; including its politicisation activities in response to the March 1989 election. This form of electoral separatism is too early to evaluate, although it is clear that there are many other women's initiatives in informal groups that may be somewhat suspicious of this solution to the eternal 'woman question.' For Fedulova, who believes that women have had very little influence on the political decisions of men, a women's party may provide the impetus for change (78).

In Poland, some women deputies formed a coalition

within the Sejm after the 1989 election in order to mobilise opposition to the abortion Bill. To a certain extent, the presence of high profile women politicians after 1989, was facilitated by the sponsorship of Solidarity. Women in the Sejm were also assigned a number of key posts. In the former Czechoslovakia, some awareness of women's disadvantage in the new electoral politics is slowly being raised through individual parties, anxious to attract women voters. In Hungary, where the share of women's representation is lowest, women appear to face a more difficult task in terms of increasing their numbers within the Hungarian parliament. Furthermore, women's issues are largely absent from the agenda of most Hungarian parties. Where issues are raised that are of direct relevance to women, discussion does not appear to incorporate a women's point of view. In 1991, for example, the Christian Democratic Party led a debate on the display of pornographic material in Budapest which led to the Mayor of Budapest initiating some restraints on displaying such material. This discussion was conducted on grounds of morality and decency rather than on whether it was offensive and potentially damaging for women (79).

As discussed above, there are a number of contributory factors worth considering in examining the fall in women's share of representation. A comparison between individual

electoral systems help draw attention to the significant differences between states and the means by which deputies gain legislative office. At this stage of the democratisation process, however, party identification is weak, and public opinion remains highly volatile (80). The position of women in the new political parties, therefore, is likely to undergo further change in the near future. Specific factors have initiated women's participation in some states. In Poland, the proposal to limit abortion led to the formation of a Women's group within the Sejm; in the former Soviet Union, the fall of women's representation in 1989, prompted the foundation of the Women of Russia party. In turn, this was probably facilitated in part by the early mobilisation tactics of the old Soviet Women's Committee.

However, there are a number of commonalities that have shaped the nature and scope of women's participation, including prejudices women faced as candidates; the negative images of women politicians in the old regimes, as well as those in the new; and the secondary role women played in the opposition movements before reform.

Women and 'democratisation.'

The political participation of women in the emerging democracies raises fundamental questions about the way in

which women experience political change, 'democracy' and citizenship in the new regimes. Indeed, the concepts of 'transition', 'democratisation' and 'democracy' figure prominently in contemporary literature on the political events that have taken place since the late 1980's. The conceptual framework used in this literature aims to provide a means of evaluating phenomena such as the social and economic conditions that threatened the legitimacy of the old regimes; the role of elites in bringing about or resisting change, and the struggle of competing groups angling for power and influence in the emerging civil society. For feminists, however, much of the political discourse, in this field as in many others, fails to address the way in which women and men experienced and contributed to political change in different ways; as opposition members, as candidates and as newly elected deputies.

Political analysis has adopted an androgynous form of language in recent years (81). That is to say, it treads a careful path of gender neutrality in its discussion of key themes. Thus, for example, 'civil society' is a term that encompasses all shades of society; the 'individual' or the 'political elite' are not assigned a specific gender. The problem of analysis that presents itself as androgynous in this way, however, simply reinforces and reproduces the

inequalities of power relationships that exist within society, by failing to give adequate recognition to the gender dimensions of political change. Furthermore, although the language adopted by analysts may be gender neutral, the conceptual frameworks which emerge from political discourse are not, and reflect instead an enduring and predominantly male-oriented view that gives primacy to values such as claims for legitimacy and elite struggle, and recognises the practice of 'politics' as an integral and exclusive part of that framework (82).

However, as Parry and Moran [1994] observe, 'democratisation' is not a 'once and for all event', but a constantly evolving process;

...democratisation ...presents its own independent difficulties both for the scholar and for the practitioner: problems of explanation, of realisation and of interpretation (83).

Thus, the concepts of democracy and 'democratisation' are open to diverse degrees of interpretation and opinion; much of which is beyond the scope of this discussion. Indeed, feminist analysis has alerted us to ways in which the concept may be re-interpreted so as to raise issues of gender (84). Despite these developments, however, mainstream political analysis continues to concentrate on a limited form of 'politics' and political activity. Hence, the activity of women, or the political aspirations

of women, in support networks at the margins of 'male' politics, goes unrecognised. In this context Jones [1988] argues that the political vocabulary of contemporary political science, despite its androgynous framework, is thus a distorted one;

The major concepts of contemporary Western political thought are built on an acceptance of the idea that the public is fundamentally distinct from the private and personal. This distinction informs the discipline and shapes the analytic tools of traditional political science (85).

The argument has two distinct, but inter-related strands. Firstly, the definition of key concepts, such as 'democracy' or 'citizenship' are often inadequate in reflecting the different ways in which men and women experience citizenship, representation, responsibility and political activity. Secondly, the emphasis on the activities of elite groups and the institutional aspect of politics and policy-making, generally excludes women and women's interests from debate.

However, although 'transition' and 'democratisation' may theoretically be recognised as open to interpretation, in practice, much of the analysis that appeared in response to the processes of change in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, remained firmly wedded to a more orthodox view (86). Moreover, in the context of political change in the former Soviet Union and East

Central Europe, Waylen [1994] observes that the major concepts of 'transition' and 'democracy,' in following the conventional definitions, fail to address the impact of political change for women. For Waylen, therefore;

This is one important aspect of the inadequacy of much of this work. It is clear that any analysis of democratisation that fails to incorporate a gendered perspective - that ignores the actions and impact of certain groups - will be flawed. The study of comparative politics can only be improved by creating a framework for analysing the interplay between gender relations and democratisation (87).

Feminist political scientists have provided alternative conceptual frameworks with which the gender dimensions of social and political change may be recognised and evaluated. As yet, however, these appear to remain subordinate to the conventional approach. Thus, orthodox analysis provides the framework for discussion, whereas feminist analysis takes on the familiar mantle of making visible the position of women within the broader overview. In other words, analysing change from a feminist standpoint examines the impact of power relationships on groups that have traditionally been excluded.

The persistent absence of women among elite groups determining the shape of political change has led to a situation in which policy, particularly social policy, is made for women rather than by women. Furthermore, although political initiatives made by women are as yet relatively

insignificant in comparison to the whole, some groups of women are protesting against a form of politics that excludes their voice and thus fails to address their problems; and are voicing opposition to economic policies that are beginning to erode women's rights at work.

The ways in which women and men experience 'democratisation' and 'transition' differently, is particularly noticeable in the new electoral politics. The disadvantages women faced as candidates in the first new style elections, the negative images of women politicians, and the influence of the opposition groupings before reform, have been significant factors in determining the decrease in women's share of representation. The maleness of 'public' politics may well have contributed to the development of unofficial women's groups, which provide an important source of politicisation for women. It is this form of political activity that will be examined in chapter four.

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CHAPTER FOUR

UNOFFICIAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY: THE NEW WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the development of a new and independent women's movement in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, in order to suggest that these groups may provide a platform for women to engage in political activity at a grass-roots level. As noted in chapter one, it is this form of political activism that has often been marginalised in traditional studies of participation. The main focus of this section, therefore, is to take up the theme pursued by feminist political scientists, who have argued persuasively that a broader definition of 'participation' is required in order to make women's contribution and influence more visible. Thus, Randall [1987] for example, claims that the political significance traditionally given to voting behaviour is not only over-rated, but is also misleading in terms of demonstrating gender differences. The general assumption expressed in traditional studies concluded that women are less interested in politics, more conservative in their views, and less knowledgeable about current events; findings based on a definition of 'politics' that reflected

male concerns and masculine opinions. The inclusion of activity in less conventional politics should therefore be regarded as a means of redressing this imbalance, as well as recognising informal political activity as an important aspect of women's political behaviour. Randall notes for example that;

We need in particular to consider what can be called ad hoc politics, not fully integrated into the formal political process or institutionalised, protest activity directed against the existing regime and a range of political activities falling somewhere between these (1).

Lovenduski [1986] maintains that these kinds of action frequently overlap in an arena that women appear to find more attractive than formal politics. Such behaviour may take place in makeshift organisations, short-lived campaigns and spontaneous action. However, if women find electoral politics alienating, then they are likely to turn to ad hoc politics in order to press for change (2). For women engaging in political debates in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe since reform, ad hoc and protest politics will inevitably play a crucial role in the shaping of women's opinion, women's issues and women's politicisation.

The women's movement before communism

Women's activism in informal and unofficial groups

since the collapse of communism is still at an embryonic stage. Under the years of communist rule, there was no tolerance of unofficial social groups. Women's activity in such groups before the communist period, however, is worth some examination here, in order to trace the kinds of developments that took place, and to include an assessment of their capacity for autonomous and effective action. The placing of women's activity into a wider historical context, emphasises the destructive nature of communist hegemony in squeezing out all social activity that was not under its exclusive control. For women particularly, the long years of lost opportunity to explore issues of equality and gender within independent groups, means that concepts familiar to Western feminists are largely alien to women in these societies.

The term 'feminism' was not widely used by women activists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the broader concept of women's movement, therefore, seems a more appropriate term to adopt, although the issues raised by women in the early movement remain familiar to contemporary feminists. In Russia, the women's movement was initiated in St. Petersburg in the early nineteenth century, firstly through charitable work, and later through action directed towards achieving women's right to education; this later activity became the key focus of the

women's movement in Russia, so that by 1880, for example, the number of women finishing secondary school was only marginally lower than that of men. During the 1860's, the movement was at its height, mobilising women to fight for the right of entry into higher educational establishments. Malysheva [1992] notes, however, that the question of the admission of women into higher education was inextricably bound up with the Russian democratic movement as a whole; consequently, ideas of equality in relation to women formed part of a general critique of society. Thus;

In this period, 'feminism' was seen not as a destructive, isolationist or bourgeois movement but as a philosophy and ideology which appeared in the philosophical and journalistic works of the most democratically minded people, regardless of their sex (3).

In this respect the early movement differs significantly from the new movement. Women since the late 1980's have witnessed a rising tide of opinion that is attempting to reduce the rights of women, rather than harnessing women's further emancipation to the general push towards a flourishing civil society.

By 1905, groups of women were becoming increasingly politicised through their criticism of government policy; notably in relation to working conditions in the factories, the loss of husbands and sons in the war with Japan [1904-5], and the issue of female suffrage. The creation of

an All-Russian Union of Equal Rights for Women in the same year, was intended to bring the growing number of women's groups under one umbrella (4). At this point, the women's movement and the Russian liberation movement entered a debate that was to become critical for the future of independent women's groups. The social democrats, in particular, began to view 'feminism' with some hostility, regarding the aims of the women's movement as superfluous to their own at best; and at worst, as potentially counter-revolutionary.

After the 1917 Revolution, women's issues were theoretically and practically absorbed into the problem of the class struggle, and the 'woman question' came to be seen as something that could only be resolved firstly, as part of the revolutionary transformation of social relations, and secondly, by the incorporation of women into the new communist workforce. Lenin's rejection of the legitimacy of an autonomous women's movement within the broader revolutionary one was clear;

We derive our organisational ideas from our ideological conceptions. We want no separate organisations of communist women. She who is a communist belongs as a member of the party, just as he who is communist (5).

The women's movement that had developed and diversified over the years, declined markedly after the 1917 Revolution. By 1930, the 'woman question' was deemed to

have been solved, and the special women's departments [zhenotdely], set up in 1919, as part of the party apparatus, ostensibly to encourage women's active participation, were abolished. Women's councils were initiated nationwide once again under Khrushchev in the late 1950's and 1960's, to encourage women's activism in politics and social affairs, although their autonomy was severely restricted (6).

Women's movements in East Central Europe experienced a similar fate. In Poland, women championed the right to form women's trade unions in the late nineteenth century, as well as the right to vote. Later in the twentieth century, a women's movement was flourishing in the years between the wars, through 80 or more groups organised around a myriad of issues and interests (7). Similarly Hungary, despite its chequered and fragmented history, had a relatively diverse pluralistic society, including women's organisations (8). In the Czech Lands, women in the early years of the twentieth century began to be active in politics and identified with socialist or social democratic groups (9). When Czechoslovakia came into being in 1918, women won the right to vote a year later, and were active in pursuing a 'progressive tendency as regards the woman question' (10). Indeed, in most respects, the activity of Czech women in particular, resembled that of the women's

movement developing in Western Europe, with the formation of groups such as the Central Association of Czech Women and the Women's Industrial and Commercial Trading Association (11). Communist party rule, however, ended the plurality and autonomy of all social organisations, and the establishment of official women's organisations at national level echoed the Soviet model in subsuming women's interests into a single structure directed by the state.

Re-thinking the 'woman question' in the former Soviet Union: the 1980's

In the former Soviet Union, Gorbachev attempted to breathe new life into the zhensovety [women's councils] as a means of re-addressing the 'woman question', and as part of the willingness to tolerate the public expression of new ideas under 'glasnost'. This form of 'organisation from above' however, fell far short of what can be considered an autonomous women's movement, as the councils' funding and activities were directed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. [CPSU] (12). In 1986, the zhensovety became part of the structure of the Soviet Women's Committee [SWC], a national body originally concerned with representing Soviet womanhood internationally, and thus raising the profile of women's officialdom under communism. The zhensovety clearly involved large numbers of women, but

arguably, did little in the way of confronting the traditional gender roles entrenched within Soviet society. Furthermore, attempts by women to organise themselves independently continued to face formidable obstacles, as the repression of Tatyana Mamonova and Tatyana Goricheva, members of an unofficial women's group based in Leningrad in 1979, indicates. Mamonova and Goricheva were questioned by the KGB when putting together a first feminist Samizdat of women's writings; no second issue appeared (13).

The years in between the demise of the early women's movement and the independent groups now springing up throughout the former Soviet Union, represent a vast chasm in the articulation of women's personal, social and political needs and aspirations. As will be discussed later, a corollary of this is that the new women's movement lacks the established heritage of a theoretical and philosophical foundation (14).

The 'official' women's organisations in the era of post-communism

The rapid political and social changes of the late 1980's gave birth to a widespread dissatisfaction at the inefficacy of the women's officialdom controlled by the state under communism. For many women, these bodies created a destructive and demoralising image of what a

women's organisation is, and membership dropped sharply as the communist parties became discredited in the shift to democratisation. After November 1989, for example, more than 83,000 women left the Czech Women's Union in less than a year (15). Nevertheless, in contrast to their past role of supporting communist regimes, the remnants of women's officialdom began to develop a critical stance on issues that concerned the future of women's welfare during a period of political and economic instability. The Polish Women's League for example, registered its dismay at the Sejm's proposal in 1989 to prevent abortion, although this can also be seen as a reactive response to a lead taken by informal protest groups springing up around this issue. At the 1989 Congress of the Slovak Women's Union, chairwoman Elena Livajova raised the urgency of the need to improve women's living and working conditions in economic restructuring, in order to give them the same chances as men (16).

In terms of direct action, the Soviet Women's Committee held a conference in 1990 entitled 'Women and Politics: Reality and Prospects,' as a means of preparing women for political change; recognising that opportunities for women to engage in political activity required some form of training. Thus the press reported that;

... they have openly stated the goals they are setting for

themselves: to prepare women for political battle, cultivate leaders from their ranks, help them advance up the social ladder and give the chance to occupy a worthy place in the top echelons of power (17).

The formation of a Women's Political Club in 1990 aimed to maintain this initiative in the longer term. Part of their strategy included meeting with representatives of the new political parties, in order to raise issues that might be of importance to women (18).

The persistence of women's officialdom

A common discernible trend can be traced through the attempts made by the official women's organisations to restructure themselves, and present their new credentials as the means legitimately to represent women's interests in the new political and economic arena. In the former Soviet Union, the Soviet Women's Committee became part of the Women's Union of Russia in January 1992, under the Presidency of Alevtina Fedulova. Although this form of restructuring attempted to reflect a more neutral image, the new organisation inherited the programmes initiated by the SWC, including negotiating with the government in drafting legislation that sought to protect women. Thus, their restructured agenda clearly identified the kinds of objectives it hoped to achieve in new political climate.

The programme "Democracy for All" presupposes the protection of women's rights, ensuring that their participation in legislative and public activities, in executive bodies. To put these objectives into life the Women's Union of Russia plans to elaborate a draft law on social equality, to educate women on legal issues, to establish in the Women's Union a legal advice service, to provide information on the status of women, to hold campaigns for nomination and support of women-candidates for elected positions (19).

Similarly, the Alliance of Hungarian Women emerged as the successor to the official National Council of Hungarian Women in July 1989, with claims to be an independent, democratic, political and cultural organisation. The new organisation announced that it intended to participate in the country's reform process, and would be pressing for a long-term social policy concept. It also saw its future role as a focus to rally existing women's groups or those to be founded in the future, and, in common with the other post-communist women's organisations, began to form links with Western women's groups (20).

In January 1990, the Slovak Women's Union disassociated itself from the former leadership, on the grounds that women's roles under transition had not been handled properly (21). It seems apparent, however, that the longevity of the communist women's associations, together with their assiduity in re-structuring themselves, has meant that they have retained access to state resources, such as property and some funding, as well as crucial

avenues of official information. The results of this are important. At one level, these organisations may starve other groups of financial support; at another, they may be seen by the new regimes as legitimate representatives of all women's interests. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example;

The Women's Union has been invited to take part in government discussions concerning women's issues, particularly issues of employment and social policy. This means that no other women's organisation can have a say at this important level (22).

The new quasi-official women's organisations are clearly out of touch with women's diverse and very different needs and may hinder effective progress towards achieving an authentic women's voice in policy-making debates. At the end of 1992, for example, the Russian Women's League, a branch of the new Union of Women, held a round table discussion to put forward proposals for the protection of Russian women. These included pay for housework and childrearing, rights for the conceived embryo and a mandatory limitation of the working week to 35 hours for women with children under 14 (23). This scenario may represent one particular vision, but is unlikely to appeal to all women, and is certainly at odds with the kinds of principles espoused by the independent women's group known as NEZHDI [Independent Women's Democratic Initiative], who

have called for a 'genuine transformation rather than a revival of traditional, clearly obsolete, models' (24).

Apart from the restructuring of women's officialdom, some of the associated journals underwent a similar metamorphosis, reflecting the new mood of press freedom. In Poland, the Women's League magazine, 'Kobieta i Zycie' [Women and Life], transformed its content from a brand of propaganda and recipes into an independent magazine, under the editorship of Anna Szymanska, also a Sejm deputy, and a former member of the Polish communist party. [Polish United Workers Party]. Now independent, it is trying to promote feminist ideas (25). However, the ability to continue publication would not have been possible without the offices and equipment retained from the old regime. In the former Soviet Union, other women's magazines originally sponsored by the CPSU have become more radical in their tone. At Rabotnitsa, in 1991, the chief editor Zoya Krylova, aimed to provide a frank and informative style to aid women in their adaptation to the new social and economic upheaval (26). It carried interviews with popular female deputies as well as the familiar diet of household hints and recipes. In contrast, the official women's magazine in Hungary, 'Nok Lapja,' [Women's Journal] appears not to have followed this trend. The new motto on its cover, for example, reads, 'Compassion be the bright

light of your eyes;' suggesting a shift towards extolling the virtues of passive sensitivity (27).

Because of their resources the old women's press still continued to attract a significant readership - in 1991 Rabotnitsa claimed a readership of 100,000 a month - and therefore retained the potential to wield some influence. On the whole, however, a significant number of women find the new women's groups unattractive, chiefly because they are seen to be tainted with the communist past, despite efforts to eliminate this stigma. In particular, the quasi-official women's organisations, still bureaucratic in nature, are failing to meet the needs of women pre-occupied with retaining their jobs and feeding their families during the economic stringencies of reform.

A recognisable, and, to some degree, effective independent grass-roots women's movement is beginning to emerge, but it is hampered on the one hand by the continuing activities of the quasi-official women's groups, and on the other, by the lack of societal support for the establishment of a new women's movement. For Konstantinova [1992], the result of this in the former Soviet Union, is the formation of a vacuum;

Thus, although one may get the impression that steps are actively being taken to tackle women's issues, in fact the official women's movement remains part of the establishment, which does not have the support of the electorate and is therefore incapable of representing

women's interests in a democratic way. On the other hand the unofficial women's movement ... is still too weak to exert any substantial pressure on existing structures from below (28).

A further point worth making here, is the extent of women's activism in new groups throughout the region. Most groups are small, poorly funded and represent only a fraction of women in these states. Any discussion of the influence such activity may yield must be placed within this context. There may be a need for a women's movement - at least from a Western perspective - but there are clearly number of obstacles to be overcome before substantial progress can be made.

The birth of new women's groups

A working definition of the new women's movement will help to incorporate the kinds of activities that women are currently engaging in. Hauser et al [1993] provides a useful framework to describe the Polish situation that is reproduced here in order to illustrate behaviour that might legitimately be considered a form of political participation in ad hoc or protest politics.

In Poland, as in the United States and Western Europe, we recognise as a participant in the women's movement every woman who complains to her husband that she should not have to do both her full-time paid job and all the work of the home, including the endless shopping. Every woman is a participant who tries to find a battered women's shelter,

even when she fails to find one. Every woman is a participant who in any way makes men and women more equal at her job (29).

In other words, activity that questions women's position in society. This definition is also important because it recognises that many groups in the new movement, in common with those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, do not necessarily consider themselves as 'feminist.' Indeed, there are instances of groups exhorting women to rediscover their femininity and through this process adopt their 'true womanly destiny', rather than question and explore the nature of women's subordination. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example, the Association of Modern Women strives for a return to family values, and calls for women to be 'more humble' in their marriages (30). The approach to the 'woman question,' therefore, is extremely diverse; the only common feature being the need to make sense of women's role in contemporary society.

'Civil Society;' opening up a 'space' for women?

The end of communism is said to have begun a revitalization of society, emancipating individuals and enabling them to determine their own lives as free citizens (31). In East Central Europe, the intellectual dissident groups saw their primary role as promoting

democracy in order to re-establish civil society. The concept of civil society, however, has a gender dimension that is frequently overlooked. Watson [1993] has argued that the emergence of civil society in East Central Europe has offered more opportunities of action and empowerment to men than to women, maintaining that the cultural space opened up by democratisation has been filled primarily by interests and organisations that pursue male concerns, rather than female issues.

A central tenet of Watson's argument is the claim that the empowerment of men has resulted in the rise of masculinism on a grand scale. The evidence Watson offers to support her argument rests partly on the selective political success of men in the democratic elections, although these outcomes echo the same kinds of gender imbalances to be found in long established Western legislatures. A second and more convincing thread of Watson's argument maintains that the legacy of communism continues to exert a powerful influence on the scope of women's action in the new public sphere. The absence of civil society in the old regimes, allowed the entrenchment of traditional definitions of gender to take place. This, coupled with the long established legal basis of women's equality in the public sphere has contributed to a persistent lack of feminist consciousness and facilitated

the rise of masculinism (32).

The recent abortion issue in Poland, and to some degree in Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia, illustrates the force of the concept of the 'rise of masculinism' in the proposals to limit abortion rights and in the lack of debate surrounding women's right to control their own bodies. It also draws attention to the articulation of views that suggest a return of women to the home and full-time motherhood. In the new, predominantly male legislatures, the discussion of anti-abortion legislation takes place with little attention paid to the majority of women's views, or, indeed, public opinion generally (33).

The restructuring of political and economic life and the development of civil society demands the involvement of the individual. On the one hand, the way in which the state defines and values individual activity is fundamental to an understanding of women's place in this process; on the other, the way in which women conceptualise their position and their role is equally critical. Thus, it can be argued that the longevity of entrenched gender inequalities in these states, in both the public and the private spheres, has profound implications concerning the kinds of informal political activity that women are likely to engage in.

The development of a women's movement; the former Soviet Union

In the former Soviet Union, a women's movement that contains feminist beliefs and aspirations began to emerge at the end of the 1980's. The LOTUS group [Liberation from Social Stereotypes] represents a group of women academics, seeking to challenge and defy existing stereotypes of women and women's role in society. Some of the women involved in LOTUS went on to establish the Centre for Gender Studies in Moscow [1989], and also helped to launch NEZHDI, the Independent Women's Democratic Initiative in July 1990 (34). The founding members of NEZHDI were acutely aware of the problems that the communist system had created for women, as well as the pitfalls that lay ahead in the process of democratisation. Part of NEZHDI's feminist manifesto promotes the concept of women vigorously engaging in action to overcome their disadvantage in public life, claiming that;

Nezhdi is convinced that no-one will help women if we cannot help ourselves. We have been organised 'from above' for so long, have we really lost the ability to do it ourselves and for ourselves? (35).

However, the organisation does not include 'feminist' in its title. The reason for this is explained by one of NEZHDI's founding members, Anastasya Posadskaya;

Feminists are thought of as terribly worn and dreary women who look like men, who demonstrate on the streets, and hate men. Most women who are in the association and who are presumably going to join do not know what 'feminism' is other than this stereotype. They could be feminists in our own particular soviet way. But they do not call themselves feminist, and it would be difficult to attract them by this name (36).

The first conference that brought together many of the women associated with NEZHDI, was held in Dubna early in 1991. The official women's organisation was not given a formal invitation and only sent a delegate at the last minute; indicative, perhaps of the primacy NEZHDI seeks to place on women's initiatives outside the official state organisations (37). The topics covered at the conference encompassed a disparate range of women's concerns, including women and democracy, women and business and women in the arts and women in the media, reflecting the challenges facing women in the process of economic and political change.

Both LOTUS and NEZHDI are campaigning for a broadly based platform; other groups have organised around more specific issues in response to events that directly impact on the well-being of women and their families. Since 1989, for example, women have grouped together to protest against the level of brutality meted out to their sons in the armed forces, or to campaign against the draft itself. The process of this kind of activism, however, has had a wider

impact than the specific issue of mothers' anxiety about the conditions their sons face in the forces. Shreeves [1990] notes, for example, that;

Over the past eighteen months, a clear trend has emerged in the development of mothers' activism. Women initially drawn together into loosely structured support groups by shared suffering over the deaths of their sons during military service have become increasingly radicalised as they have encountered the indifference of the military authorities (38).

Thus the process of protesting has resulted in women coming together under wider umbrella groups, by combining with other campaigning organisations.

The efficacy of women's activity in informal groups can be examined at a broad level by citing some of their immediate successes. The women's groups associated with opposing brutality in the armed forces, receive letters and telephone calls from all over the former Soviet Union, and hence provide not only a focus for protest, but also an information base from which to campaign, largely through letters to the government, the press and the armed forces (39).

A frustration concerning the deterioration of living conditions appears to drive some groups of women into direct, spontaneous action, such as women in Kiev bringing the traffic to a halt in order to protest about the impossibility of purchasing milk and other essential

foodstuffs for their children in 1992. Women also campaigned to bring the media's attention to the plight of children damaged by the radiation released from Chernobyl (40). Evidence of women's activism is growing; between 1990 and 1992, approximately 50 women's groups registered in Moscow alone (41). However, lack of funding and societal support make it unlikely that all these groups will survive.

Women's groups in East Central Europe

Women's activism is also apparent in East Central Europe. At the end of 1990, the former Czechoslovakia had 37 registered women's groups (42). An example of women organising around a specific issue can be illustrated by the Prague mothers group, committed to raising awareness about the link between pollution and the increasing incidence of illness, particularly asthma and respiratory disease among children in the city (43).

In Hungary, several groups are slowly being established. A Feminist Network established by Eniko Bollobas, an active member of Democratic Forum, started with a group of six and is now growing steadily. Part of the Hungarian Feminist Statement reads;

Women are conspicuously absent from the political turmoil of contemporary Hungarian society. Very few women are

active in alternative opposition groups; in a similar way, the women's issue is not part of the political programme of any new party or movement. This we find alarming (44).

The Feminist Network collected 5000 signatures for a petition against a ban on abortion, as well as holding a meeting in November 1990, to mark the international day of 'Violence Against Women' (45). More significantly, since 1992, the Feminist Network has begun to receive some positive media coverage for its pro-women stance (46).

The Society for Equal Opportunities, formed during 1991, has a membership of over 100 educated career women seeking increased access to all jobs and equal pay. In addition, they are pressing for the political parties to create programmes for women, and to encourage more women to go into politics (47).

In Poland the proposal to outlaw abortion, which has been available to women on demand for forty years, has been instrumental in drawing women into campaigning groups. The original Bill, designed to bring about a total ban on abortion, would have imposed severe penalties on both the doctor performing the operation and the woman herself. A more moderate version was eventually submitted in August 1990, limiting the penalty for the doctor performing the abortion, and allowing cases of rape and a direct threat to the mother's life to be taken into account as grounds for permitting the termination of a pregnancy. Four significant

groups formed around this issue; the Polish Women's Association, Pro Femina , Women's Self-Defence Movement and the Democratic Union of Women (48). These groups joined forces in their thousands to picket outside the Sejm in September 1990, in order to protest against the proposed abortion law, and issued a prepared statement claiming that the legislation would reduce motherhood to a form of legal coercion (49). Indeed, the Bill was seen by many women as a violation of their dignity and humanity, and then increasingly, as a challenge to women's fundamental right to make decisions about their own bodies.

The influence that women have been able to wield in terms of changing the legislation, however, has been marginal. Legislation surrounding abortion is commonly fraught with political pitfalls due to the difficulty of attempting to forge a compromise between the fundamental positions adopted by pro-choice and pro-life groups. In the Polish case, the moral argument of the pro-lifers was sponsored directly by the Catholic Church, which played a key role in drafting the original Bill. The church's determination to take a primary place in developing the social and political sphere gave authority not only to the legislation, but also to the re-thinking of women's role in society. It has suggested, for example, that the preparation of young girls for marriage and motherhood is

more important than stressing their intellectual development (50). It is this potential fusing of church and state that has led some women deputies to proclaim that 'Polish democracy is a masculine democracy' in which women appear to have minimal influence. (51). Significantly, however, the abortion issue has become central to the initiation of women's groups and hence women's politicisation. For Fuszara [1991];

Mobilisation of the Polish women's movement seems to me to be the outstanding achievement of the parliamentary campaign to ban abortion.....The bill banning abortion enabled women to see their common goals and take common action, accelerating the emergence of a new wave of women's organisations (52).

The low levels of female representation in the national legislatures has meant that women have had scant opportunity to influence legislation that directly affects their interests, as discussed in chapter three. The political behaviour of women in informal groups, such as those initiated by the anti-abortion Bill in Poland, must therefore command serious consideration in order to listen to women's demands, monitor activity and chart their politicisation.

Obstacles facing the development of a feminist movement in the context of post-communism

Although the 1980's witnessed the beginning of a new

debate concerning women's position in society, particularly in connection to the pressures of coping with the demands of work and family life, this was accompanied by an underlying thread of conviction that believed such pressure had led to the creation of serious social problems, such as delinquency, alcoholism and rising divorce rates. One way of reversing this trend, therefore, proposed the improvement of better facilities for working women, including shorter working hours, and to encourage women to fulfil their 'womanly' mission as nurturers and carers in society; another advocated a return of women to the home altogether. An integral part of this debate is the concept of 'over-emancipation'; the notion that women have been given too much equality. Certainly, for women under communism, emancipation was associated with full participation in the work force with all its attendant disadvantages of low status and low pay, as well as the sheer exhaustion of trying to combine this with domestic responsibility. Furthermore, the increased emphasis now being given to marriage and motherhood has also implicitly placed the prime responsibility for family discipline and moral values into the hands of women. Hence, the belief that women have accrued too many rights under communism stems in part from the difficulties women experience in trying to combine both roles.

Nevertheless, the concept of over-emancipation expresses the 'biologism' that clings stubbornly to the debate concerning women's societal place by frequently lamenting the loss of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. The call for a return to 'true womanhood' also implies a vision of powerlessness and dependency. In this vein, the former Czechoslovakian leadership recently proclaimed that;

It is necessary to renew the cult of the mother and woman enshrined in our literature and poetry; we have to get a lot done for our wives, daughters and dear ones (53).

It also explores the impact that 'emancipation' for women has had on men. For many, the old communist state bears a prime responsibility for distorting the 'natural' relationship between men and women. An article in 'New Russia' illustrates the extent of 'biologism' in contemporary debate, by declaring that;

Man has relinquished his leadership, which is his destiny by nature's design, and suffers the greatest discomfort and frustration at his loss (54).

Similarly, the sentiments expressed by the distinguished novelist Zoya Boguslavskaya in 1988, suggest that women should transfer some of their acquired responsibilities to men, in order to take up their 'feminine' duties and allow men to regain their dignity.

Could it not be that our women have too many rights at

times? Can't we women do without some of them today? And is it not time to exchange some of these rights for others? (55).

The collapse of communism has fostered this debate by enabling the 'over-emanicipation' of women to be seen as a communist ill and therefore worthy of rejection. Communism, according to this view has 'masculinised' women and 'feminised' men. The Soviet sociologist Yaroslav Beregovoy, for example, has claimed that admitting a woman into a 'male' occupation, such as the law, or management, places 'an unbearable strain on her part and eventually turns her into what is a man-like creature' (56). At the same time, the increase in divorce, alcoholism, delinquency and other social problems has been attributed to women's inability or refusal to fulfil their traditional role in the private sphere.

In this critical climate the seeds of feminism, especially the ideas associated with Western thought and practice, face a harsh struggle for survival. Indeed, feminism itself is regarded with a mixture of suspicion and contempt by women themselves. As noted earlier, moreover, the new women's groups are only too aware of this phenomenon. As the head of the Society for Equal Opportunities in Hungary noted;

If you define feminists as people working to improve women's lives, then we are feminists, but don't hold the

flag, because it doesn't give us a good image (57).

Bringing a Western feminist perspective to bear on the examination of the emergence of new women's movements in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, may, in many respects, be inappropriate. There is, as noted by Bassnett [1992] a need to resist the temptation to 'reconstruct' women in these states into a Western image as Western feminists are likely to see an overwhelming need for a women's movement (58). Women face a number of common problems, such as the proliferation of pornography, rising unemployment, and cut backs in child care provision. However, the emergence of a women's movement is likely to follow a path that is distinctive to each state.

Furthermore, women who are active in the new groups are searching for an explanation as well as a recognition of women's subordination in contemporary society. Indeed, the process has already begun. In Hungary for example, Yudit Kiss [1991] describes the importance of recognising small-scale personal struggle as a key element of women's oppression. Her comments not only convey the enormity of the task that lies ahead for women attempting to conceptualise their present situation, but also echo sentiments familiar to western women.

[Women's movements].. will have to face the same troubles as other feminist movements do everywhere in the world.

Although they also have some important general issues, like the need for women's economic and political emancipation, equal rights, etc., their ultimate scenario is in the realm of everyday personal life: how one feels walking on a street, travelling alone, going into public places, how difficult it is to find a place in the productive system or to express interests through the media, how natural it feels to communicate with others, known or alien, men or women (59).

The exploration and interpretation of women's role in post-communist society will, in common with the early movement in the West, depend on such beginnings.

Optimism for the future?

It is clear that some women are making immense efforts to bring their own agendas to the notice of political parties and legislatures; in the former Soviet Union and Russia, women's activism against the draft has had a measure of success in bringing the issue to the attention of the media and to other women. Nor is the achievement of this group an isolated incident. Women's groups in the former Czechoslovakia called for an increase in family allowances in 1990, and received an additional 100 koruny in response. This amount failed to compensate entirely for inflation, but is illustrative of the small gains being made by women in the newly emerging movements (60). One of the strengths of this kind of activism potentially lies in the networks women create in order to share information

and create a platform for campaigning. However, while this form of activity remains outside the formal policy-making institutions, the evaluation of women's influence in ad hoc and protest politics can only be based on tentative conclusions. The advantages for women working within the new movement include the opportunity to organise and formulate plans in an all-women setting, and articulate demands from a supportive base. The societal contexts in which this takes place, however, do not look encouraging, although the need for women to organise in order to protect some forms of social provision - as women in Poland reacted to the proposal to ban abortion - may, paradoxically, create a valuable momentum.

The analysis of women's activism outlined above, therefore, has traced the early beginnings and small successes as well as the political, social and cultural contexts in which these have taken place and which may hinder the development of an effective movement. Although the new women's movement is small, no analysis of women's political participation would be complete without incorporating an assessment of unofficial and protest politics, which act as a potential source of alternative power and politicisation.

Chapter five places the political participation of women into a broader context, by examining the role of the

state in defining women's societal place through the structure and implementation of social provision. Social policy-making is central to women's interests, but continues to disadvantage them in a number of ways. As this area of politics is frequently taken up by women politicians, an exploration of women's relationship to social policy will provide further insights into the nature and scope of women's political activism before and after communism.

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CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN AND SOCIAL POLICY

This chapter will review the ways in which social policy has both advantaged and disadvantaged women in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe. It will begin by arguing that the role of the state in structuring social policy in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, both before and after reform, limits and defines the avenues of women's participation, or potential participation, in an area of policy that has a special significance for them. It will then discuss issues relating to the restructuring of social provision following the collapse of communism, and the implications of change for women's access to social provision, and women's ability to influence emerging social policy agendas. The themes raised by these points have been noted in recent years by feminists in the West, as part of feminist discourse concerned with the relationship between women and social policy. This body of scholarship recognises that welfare has given women a number of important material benefits, for example, including provision for maternity leave, income support and access to health care. At the same time, however, it has made visible the ways in which

aspects of welfare have reinforced women's 'traditional' caring role in the private sphere, and underpinned their lesser economic status in the workplace (1). These themes, therefore, will help to inform the discussion below.

Under communism, women's participation in social policy was limited on a number of fronts. As grass-roots workers responsible for the implementation of social provision, women had few resources of power. They were too poorly paid and poorly placed in the administrative hierarchies to effect change; and were also ill-represented at the top of welfare professions or interest groupings, such as those associated with health policy. Moreover, women in general relied on social provision to a greater extent than men. In addition, access to maternity benefits or child care was almost always linked to employment, so that social policy for women was closely controlled by the communist state. Hence, women workers were given 'privileges' at work that allowed them to fulfil their maternal role as well as their economic function. Equality for women in the workplace, therefore, was defined differently for men and women, with women's reproduction given a form of official priority in relation to work.

The role of social policy in institutionalising such differential 'equality' however, also spilled over into

limiting and defining women's political activity. A significant amount of women's participation, for example, was associated with defending or extending women's rights as mothers and workers. Women politicians, as noted in chapters two and three, frequently adopted or were assigned a health-education-welfare role. The structure of social policy-making under communism, therefore, legitimated the reinforcement and extension of women's 'private' role in employment and politics, and underpinned their exclusion from managerial and executive positions.

Since reform, some aspects of social provision remain disadvantageous for women. The emphasis now being placed on strengthening family responsibilities, is accompanied by debate urging a return of women to the home. One implication of this may be that some forms of social provision will become a 'private' concern. The rise in unemployment, for example, particularly among women, may facilitate the growth of voluntary and unpaid welfare provision. Furthermore, the links between employment and access to benefits for maternity leave and childcare have been weakened, as enterprises have radically reduced their commitments to workplace nurseries, and the job security for pregnant women or new mothers has been jeopardised (2). Women, moreover, are still regarded as less reliable in the workforce than men, partly as a result of the long

years of 'privileged' treatment under communism.

Dixon and Macarov [1992] note for example, that, under communism, the linkage between employment and social provision was a means of encouraging labour productivity as well as labour discipline (3). Indeed, McAuley [1981] argues that the state, as the major, if not the only employer, exercised a enormous influence on income distribution. The existence of differential wages between workers, for example, was designed to encourage greater effort in the work-place, on the principle that those who contributed the most to social production should also receive a larger slice of social output (4). A form of labour discipline and income distribution can also be seen in the way in which women's dual role as mother and worker was reinforced through the structure of employment. Mieczkowski [1985] observes that the early industrialisation stage of communist states saw the emphasis being placed on employment policies designed to draw women into the workforce. A steady fall in birth rates over the years, however, initiated a shift of policy towards forms of pro-natalism (5). For policy-makers, work-related benefits were ultimately the solution to the fulfilment of both objectives; for women, they represented an official sanctioning of the dual burden, as evidenced in the Labour code of the former Czechoslovakia;

...The Labour Code expresses the principle of the complete equality of women in employment and the duty of society as a whole to provide such working conditions as will enable women to harmoniously fulfill their duties as mothers and their responsibility for the education of their children, and to take part in the working process for the benefit of society... (6).

Women, moreover, appeared to internalise this form of dual responsibility. The official women's organisations under communism, for example, frequently called for policies that would allow women to shoulder this form of burden more readily.

In states that, until recently, were committed to the concept of full employment, the implications of the loosening link between work and social provision become critical, particularly in relation to women. An examination of the relationship between women, political participation and social policy under communism and since reform, therefore, cannot be divorced from the structure of employment and the differential forms of 'equality' practised in the workplace. The combining of employment and reproduction, regarded as a social obligation for women, both defined and constrained women's 'equality' in the workforce, and, it is argued here, their 'equality' in political life. Social policy, for example, attempted to mobilise women into the economy without jeopardising their reproductive role, thus reinforcing and reproducing the 'traditional' role of women in the private

sphere. The issue of the dual burden and women's disadvantage in the workforce has formed much of the focus of critical debate for women politicians and activists since the late 1980's, as discussion relating to the lack of women in administrative and managerial posts and criticisms of women's position in the workforce began to come to the fore (7). As a result of political and economic changes, women expressed concern that their social standing would decline in relation to men, because of the changing patterns of employment and childcare provision (8). Thus the new instability of employment and work-related rights for women has taken up much of the energy of the new women politicians and activists; a pattern that may continue for some time, and contribute to the legitimation of limited roles for women in the new politics.

So far, the discussion has focused on the relationship between social provision and women workers. Women's work in areas of social policy delivery, however, forms an important part of this analysis. The extent of 'feminisation' within the welfare bureaucracies in the West, for example, has raised awareness of the nature of gender divisions within welfare work, and the impact this has had on women's ability to influence welfare policies. For feminists, the value attached to this category of work

has been persistently undervalued because of the implicit association with the home and the family. A corollary of this is that women are not well represented in higher level managerial jobs and are therefore not in key positions to influence social policy agendas. Women also provide a great deal of unpaid care within the community, by acting as advocates in the negotiations between welfare officials and those in need. In addition, women are commonly found in the forefront of campaigns to improve or protect welfare services. In this way, a significant burden of welfare provision is undertaken by women on an unpaid voluntary basis (9).

Occupational segregation in the welfare professions in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe exists on a similar scale to that in the West. The extent of feminisation in health and teaching, for example, is demonstrated in table 7. Moreover, although women's share of employment in these areas is greater than that of men, there are fewer women in higher or managerial posts. In Poland, for example, the percentage of women managerial staff in education in 1991 was 17.6%, and in health and social welfare, 34.6% (10). In the former Soviet Union, similar forms of occupational segregation occur in teaching and health work, as noted in chapter two. (11). Women were well represented as grass-roots workers in the delivery of

social provision in these states but played a diminishing role in the key posts. The patterns of occupational segregation in the delivery of social provision, therefore, have contributed to the lack of women's input in social policy-making. This point will be pursued further in relation to health workers, in chapter six.

The restructuring of social provision

The introduction of political and economic reforms since the late 1980's has initiated a re-thinking of social policy provision and delivery. As yet, change in this area has been piecemeal, frequently in response to the mounting social costs of rising unemployment and poverty levels as price rises throughout each economy have forced up the cost of living. During 1990 and 1991, for example, it was estimated that living standards had fallen by approximately 30% across Eastern Europe (12). The transition to the market has a number of implications for the future shape of social provision and social policy making. The privatisation of state enterprises, along with falling output has caused unemployment on a scale unprecedented under communism. The steady reduction and removal of state subsidies led to an increase in consumer prices, whilst inflation eroded the value of savings and put increasing numbers of people at risk of

poverty. Contemporary social policy-making is attempting to adapt to the new economic situation. In the context of the Polish state Ksiezopolski [1993] notes that;

In such a situation the success and the pace of the reform process very much depends on the government's ability to craft social policy that provides a reliable solution to the main social problems while maximising incentives and resources for economic reform (13).

Thus, social policy has been viewed at one and the same time as being both a necessary form of provision for those most in need as well as a potential burden in terms of jeopardising the shift to a market economy. Moreover, a sharp fall in state revenues caused by rising unemployment and high levels of inflation has meant that these states have retreated from a universal system of social provision to a residual one. This retreat is not only being shaped by domestic pressures but is also open to influence from international agencies. In 1991, for example, the Hungarian Government negotiated a three year loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund, contingent on its success in reducing the budget deficit (14). Ksiezopolski notes the kind of contradictory pressures that this creates for policy-makers.

The IMF, World Bank and OECD experts lay particular stress on the achievement of macroeconomic stability and on the quickest possible privatisation and restructuring of the economy, even at the cost of massive unemployment and reducing living standards (15).

A further complication for East Central European states lies in their hope of future membership in the European Union, part of which will depend on developing a framework of social policy that is compatible with the requirements of the Social Chapter (16). In addition, there are obvious political risks for new governments, anxious to establish their legitimacy, in withdrawing the social guarantees developed during the communist period (17). A key point to note is that the internal and external institutions shaping the restructuring of social policy are all predominantly male institutions, concerned, not unnaturally, with the economic impact of introducing new forms of social provision, rather than with gender equity.

Rys [1993] maintains that one of the reasons why the East European states have yet to formulate detailed major reform programmes for social policy is the lack of experience with planning and administering systems based on social insurance (18). This is compounded by the difficulties facing the newly privatised enterprises and falling incomes generally, as discussed above. A significant number of employers and employees may be unable to meet their statutory obligations in contributing to the new mandatory social insurance schemes. Indeed, there may be an unwillingness to employ some groups of workers if some of the costs of health provision - such as

maternity care - have to be borne by the employer.

Furthermore, as Rys notes;

...what social purpose will be served by legally enforcing the payment and, in doing so, pushing the employer out of business? It seems clear that whatever the system of finance being adopted, the resources needed for social insurance can only be provided by a normally working national economy (19).

It is clear, then, that coherent social policy programmes based on a comprehensive concept of social policy have not been fully formulated, so that social policy measures on the whole have been pragmatic responses to rapid economic change. Policy statements concerning the overall objectives of social policy have tended to assume that the withdrawal of some of the social guarantees of the communist period would be replaced by a mixture of family initiatives and charitable work. Alongside the emphasis on mobilising family responsibility and activity, there has been a re-evaluation of the 'woman question,' particularly in relation to the high levels of female economic activity under communism. All welfare systems have some form of value system, implicit or explicit, to support the framework of social provision. There are, however, significant implications for women if new forms of welfare provision are to be based on the importance of the family and the 'values' of women's role in childrearing and traditional family life. In the absence of an established

body of feminist thought, including a feminist critique of social policy, the restructuring of welfare may continue to incorporate a differential approach to men and women based on these kinds of values. The paucity of women in key posts in the administrative hierarchies responsible for social provision under communism, as well as the fall in the number of women deputies in the new parliaments, also means that women's voices in policy debates at national level are rarely heard.

Social policy and the 'woman question'

The re-opening of the 'woman question' under democratisation can be traced back to Gorbachev's statement at the January 1987 plenary meeting of the All Union Central Committee in the former Soviet Union, when he raised the issue of women's social and political participation in the era of perestroika. His claim that the state had failed to pay sufficient attention to women's specific rights and needs as mothers and homemakers, and their 'indispensable educational function as regards children,' is also placed alongside a recognition of women's achievements in the workforce, as well as a call for women to become more actively involved in the management of the economy. Both these objectives appeared to be irreconcilable; the one giving primacy to women's

maternal role, and the other to women's greater activity in achieving some status in the work-place (20).

Nevertheless, Gorbachev's plea for ways in which to encourage women to rediscover their 'purely womanly mission' had an echo in other states in the region. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example, Wolchik [1991] notes the re-emergence of women's maternal roles in policy debates, and the emphasis in public policy to allow women to remain at home with their children for an extended period of time (21). Indeed, policy-makers were at least clear about the kind of values that new social policies would be built upon. The Deputy Prime Minister Valtr Komarek envisaged the family unit as being the key to the development of social provision under economic reform, although it is apparent from his speeches that the patriarchal nature of the family unit is assumed to be intact;

We want to create a new system of social security, enabling every citizen - freely, responsibly and thus in a differentiated way - to take care of himself, his family, his future.

and;

The intention of the Czech government is to enable families to realistically and effectively solve their own problems in their own way (22).

One 'realistic' and 'effective' way of achieving this, is to encourage women to work part-time. For many women in low

paid, low status occupations, and with burdensome domestic responsibilities, an opportunity to spend more time at home may be greeted with relief. However, a call to return women to the home fails to recognise the changes in the social structure that have taken place over the years. The divorce rate and the number of single parent families headed by women is growing steadily. Within the family, women's wages are frequently essential, and women's dissatisfaction with work can be linked to poor and deteriorating working conditions as much as dissatisfaction with work itself. In reality, many families need a 'second' wage to ensure even a basic standard of living. Other studies suggest that women also value work for other reasons, not least because of the benefits it has traditionally extended to them, such as pension rights, social contact and self-fulfilment (23).

As unemployment rises, however, women may return to the domestic sphere in significant numbers. This factor, coupled with a restructuring of social provision for vulnerable groups, may well see an increase in the number of women expected to combine their domestic responsibilities with a broader caring and nurturing role within the community. The element of unpaid and voluntary provision of welfare would therefore take on a heightened significance. For all employees in the former Soviet Union

and East Central Europe, the concept of job security has declined markedly; and for women, employment has become increasingly unstable. The pressure placed on unproductive enterprises to shed some of their 'uneconomic' workforce may disproportionately affect women, especially those on child care leave. In the past, women's extra domestic responsibilities combined with the pressures of finding time to shop, often meant that women took some time out of working hours for private reasons. An International Labour Organisation [ILO] survey conducted in the former Czechoslovakia in 1989-1990, showed that as many as 70% of women were able to leave their workplace during working hours in order to attend to personal matters (24).

Women account for 60% of the unemployed in the former Czechoslovakia (25). In Poland in 1991, registered unemployment was only slightly higher for women than for men, yet Bishop [1990] claims that 80% of those already dismissed were women working in 'non-essential' office jobs (26). Moreover, almost three times as many jobs available for the newly unemployed were for men rather than for women, suggesting that women are likely to form a significant proportion of the new long-term unemployed (27). A similar situation exists in the former Czechoslovakia, where job advertisements are able to ask specifically for male applicants (28). In Russia, more

than 75% of the unemployed are women aged 35-40, with a secondary or higher education (29).

In the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, unemployment benefit only continues in exceptional circumstances beyond twelve months, following legislation passed between 1989 and 1991 (30). The risk of unemployment for women is heightened by the closure of kindergartens or the raising of fees, obliging more women to stay at home because of the lack of affordable child care. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example, the pressure for enterprises and co-operatives to save money has resulted in many refusing to run work-place nurseries (31). Furthermore, the 'privileged' working situation of women that existed under communism has bequeathed a poor image of women's patterns of labour. In a shrinking employment force, preference is likely to be given to men, which in turn may well widen the income gap between men and women.

Unemployment in agricultural areas is also rising. In the former Soviet Union during the first quarter of 1993, 73% of unemployed people living in rural areas were women. Moreover, these women were drawn largely from disadvantaged groups, such as single mothers and elderly women. Again, rural kindergartens and nurseries are being closed, as women are perceived to be unprofitable employees (32).

The extent of women's influence in social policy debates

The lack of a comprehensive approach to social policy since the demise of communism has been accompanied by a similar lack of consultation at a societal level (33). With virtually no client-based pressure groups, the mechanisms of communication between policy-makers, welfare professionals and welfare recipients are as yet poorly developed. On an informal basis, women are organising around specific issues in an effort to protect social provision or to improve inadequate benefits. In the absence of official or semi-official channels, women have to rely on the media, protest activity, letters and petitions to allow their grievances to be heard. Success in this area has to be measured by small victories, yet the task is a daunting one. In January 1990, for example, Zsusa Ferge, a Hungarian social policy analyst at Budapest University, resigned her post as expert adviser to the Hungarian Parliament's Social Security Committee, on the grounds that the government was formulating new social security policies without grass-roots involvement (34).

At the level of policy-making, the few women in the national legislatures and the even fewer at executive level mean that women are simply not in a position to make much of an impact on policy debates, let alone represent the interests of all women. In the former Soviet Union, the

1990 resolution 'On Urgent Measures to Safeguard the Position of Women and to Safeguard Maternity and Childhood' reinforced the 'protected' status of women at work, and did nothing to promote equality in the workplace. Posadskaya notes the limitations of this form of policy-making for women;

No legislative measures have been enacted to increase both the numbers and calibre of women taking part in decision-making processes, nor to eliminate discriminatory wage differentials between the various sectors of industry, widening opportunities for vocational training and inclusion of women in retraining programmes. In fact, current legislation facilitates women's exodus from, rather than their incorporation into, the labour-force (35).

The absence of a substantive voice representing women's interests suggests that changing employment patterns will impact on the development of social policy; in the 'freeing' of women from the work-place, in the number of women remaining at home and in the sustained emphasis on women's biological, cultural and social roles.

The ways in which women were disadvantaged within social policy under communism have not disappeared since democratisation and economic transition. Rather, the restructuring of welfare since the late 1980's, and the shift away from state control to systems that are exploring insurance based schemes and encouraging family and voluntary based provision, may compound the situation by placing women at the centre of unpaid, voluntary welfare

work. Under communism, formal equality actively encouraged women to participate in employment, albeit in ways that gave primacy to their reproductive functions, but did nothing to address the traditional role of women in the home. As a result of this, the world of work reflected the inequalities that persisted in the private sphere, particularly in the patterns of occupational segregation found in the delivery of social provision. The process of providing new forms of welfare, moreover, is likely to take little account of those in subordinate and less powerful positions.

Women's position in the work-place since reform

Women's right to work as well as women's rights at work are slowly being eroded. Under communism, the law gave 'special' treatment to women because of their reproductive function, therefore placing more emphasis on this role than on women's equal treatment in the work-place. Thus legislation forbidding night work or work for women in certain branches of industry, although widely flouted by employers and women alike, was clearly discriminatory when viewed from a Western perspective. On the one hand work gave women access to a range of social benefits, especially in relation to pregnancy and child care; on the other, these measures placed undue restriction on women's working

practice, and on women's autonomy in other areas of social life, including politics. Under conditions of reform, women's inferior position in the work-place remains intact, whilst hard-pressed enterprises are reluctant or unable to offer the same kind of social provision women could access in the previous regimes. In addition, without new legislation that addresses women's discrimination in the workforce, women have no legal redress with which to express their grievances.

This form of legal protection, however, will have to come onto the political agenda if post-communist states continue to aspire to membership of the European Union. Directives for equal pay and equal treatment for women in employment are legally binding throughout the community. In the meantime, however, in the process of transition, women's position in the work-place is uncertain. Women already form a significant majority of those living at subsistence level or below and provision for child care is disappearing or becoming prohibitively expensive, whilst social policies are shifting the 'solutions' to social problems onto the individual and the family. These developments are likely to affect the future political participation of women in a number of ways. Firstly, women's lesser occupational

status, as under communism, may be reflected in their political status. Women will continue to be assigned a lesser political role, or lack the skills to enter politics on the same terms as men. Secondly, cut backs in the extent of social provision for working mothers demonstrates that 'women's' issues have a low priority in an era of economic reconstruction. Women who enter political life may expend a significant amount of energy defending welfare provision in relation to women, and thus reinforce the notion that women politicians represent a narrow range of interests. Thirdly, the restructuring of social policy is not being accompanied by national debates concerning issues of equality. If women return to the private sphere in significant numbers, the public world of politics may increasingly be seen as an inappropriate place for them.

The main focus of this chapter has been to discuss the legacies of communist social provision and the processes of economic reform and welfare reconstruction, and to argue that locating women's political participation within this broader context is relevant to an understanding of the limited role played by women in the national legislatures before and after reform. Chapter six will examine housing and health policy before and after political transition, in order to highlight women's disadvantaged social and

political position as recipients of welfare and as welfare workers. Housing and health systems, it will be argued, are underpinned by assumptions of women's role in the private sphere. Women therefore find it difficult to influence social provision at even the most basic levels of policy-making, in areas that are central to their needs. This situation reinforces women's lesser economic and social status, and is in turn, reflected in the nature and scope of women's participatory behaviour in both formal and informal politics.

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CHAPTER SIX

INFLUENCING THE AGENDA? HOUSING AND HEALTH FOR WOMEN

Good health and adequate housing are interdependent; they also have a particular relevance for women in these societies, who undertake the major responsibility for monitoring the health of family members, and for cleaning the home. Furthermore, as noted in earlier chapters, women frequently undertake a health-education-welfare role when they enter politics or seek to influence policy-making. Thus, an examination of women's experiences as recipients of housing and health policy, and as health workers, will help to demonstrate the role of social policy in reinforcing and reproducing the lesser status of women in communist and post-communist societies, and the way in which this form of policy-making limits women's autonomy in a number of areas - including that of politics. Both areas of policy will be examined in turn.

Women and housing

The factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of women's 'voice' in the allocation of housing and in housing policy under communism and post-communism can be seen as twofold. Firstly, it can be

argued that the allocative process of housing tended to increase social inequalities in these states, and that women formed a significant number of those disadvantaged by this process. Moreover reform, it will be maintained, has in many respects exacerbated this situation for women, as states' pursue the privatisation of state-controlled housing. Secondly, and underpinning much of the examination of housing in these states, is that women's lesser economic status is a key consideration in the provision of decent and affordable housing. In Britain, for example, feminists have raised the issue of gender in the analysis of housing provision in a number of areas; notably, in access to housing, security of tenure, housing quality, and the need to incorporate women in decisions concerning housing policy (1). The importance of this literature is the way that it highlights firstly, the vulnerability of women in specific social groups, and secondly, the poor placing of women in policy debates. It has thus provided a useful framework for discussion in Britain, and one that can be utilised to some extent here.

Recent discourse surrounding the issue of women and housing, for example, has focused on the ways in which housing systems have contributed to the persistence of gender inequalities in society. Munro and Smith [1989], in reviewing much of this literature, point to two important

threads of this debate. The first suggests that because housing systems are oriented towards provision that favours 'conventional' families, non-family households are disadvantaged by the housing allocation system. The second point highlights the link between gender differentiation within the workforce and opportunities for women in the housing market. Women's poorer purchasing power as opposed to men's, thus creates important differentials in access to the housing market.

For Munro and Smith, housing has been drawn into the production and reproduction of gender inequalities in society. According to this approach, the examination of women's housing needs should thus be grounded in an understanding of housing's broader social influence (2).

The issue of women's inequality in housing in communist states before reform can be demonstrated by drawing conclusions firstly, from the general inequalities that existed between different groups of workers, and secondly, between the elite and the population at large. Both would seem to have a direct bearing on issues of gender.

The most dominant factor shaping housing allocation appeared to be the concern to provide more and better housing to industrial workers in key cities, producing goods that were central to the economy. Managers, technicians and skilled workers in key industries, for

example, received large housing subsidies in comparison to workers living in rural areas. Thus housing policy was inextricably related to management of the labour force and elite privilege, a theme that co-existed uncomfortably with the official policy of creating equality and raising living standards (3).

Such concerns, however, resulted in inequalities between regions that were exacerbated yet again in rural areas. Morton [1989] notes that the best housing conditions in terms of availability in the former Soviet Union were to be found in the newly industrialised cities and mining areas (4). The bulk of poor quality housing on the other hand, is still to be found in rural areas. Bridger [1992] states that most rural housing in the former Soviet Union lacked mains sanitation and may have had inadequate mains water, gas or electricity supplies (5). In Poland, even in the mid-1980's, only 37% of rural dwellings had a flush toilet (6).

In addition, recent analysis has shown that the generous housing subsidies for rents and mortgages that existed before reform, disproportionately benefited higher income and higher status groups in some states, further increasing patterns of inequality. This is especially marked in Hungary, but rather less so in the former Soviet Union (7). In Hungary, two thirds of the housing

subsidies were given to households irrespective of their social and financial standing, although there was an element of official disapproval of this practice, evidenced by a statement made by the Chairman of the National Planning Office in 1989.

The measure and proportion of support essentially violates the principle of social justice as people with higher incomes automatically receive a greater amount of support.
(8)

Furthermore, subsidies were generally based on quantitative factors such as size or floor area and did not take account of qualitative factors such as location, age and state of repair. There were also significant differences in rent between the various categories of housing to be found in these states. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example, rents were higher for members of co-operative housing than for tenants in state-owned dwellings; yet the latter often enjoyed a higher income than the former (9).

The process of allocation, shaped by a situation where demand far outstripped supply, was underpinned by endemic bribery and corruption, practised and sanctioned by party officials. In the former Soviet Union, in particular, this was widespread. Eduard Shevardnadze's investigations into corruption in Georgia in 1972, for example, when he became First Secretary of the Georgian Party, not only discovered

high officials living in opulent luxury in Tbilisi, but exposed a powerful and systematic abuse of the allocation process (10). In the former Czechoslovakia, Short [1990] also reports that the system was prone to similar kinds of allocative abuse (11).

The direct intervention of party officials in the allocation process has been well documented in the former Soviet union (12). This often took the form of a well-timed telephone call to the right official. Tamara Dudko, a former member of the USSR Supreme Soviet [1989], describes such an incident.

The other day I had a visitor - an aged teacher. She is sick and tired of trying to prove the obvious thing that four adults can't be crammed into a tiny apartment. But everywhere they were denied improved housing. Curiously enough, the next applicant was an army general also seeking better housing. He asked for a four-roomed apartment only for two tenants - himself and his wife. He insisted on this and kept on referring to his 'entitlement' and support from higher ups. I did, in fact, get a call telling me to find something for him, so, we're still fighting such telephone injustice (13).

The paucity of women in nomenklatura posts, as well as their lesser occupational status, suggests that they were not able to influence the allocation process in these states as effectively as men. Furthermore, as policy did not primarily favour those in most need, a significant number of women living alone on low incomes, or as single mothers, may have suffered disproportionately in

relation to men in housing provision.

The acceleration of the drive towards the privatisation of housing since 1989, has meant in many cases that sitting tenants have been offered the opportunity of buying their apartments, with the result that the old nomenklatura have been able to gain considerable benefits from buying high quality, potentially valuable properties. The old inequalities of the past have thus been replicated in the present; a phenomena noted by Russian analysts. Natalya Rimashevskaya stated recently, for example, that:

Our Party nomenklatura had the best apartments, in prestigious neighbourhoods. So it was the nomenklatura that was given ownership of these apartments.....Meanwhile, housing is getting more expensive, but Party officials received, in effect, hundreds of millions of rubles worth of housing (14).

The opportunity to purchase as a sitting tenant, may not be possible for women on low incomes, particularly if they lack the necessary capital for renovating and maintaining deteriorating apartments or houses. Moreover, in East Central Europe, where the diversity of housing provision was greater than in the former Soviet Union, the shift towards market conditions in housing in the 1980's has already benefited better placed groups as they opted for private housing as opposed to state controlled housing. In Hungary, this shift was encouraged by housing subsidies which were restructured to

favour private housing. Hegedus and Tosics [1992] note, for example, that;

The social groups already possessing some status in the housing market and with high income and access to second economy sources could improve their position in the housing system through the market provision (15).

The inequalities of distribution under communism, therefore, have fundamentally affected issues of decent and affordable housing for poorer groups since reform. At present, it seems unlikely that the market will be able to address this inequality more effectively than allocation and management under communism. To a certain extent, the issue of inequality will depend on whether the restructuring of welfare provision generally can offer some compensation for market failures.

Another important point to note is that the deficit of housing units in relation to the number of households is very large indeed, creating a permanent housing crisis for these states. In Poland, for example, families may wait for up to seven years, before they obtain their own flat, although estimates of the length of waiting lists vary enormously (16). In the former Czechoslovakia, the waiting period is approximately five years (17). Multiple occupancy in all these states is common and causes considerable stress. The housing deficit has intensified in recent years due to a decline in the number of new units

being constructed since the 1960's, the continued flow of rural migrants to the cities placing an additional burden on urban accommodation, and the increased divorce rate.

In Hungary the housing shortage is similarly acute. In 1989 Ernol Kemenes, Chairman of the National Planning Office, stated that more than 200,000 urban families had no chance of gaining access to a flat of their own in the next decade (18). Hence, the main thrust of housing policy since the 1980's has increased the role of the private sector, particularly in East Central Europe, partly in recognition that it was no longer possible for the state to continue to be the main provider of housing. However, the key housing problems remain acute; the need for more accommodation to meet demand, deteriorating properties awaiting repair and no long term plans outlining the ways in which these issues are going to be resolved.

Economic transition has brought the issue of state controlled housing firmly onto the political agenda. Policy initiatives across the region have attempted to lessen the burden of state expenditure on housing; they have varied in their approaches to this goal, but a common set of principles underpinning policy changes can usefully be identified. The first is to phase in the removal of state subsidies on rent and mortgages, and the second, is encourage the privatisation of the housing market - a trend

already well established during the 1980's in Poland, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia, but furthered in the new economic climate of marketisation.

The reduction of subsidies has led to a marked rise in the levels of rent. In January 1990, for example, rents were increased by 35% in Hungary (19). In Poland, the gradual introduction of market rents is expected to result in increases that are simply not affordable for some tenants, although some efforts have been made in the form of means tested housing benefits to alleviate rising costs. There is concern, however, that the funds allocated for this purpose are too limited to have much impact (20). Also, the number of people eligible for housing benefit is likely to be vast; in September 1990, for example, 60% of retired people, predominantly women, fell into this category. Furthermore, rising or unexpected costs elsewhere may easily negate any benefit received (21). In December 1990, the Hungarian National Assembly voted to give local government the right to collect a tax on housing. But for many people, these taxes could prove to be a heavy burden, especially in rural areas, which tend to have high percentages of old people, the majority of whom are women. Local governments are reluctant to levy the tax, but will lose various state subsidies if they fail to do so (22).

Housing which is still directly managed by the state has, on the whole, deteriorated markedly in comparison to other forms of provision, yet it is frequently reserved for those on very low incomes who are unable to afford co-operative or privately owned alternatives. Indeed, future provision for these groups looks bleak. The diminishing resources allocated for housing appear to rule out any long-term plans for continuing direct provision by the state. In 1990, for example, the Budapest Council Executive Committee announced that there were no plans to build new accommodation in the forthcoming year, as all the funds available were being used for repairs (23). In addition, local authorities and other public organisations now claiming ownership rights over the properties they previously administered and maintained, are seeking to make the best use of these by changing patterns of use, for example; this raises questions about the rights of sitting tenants and the vulnerability of low income groups (24).

The individual housing needs of women

Housing policy under communism adopted a familist stance; that is to say, housing provision was based on assumptions concerning the traditional family unit, rather than individual need. The social and demographic

changes of the last thirty years or so, such as greater longevity for women, later marriage and increasing rates of separation and divorce, have seen a dramatic rise in the number of women living without a male partner for at least some part of their lives. In Poland, for example, the number of single parent households rose by 34% between 1970 and 1984 (25).

Divorce rates in all these states are high. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example, 32% of marriages end in this way (26). In the former Soviet Union, 36.5% of marriages dissolve before the fourth anniversary (27). Women with children may secure an advantage over male partners by retaining the apartment, although they are frequently left to shoulder the cost of household expenditure, such as rent, repairs and the cost of utilities. Furthermore, evidence suggests that absent fathers' financial support of their former families, particularly in the former Soviet Union, is minimal and frequently non-existent (28).

Since reform, the rise in the cost of household energy must be taken into account, as government subsidies from energy sources are removed. In December 1990, for example, the Hungarian Government cut subsidies of household energy costs by thirteen billion forints, resulting in an increase of electricity prices of 50% by the beginning of January

1991. Similarly, water charges have risen steeply. Households that were accustomed to paying approximately 15% of the actual cost of water supply, now pay between 40% to 50%. This is likely to force a reduction in consumption, raising possible questions relating to health and well-being (29). Similarly, in Poland, prices for electricity and gas have soared as subsidies for coal and central heating have been reduced (30).

The withdrawal of housing subsidies will have a significant impact on low income groups, including single mothers and elderly women. For vulnerable women, forced to leave the family home because of a violent partner, there is a virtual absence of shelters or voluntary aid (31). Indeed, the issue of domestic violence in these states has yet to be fully recognised as a serious social problem. In Moscow, the organisation Medecins Sans Frontiere, active among the destitute, reported the dilemma of a woman cast adrift in a system that marginalises the victims of domestic violence.

Her name is Vera, 3 months ago her husband kicked her out of the house, and she has no relatives. She never had a job; she stayed at home with the children. And now she's here, at the train station. She doesn't know how to find a job or make decent arrangements for her children. She needs help, but who is going to help her? (32).

This form of homelessness among women may increase in a society where male alcoholism is common. Issues

of domestic violence have yet to be fully recognised, and alternative accommodation for women remains generally unavailable. Overall, it seems likely that the continuing shift towards solving the housing problem through the mechanics of the market will compound women's disadvantage in a policy area that has largely been based on the family as a unit in housing, rather than individual need.

The number of elderly women in these societies is growing steadily. By the year 2010, more than a quarter of all the people in East Central Europe will be of post-retirement age, although the demographic profiles vary slightly from state to state (33). As the life expectancy of women is significantly greater than that of men, many of the problems associated with housing the vulnerable elderly population will disproportionately affect women. Elderly women, more frequently than men, live alone and have less available income and smaller pensions than men in the same age group, yet face the kinds of increased costs outlined above. One result of these increased costs generally, is the growth in the number of elderly among homeless people. In Hungary many of the 15,000 homeless people in Budapest are pensioners, who have been unable to pay the higher rents (34).

Much of the current evaluation of the impact of housing reform is preoccupied with the practicalities of

implementing a market-oriented system. Any critique concerning affordability, and who gains or loses in this transition is generally restricted to low income families or pensioners. The gender divisions within these groups also deserve some consideration, as women's lesser economic status can be seen to be reproduced in the housing system. A worsening of women's purchasing power, coupled with the impact of new housing policies, may disadvantage single women on low incomes, single mothers and elderly women in particular. In addition, the cut backs in day care for children under school age means that the home will become the main area of care for small children, although the quality of care will depend to some degree on the quality of housing. As yet, women do not appear to have voiced their views on housing provision in any substantive way. Significantly, the relationship between women and housing policy both before and after communism, indicates, in a number of ways, their lack of political efficacy in influencing an area of policy that is crucial to their interests. Housing, therefore, in conjunction with low economic status, can be instrumental in reinforcing women's low status in society, and in reproducing disadvantage for low income groups. It is these kinds of processes within social policy and social policy-making, that illustrate the role of the state in defining women's position in society

and, ultimately, their broader social role.

Health care and health policy

This part of the chapter will consider women's relationship to health care by examining three key aspects of health provision under communism and since reform. Firstly, it will outline the relationship between the centralised planning of health care systems under communism, and the extent of occupational segregation and 'feminisation' within the health care field, in order to suggest that women were too poorly placed in the old regimes to have much influence in shaping health policy. Secondly, it will outline the problems associated with the low status of women's health in these societies. Health status becomes a vital issue in pregnancy, childbirth and the care of children, for example. The discussion of women's experiences of health care provision will therefore focus primarily around areas of maternity and child health care, in order to suggest that even at these levels of provision, women's needs have not made any significant impact on policy agendas. Yet it is clear that women find certain aspects of health care both inadequate and demeaning, and the poor facilities which surround women undergoing an abortion or giving birth are well documented in the literature (35). Thirdly, it

will note the way in which women's poor reproductive health has frequently been linked with poor working conditions; and that the 'remedy' for this in terms of policy, has generally been a call for an extension of women's 'privileged' treatment in the workplace. In conclusion, it will evaluate the implications of the new health reforms in relation to women, and discuss ways in which women may be able to influence health policy and health care in the future.

Under communism, the concept of health needs was clearly a highly political one, despite the ideological objective to provide free access to state funded institutions as a social right for all. In common with housing, the provision of extensive health care facilities for workers in key industries, as well as the special clinics and hospitals available only to the nomenklatura, denoted the priorities given to economic need and elite privilege. Thus the commitment to economic growth through heavy industrialisation provided the major impetus for formulating health care policy. George and Manning [1980] claimed that this resulted in health care needs being equated with labour discipline (36). This form of social control had implications for women workers and their reproductive health, as will be discussed later. Moreover,

the development of industrial health care was not accompanied by sufficient improvement in hazardous and unhealthy working conditions. The concept of fitness for work, therefore, seemed to have been given preference over long-term preventative measures. For women, whose health status had been damaged by such working conditions, it was not so much the availability of health care that became an issue in this context, but the priority given to the scope and quality of that care.

Another feature of these systems was the overwhelming drive to provide 'top down' quantitative indicators of health provision as opposed to concerns for the quality of the service provided. This not only severely limited the avenues of participation from below, but also largely excluded the voice of health care workers. The pressing task to fulfil directives issued from the centre, for example, left very little space for such groups to take an advisory role in health policy, particularly in the former Soviet Union (37).

The centralised nature of health policy must be considered alongside the low status afforded to all the medical disciplines. George and Manning [1980] make a salient point in noting that, in the former Soviet Union, this can be seen as a reflection of the feminisation of the workforce in these areas, particularly among doctors; but

they failed to make an explicit link between this and the lack of development of a powerful and articulate professional interest group (38). Such a link, if it existed, is worth pursuing as it may go some way towards explaining this deficit. The relationship between low pay and feminisation, however, was a significant one for Ryan [1991], who claims that;

..the feminisation of this occupational grouping can hardly be dissociated from the economic reality that, as a rule, the supply price of women will be lower than that of men. (39).

The extent of feminisation among doctors however, varied from state to state. In 1986, women formed 69% of all doctors in the former Soviet Union, but this was not matched to the same degree in East Central Europe. In the former Czechoslovakia, female doctors totalled 46% (40). Whereas in Hungary in 1987, 54.4% of medical students were women (41). In Poland, there was a quota system to restrict the number of women in medical faculties, introduced to prevent an 'excessive feminisation' of the profession. No such restrictions existed for nursing schools (42).

Any influence that doctors were able to wield, however, came from those practising highly specialised, hospital-based medicine, indicating that the patterns of occupational segregation by gender among doctors may yield

a clearer indication of women's disadvantage than the extent of feminisation. Women were poorly represented among this elite, even in the former Soviet Union. Ryan [1989], for example, draws on evidence from the number of women members of the USSR Academy of Medical Science in 1983 to note that:

From this source it can be ascertained that the total of 291 Academicians included a mere 12 women, while the 293 Corresponding Members included only 31 (43).

In 1990, the position had only changed marginally. Within the 18 member executive, there were no women at all. Out of 140 Academicians, 12 were women; of the 177 Corresponding Members, 18 were women. Moreover, an examination of the specialisms represented at this level reveals a high percentage of women working in what might be construed as 'feminine specialities,' such as paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology or social hygiene. Thus, among women academicians, 36.7% could be found practising these forms of medicine. Among males, this fell to 10.1%. Moreover, among the few male academicians specialising in social hygiene, the majority were placed at administrative level, in stark contrast to their female counterparts. In the more 'masculine' specialities, such as general and cardiac surgery, 13.9% of males academicians fell into this category as opposed to a single woman. Among the

directors of the 71 research institutes, only 4 were women (44).

The paucity of women in the higher ranking posts and prestigious specialisms, therefore, was a fair indication of the extent and persistence of vertical segregation by gender among doctors; a situation that does little to suggest that women doctors had much influence to bring to the formulation of health policy. Women doctors still form the majority of those working in primary health care clinics, rather than in hospital-based medicine, which attracts higher status and better working conditions. Thus, although the relationship between the extent of feminisation and low pay in the health sector is significant, this cannot be considered in isolation from the nature of occupational segregation. Limited opportunity for health workers to influence the health agenda did exist under communism, but only for those who were able to reach the higher levels of the medical profession.

Women formed the majority of other health care workers, but again, were disadvantaged by their gender. Feminised sectors of workforces are generally characterised by low pay and poor working conditions. In common with the West, almost 99% of nurses were women, although their status, again in comparison to the West, was considerably lower. The shortage of nursing staff was, and remains

acute, and causes staffing problems, particularly in hospitals. The Slovak health service, for example, has a deficit of 50,000 nurses and 19,000 ancillary staff (45). Low pay and appalling working conditions contribute to this shortage, as nurses are difficult to recruit. Nurses also appear to have a poor working relationship with doctors. In Poland, the medical profession's refusal to allow any increase in the 'highly circumscribed functions of a Polish nurse' has led to nursing being perceived as a low status and unattractive occupation (46).

For women in need of health care for themselves or their families, it is important to note that the health status of the populations of these states can be said to have reached crisis proportions. This, of course, is also legitimately linked to a range of social and economic factors in addition to the state of the individual health services. Pollution, poor diet, overcrowded housing with inadequate sanitation, and widespread alcohol and tobacco addiction have undoubtedly contributed to high morbidity and mortality rates. In areas of heavy industrialisation, the problems have been evident for some years. In Poland, the city of Lodz - renowned for its unacceptably high levels of atmospheric and water-borne pollutants - infant mortality and women's mortality and morbidity rates from cancer are the highest in the country (47). In Upper

Silesia, a marked increase in the incidence of disease and congenital abnormalities among babies and young children has emerged in recent years (48).

For women, health status becomes crucially important during pregnancy, yet in Poland, over 60% of pregnant women suffer from anaemia (49). In the former Czechoslovakia, discussions have taken place as whether or not to allow women to breastfeed because of the high levels of contaminants discovered in breast milk (50).

The evidence suggests that women's reproductive health is being damaged by high levels of pollution and poor diet. In Moscow, health indicators have shown for some time that approximately 70% of babies are borne with pathological conditions (51). Indeed, women may be risking their health, and that of their child, in the process of pregnancy and childbirth. Some of these risks can be related to economic and environmental issues, as outlined above; others would appear to be related to the poor conditions that have existed in hospitals and clinics for some time, and to the quality of care provided by health care workers.

The Infant Mortality Rate [IMR] is commonly regarded as a key indicator of the ability of the state to deliver an effective and reasonably egalitarian system of health care. The IMR levels in the former Soviet Union and East Central

Europe are significantly higher than those in the west. [see table 8]. There are also some startling variations within individual states. In Turkmenia, the IMR in 1990, at 47 deaths per thousand live births, was twice the national average of the USSR; a situation that prompted a nation-wide debate and was attributed to severe protein deficiencies in pregnant women (52). Similarly, among the gypsy populations in East Central Europe, the IMR rate in 1989 was twice the national averages (53). For some years in the 1970's, the former USSR stopped publishing the yearly IMR altogether, as the levels were considered by government officials to be shamefully high. Ryan [1989] notes that a reasonably reliable figure for 1975, showing 30.8 deaths per thousand live births confirmed these concerns. He also notes that the under-recording of infant deaths [presumably in rural areas], means that this figure was an underestimation (54).

The level of maternal deaths is also significantly higher than in the West. [See table 9]. In rural Russia, the poor provision of midwives and low standards of hospital care are thought to be contributory factors (55). Furthermore, the general insanitary and unsafe conditions of hospitals throughout the region would seem to be making childbirth an increasingly unpleasant business. In Moscow, only 9 out of 33 inpatient obstetrical facilities in 1992

were up to standard requirements (56). There is, however, an entrenched belief that hospital based deliveries are safer than those conducted at home. A report on the Polish Health Service issued in Warsaw in 1979, encapsulates this view.

Suffice it to say that almost all the women want to give birth in hospital. The occupation of the home midwife is all but extinct (57).

Similarly, in the former Czechoslovakia, hospital births since 1974 have exceeded 99% of all births (58). This 'medicalisation' of childbirth, of course, echoes a similar pattern found in most industrialised nations, with one important difference. Unlike the West, there is scant evidence of a reversal of this pattern in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe; an indication of the lack of client-based interest groups pressing for improved levels and quality of service. Poor housing conditions, moreover, may be linked to the continuing tradition of hospital confinements. Heitlinger [1987] notes the significance of this trend in the former Czechoslovakia:

There has been no explicit recognition [as there has been in the west, thanks to the efforts of the feminist and women's health movements] that active independent women may wish to "give birth" rather than "be delivered (59).

The background to hospital-based management of childbirth is worth considering here, as the

'medicalisation' of this process denotes a growth in technological intervention on the one hand, and a consequent erosion of women's control on the other. Feminists in the West equate this process of increasing reliance on technology concomitant with the over-management of childbirth to the development of what might be termed a 'medical model' of women's reproductive processes. In other words, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth are viewed as aspects of 'illness' that justify active 'management.' Women therefore lose control of the natural process of reproduction, as it becomes heavily invested with male-dominated technology designed to monitor the functions of women's bodies (60). The monopoly in hospital-based deliveries throughout the industrialised world, together with the growth of intervention in labour itself bears witness to this phenomenon.

The form and extent of this kind of social control amply illustrates the difficulties women face in influencing health policy at even the most basic level, despite the way in which it impacts on their lives. The recognition of women's disadvantage in contributing to health policy at both a formal and informal level, needs to incorporate a wider understanding of women's experiences of being health workers and as recipients of

health care. Raising the 'visibility' of women in this way can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of women's position in relation to health policy. The extent of occupational segregation in the medical professions, and the lack of client based pressure groups both contribute to a situation in which women are likely to find it difficult to formulate and express their needs. Health workers in all these states are further prevented from delivering a good quality service through the shortage of equipment, and the deteriorating condition of hospitals.

Women's health and poor working conditions

It seems relevant here to add some comment regarding the link between women's health and women's working conditions. Despite the barriers that prevent women making an impact on health policy in areas of provision for abortion and childbirth, the relationship between women's reproductive health and the workplace have frequently been aired by the official women's organisations of the past, and by a broader group of women since political and economic reform. The purpose of this section is to examine the extent of influence that may arise from this form of activity. As noted above, key industrial workers enjoyed access to special health facilities. In addition, regulations concerning working conditions for pregnant and

nursing mothers were well established under communism, although these were commonly by-passed by hard-pressed managers and by women anxious not to lose a good wage or pension rights. However, the injurious working conditions of women in industry have long-term implications for reproductive health that may negate any concessions given to pregnant and breast feeding mothers.

There is a strong pre-occupation in the literature in relation to women in the former Soviet Union, with working conditions that are considered to be physically and psychologically unfavourable for the 'female organism', reflecting an overwhelming concern to allow women to 'harmoniously' combine motherhood with employment. Official lists of jobs prohibited to women because of the risks associated with reproductive health have existed since 1932. However, the delays in implementing such regulations have been considerable despite women sociologists and economists bringing the plight of women in industry to the attention of officials. In 1978 for example, a round table discussion by the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions on women's labour, noted that women were still working underground twenty years after the law banning such work was adopted, and that throughout industry, only an insignificant number of women had been taken off night shifts and strenuous and hazardous jobs.

(61)

However, although the state was fully appreciative of the link between women's working conditions and the hazards to their health, very little progress appears to have taken place over the years to ameliorate the situation. Poor working conditions, of course, are just as injurious to men's health as they are to women's; the evidence put forward by observers in the former Soviet Union, however, suggests that babies born to women working in such conditions suffer the results of the damage to their mothers' health, and thus begin life with a lower health profile than is desirable. This has profound implications for the population as a whole, including the future labour force (62).

The link between hazardous working conditions and women's reproductive health is now expressed openly and vehemently by women inside and outside the political system, although the theme of detrimental working conditions and adverse effects on women's reproductive health remains a dominant one. A recent study of women and work in the former Soviet Union carried out by Rimashevskaya, is written from a feminist standpoint, but still notes that:

Female labour is often permitted in jobs which, in accordance with their physical and other parameters, usually require "male hands" - electric welders, crane operators etc. We can and we must be more prudent in our assessment of such circumstances when women enter into

traditionally male occupations, since they may have unfavourable consequences on their health and the health of their children (63).

Outspoken comment on women's work and health is evident throughout the region. In Belorussia, the poor working conditions of women, and the negative effects this has had on their reproductive health, found critical expression in the press in 1989. Furthermore, some female candidates seeking election to the Congress of People's Deputies, took up women's rights at work in their campaign (64).

In Poland, criticism has emerged in relation to the status of pregnant women in the new political and economic climate, including the decreasing availability of suitable working conditions or facilities for pregnant women.

Now the situation becomes additionally unfavourable for pregnant women, since the emerging ...unemployment puts them in the position of underdogs vis à vis all other potential employees (65).

Women may undertake employment in hazardous conditions in order to achieve better pay and there is evidence to suggest that some women do not want to give up the extra money they can earn through working night shifts (66). Equally, women may see advantages in such work if it is likely to improve their pension rights. This raises difficult questions concerning women's freedom to 'choose' a job that gives them a reasonable standard of living, when

articulate women are continuing to follow the traditional route of linking employment hazards to the specific characteristics of the 'female organism' rather than the conditions of work.

There is a danger here, however, that the kind of jobs women are allocated in industry are more likely to be unskilled and unmechanised, and that these jobs will be the first to disappear under economic reform. The issue of women's health interests in the workplace may well vie for attention with women's risk of unemployment. As Shapiro [1992] notes;

Thus it is not surprising that in 1989 steps to remove women from positions in transport where they are formally banned were met with protests and even a large demonstration. They were not removed (67).

Women campaigning on the health issue would appear to be out of step with women workers, suggesting that the broader context of women's unequal employment opportunities needs some serious consideration. Women are striving to influence policy in this area, but in conflicting ways. The evaluation of such attempts, and the impact on women workers, will have to await further developments in economic reform.

The impact of health reforms

State funded health care is being replaced by new

systems of health finance based on health insurance schemes. Common features for all these states include proposals to introduce mandatory basic health insurance for all working people, in which contributions will depend on individual earnings. Those without a job will be insured by the state. The former Soviet Union and East Central European states have looked towards the West for ways in which to restructure their ailing health care systems. Reform is likely to be welcome, in view of the problems associated with delivering health care, and may provide a better quality of care under a market based system than that experienced under communism. In the transitional period, however, the problems are acute. In Hungary, a shift to an insurance based system, initiated in the governments's Action Programme in September 1990, has entailed deducting substantial contributions from both employers and employees (68). This has left individuals with little incentive to contribute to private insurance schemes. However, despite a doubling of doctors salaries, most are still poorly paid (69). Furthermore, the Hungarian Government adopted a slogan in 1991 stating that 'health care will no longer be a citizen's right' (70). It seems likely that inequalities in health care will increase substantially until some of these issues have been resolved.

However, with the introduction of insurance-based schemes, comes the element of choice. No-one will now be automatically assigned to a clinic, but will be free to register with the doctor of their choice, creating competition between providers of health care. Whether this will improve the quality of care given, particularly in the field of reproductive care, remains to be seen. In Russia, Ryan [1993] suggests that the climate of economic reform will result in redundancies of medical staff as the new system uncovers the fact that many health care units are working at only half of their planned capacity (71). Women doctors, who form the bulk of clinic doctors, are likely to be in the forefront of these cut backs. In the former Czechoslovakia, there are indications that the health service has a 'surplus' of around 7000 doctors; with a similar situation existing in Hungary and Poland (72). Also in the former Czechoslovakia, major employers and professional organisations will be empowered to organise their own work-based insurance schemes (73). This move will not only enable those on higher incomes to insure themselves for 'non-essential medical care,' but may well mean that some women employees may be looked on as expensive risks because of the costs associated with maternity care. In Poland, legislation passed in 1991 has provided new opportunities for private sector involvement.

In the meantime, individuals and various sectors of society are being asked to contribute to the cost of maintaining health care institutions. This may include encouraging the earlier discharge of in-patients, as well as a greater input from relatives in caring for those in hospital. Both strategies have positive aspects from the patients' point of view, yet both also have profound implications for women. There is no doubt that the emphasis placed on the importance of family life and the need for families to take a more active role in the support and care of vulnerable members of society, is based on an assumption that traditional gender roles within the home still make this scenario possible. Finally, for women on low incomes, the changing structure of medical care may create additional financial difficulties. In Moscow, the situation is already acute, as reported by Rimashevskaya;

Moreover, it is now simply impossible to get medical treatment: one-third of one's income must be spent on medicines; polyclinics don't have the necessary equipment, and the best physicians have taken positions in commercial structures...(74).

Women's prospects of influencing health policy

The gender inequalities that have become institutionalised in the structure of the old health care systems are likely to continue in the shift towards

insurance based schemes; women working within health care as well as women receiving health care will thus remain disadvantaged until their position is recognised through widespread debate and analysis. At present, at least in the former Soviet Union, much of the debate surrounding women's reproductive health is still firmly tied to unsuitable and hazardous working conditions. This focus ignores, to a large extent, the economic realities of women choosing to work in these fields, as well as the structure of maternity care as it presently operates. It also illustrates the vast gulf that exists between women articulate enough and powerful enough to press for change, and the vast majority of ordinary working women.

In conclusion, the segregated nature of the health professions, the lack of autonomous client-based groups and the failure to bring together environmental and health issues under communism, have been partly instrumental in the exclusion of women's influence in health policy. Yet women bear the prime responsibility for monitoring the health of their dependents; more so under reform. The impetus for change - in calling for better maternity services, a less polluted environment and safer working conditions - will most probably be most effectively articulated and influential from below through the gradual development of women's groups.

The provision of housing and health, as part of the wider spectrum of social policy, is illustrative of the ways in which the formulation and implementation of social policy may marginalise women's interests. Social policy not only reflects the major priorities of the state, but also reflects assumptions held about the role of the family and women's place in the private sphere. In turn, these reinforce the traditional images of women as carers and nurturers, and legitimates the persistence of occupational segregation, particularly in the welfare professions. The lesser economic status of women, however, means that women are more likely to depend on social provision more frequently than men, although the formulation of social policy often fails to incorporate an effective means of considering women's interests. Women's health-education-welfare role in politics, moreover, suggests, firstly, that women's interest in this field is consistent with their broader social role, and therefore an acceptable way for women to participate in political activity. Secondly, however, the clustering of women in one area does little to promote their interests in others, such as economic or foreign policy, which are more decisive in determining national priorities. Thirdly, women's energy may be channelled into this form of activity as a means of protecting women's interests during a period

of rapid economic and political change. Finally, the gap between women politicians and ordinary women in post-communist societies, may be such that women's needs and concerns are not being effectively transmitted in the political systems. The development of autonomous groups around housing and health issues, may yet prove to be an alternative forum for articulating needs and demands in the future.

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CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined women's political participation in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe in a variety of contexts. Firstly, by outlining the limitations of women's participatory activity under communism, and secondly, by examining the impact of reform on women's political behaviour; both within the reformed national legislatures, and in the newly emerging women's movement. It has also explored some of the factors that may have influenced the nature and scope of women's political participation under both communism and post-communism. These included, for example, the processes of recruitment, candidate selection and the structure of electoral systems, as well as incorporating the broader assumptions that underpin the kinds of political activity that women tend to focus on, or are directed towards. This form of comparison between communist and post-communist states has raised a number of key points worthy of some brief discussion.

Firstly, it can be argued that the fall in women's representation since political and electoral reform has reinforced the notion of the artificiality of women's political participation in the national legislatures under communism. Real competition between candidates and between political parties has demonstrated that despite the long

existence of 'quota' systems and the mobilisation of women into politics by the communist parties, traditional images of women and women's lesser status in society have not been substantially challenged.

Secondly, the negative images of women in the party and state hierarchies under communism have reached across to influence the images of women candidates and politicians in the new regimes. Voters, for example, appeared to give preference to male candidates in the new style elections. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the fall in women's representation since reform, has only been conducted at the margins of society by a few concerned women. Thus the issue of gender, politics and representation since reform has been slow to filter through to political parties, the media and to society generally.

Thirdly, there are marked differences between the new electoral systems in these states, so that women in individual countries now face a variety of obstacles in gaining selection as a candidate and, ultimately, election as a deputy. In Hungary, for example, the few women who won a seat in the 1990 elections to the Hungarian National Assembly, did so through the list system, rather than by standing for direct election in a constituency. As noted in chapter three, this route leads to a different set of responsibilities, and may be seen as a lesser form of

representation.

Fourthly, the political strategies followed by women in individual states have also been markedly diverse. One response of women in Russia to the fall in women's representative share, for example, was the initiation of the Women of Russia party. This was successful in terms of gaining seats in the 1993 elections to the Duma, but may ultimately prove to be a limited platform for a substantive voice in the new politics. In a sense, it reinforces the view that women's interest in politics is restricted to 'women's' issues; it also provides an official forum for women's participatory activity that may discourage other political groupings from raising the gender issue within their own organisations.

In contrast, women in Poland appeared to have had rather more access to power following the 1989 elections to the Sejm. A few women were given key posts and were subsequently able to form a women's parliamentary group in response to the introduction of a new abortion Bill in 1989. Women's share of representation, however, has been somewhat erratic since 1988, when women secured 13.5% of seats. This fell to 9% after the 1991 election, but rose again to 12.8% in 1993. In another vein, women in the former Czechoslovakia fared better in minority nationalist movements such as the National Slovakian Party, rather than

in the larger, and ultimately more powerful political groups.

Overall, the differences in participatory activity since reform are likely to increase as individual states develop their own distinctive blend of political parties, political groupings and coalitions, and consolidate the changes made to their electoral systems. These kinds of developments will reflect, to a certain extent, the diversity of social and cultural traditions that were superficially masked by communist rule. Nevertheless, some of the enduring legacies of communism allow a comparative study of the political participation of women in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe to remain a fruitful exercise.

The fifth point to note, therefore, is that in the field of social policy, the communist structures of social provision, particularly in relation to women, have bequeathed a number of problems that continue to influence the lives of women in post-communist society, and the nature and scope of their participatory activity. As was discussed in chapters five and six, the relationship between women and the role of the state in determining social provision is central to an understanding of women's position in contemporary society, including that of politics. Under communism, women's role in the workplace

was shaped and defined by the strong links between employment and access to benefits such as maternity and child care leave, child care facilities and pension rights. The primacy given to women's reproductive role through such 'privileges' contributed to the persistence of women's poor status at work, and in society. Through this form of policy-making, traditional assumptions of gender roles and the division of labour in the public and the private spheres, were continually reproduced and reinforced. This was mirrored in the extent of occupational segregation by gender in areas such as health and education; and also reflected in the political role of women.

Since reform, the lesser equality of women in the workplace has been compounded. 'Rights' accorded to women at work under communism, are now too expensive to maintain at the same levels. Yet 'equality' for women in the new regimes has yet to receive any serious official consideration. Women in the new political parties and new women's groups are devoting a good deal of energy towards defending areas of social provision originally developed under communism. The erosion of child care facilities, the issue of abortion legislation, child care allowances, maternity leave, and growing unemployment among women, have become central issues for women's politicisation and activism. Such concerns may well continue to fuel the

proliferation of the fledging women's movements, and provide a valuable basis for drawing women into political activity. Yet it also marks out women's politicisation as being chiefly preoccupied with 'women's issues'; the higher political ground, as under communism, remains largely a male preserve.

Thus, a sixth point raises the familiar dilemma concerning the representation of women in politics. In the newly empowered national legislatures, women are but a small minority. Prospects for a greater share of representation are likely to be some way off. Indeed, contemporary debate surrounding women's role in post-communist society, appears to support a retreat to the private sphere, with politics in particular, regarded as an unsuitable occupation for women. Arguments that might support some form of positive action to increase the number of women in politics look unlikely to convince in view of the experience of the 'quota' system under communism. Arguments that support an increase in women's share of representation - because of the different viewpoints women are said to bring to the political arena - appear to underpin initiatives such as the Women of Russia party. It is clear, moreover, that women's 'voice' on issues such as social policy needs to be heard, in the current period of restructuring of social provision. The legacies of

communist rule make this possibility remote. Furthermore, if women are to participate fully and effectively in the new politics, they need to do so in number of areas; not just within the narrow confines of 'women's interests,' important as they are. The new values of social policy, for example, will be predominantly male values. For women, the loss of 'rights' in relation to social policy means a loss of power in society and subsequently in politics. Yet if much of women's informal and formal participatory activity is to be focused on issues that directly affect the quality of women's lives - at least in the short-term - this may reinforce images of women's 'proper' role in the 'political' and other participatory opportunities may be lost.

A seventh point is that an examination of women's participation since reform, lends a new vigour to some of the themes outlined by feminist political scientists in recent years; an issue discussed in chapter three. The call for a reconceptualisation of key concepts such as 'democracy,' representation' and 'participation' are particularly apt in relation to the position of women under post-communism. The practical realities of 'male democracy' for example, have been expressed by women deputies in Russia and Poland, giving weight to the arguments expressed in contemporary feminist political

discourse. Furthermore, the category of gender remained largely 'invisible' in analysis of political transition and the processes of democratisation in these states, although women's and men's experiences of these processes have differed considerably.

The eighth point is that feminism as a body of thought developed in the West, may be viewed with a certain ambiguity in relation to women's political participation under communism and post-communism. Since reform, feminist analysis of women's position in politics in liberal democratic regimes, would seem to have some useful insights to offer concerning women in the new democracies. Yet many women in post-communist states are hostile to, or suspicious of, Western feminist theory and practice, although many of their criticisms of women's position in these societies are reminiscent of those expressed at various times in the West. The primary issue to emerge from this form of ambiguity is the recognition that the new women's movements in these states will develop their own distinctive brand of theory and practice in response to women's needs and aspirations in individual states. Moreover, such developments are likely to be uneven. In Poland, women's response to the anti-abortion legislation was swift and well-organised and drew a significant number of women into protest activity. This form of activism has

yet to emerge with such a force in the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In Russia, the women's movement is characterised by diversity, as illustrated by the alternative platforms offered by the Women of Russia and NEZDHI groups. Such diversity, of course, may be instrumental in pushing forward a comprehensive theoretical reappraisal of women's position in society, forming a valuable basis for the creation of a body of feminist thought.

A final point is concerned with the concept of 'participation.' As discussed in chapter one, conventional definitions of political participation tend to dwell exclusively on electoral activity and the processes of politics within the formal arena. These are important, as discussed in chapters two and three, but generally fail to encompass other significant forms of political activity. Nor do they necessarily explore the wider societal factors that may interact to create barriers to women's participatory activity. The conceptual definitions of 'participation' under communism, including the significance of mobilised electoral activity, the interest group approach and the significance of the implementation stage of policy, all drew attention to the diversity of participatory behaviour in authoritarian states. Yet these approaches rarely addressed gender differences in any

substantive detail. Women in these states express an interest in 'politics' - defined in its broadest sense - in a variety of contexts and forms. Moreover, under transition and since reform, the emergence of 'civil society' and the restructuring of social provision, has brought women directly into contact with contemporary political issues in the workplace and in the home. This thesis, therefore, has explored the nature and scope of women's political participation under communism and post-communism in the national legislatures, women's groups and in areas of social provision, in order to incorporate and examine the most relevant forms of their participatory behaviour.

Table 1

Percentage of Women in the Congress of USSR People's Deputies [CDP] and the USSR Supreme Soviet following the March 1989 election

In the CDP	17.1%
Supreme Soviet	16.2%
<u>In the Council of the Union</u>	16.2%
% women who are CPSU members	78.5%
% elected by the Soviet Women's Committee	31.2%
% elected by other organisations	20%
% elected by territorial Okrug	48.8%
<u>In the Council of Nationalities</u>	20.2%
% of women who are CPSU members	68%
% elected by the Soviet Women's Committee	13%
% elected by other organisations	17%
% elected by national-territorial Okrug	70%
<u>Both chambers</u>	
% CPSU members	71.4%
% elected by Soviet Women's Committee	21.4%
% elected by other organisations	18.3%
% elected by Territorial Okrug or National Territorial Okrug	60.2%
% of women serving on commissions and committees attached to the USSR Supreme Soviet	22%

Source: data gleaned from pp. 31-2 and individual biographies pp. 41 ff. in Mann et al [1989] The Supreme Soviet: A Bibliographical Directory

Table 2

Membership of the USSR Supreme Soviet Committees by Gender
[August 1989]

	Male	Female
Agrarian Questions and Food	23	0
Construction and Architecture	22	2
Defence and State Security	21	0
Ecology and the Use of Natural Resources	20	5
Economic Reforms	20	2
Glasnost, Rights and Appeals of Citizens	18	2
International Affairs	20	2
Legislation, Legality, Law and Order	21	2
Public health	13	6
Science, Public Education, Culture and Upbringing	18	4
Veterans and Invalids	17	2
Soviets of People's Deputies, Development of Government and Self-Government	18	4
Women's Affairs, Family Protection, Motherhood and Childhood	2	16
Youth	18	3

Source: data gleaned from individual biographies pp. 41ff. in Mann et al [1989] The Supreme Soviet: A Bibliographical Directory.

Table 3

Membership of the USSR Supreme Soviet Commissions by Gender
[August 1989]

	Male	Female
<u>The Council of the Union</u>		
Transport, Communications and Information Science	16	0
Planning and Budgetary Finance	19	2
Labour Prices and Social Policy	10	5
Development of Industry, Energy, Equipment and Technology	18	1
<u>The Council of Nationalities</u>		
Development of Culture, Language, National and Interethnic Traditions and Preservation of Historical Heritage	15	5
Nationality Policy and Interethnic Relations	15	4
Social and Economic Development of Union and Autonomous Oblasts and Okrugs	23	3
Consumer Goods, Trade and Communal and Household Services for the Population	10	6

Source: data gleaned from individual biographies pp. 41ff. in Mann et al [1989] The Supreme Soviet: A Bibliographical Directory.

Table 4

Women elected to the Hungarian National Assembly - March 1990

Party	Total no. of seats	no. of women	% of women
Hungarian Democratic Forum	168	8	4.8
Smallholders Party	45	3	6.6
Christian Democratic Party	20	1	5.0
Alliance of Free Democrats	88	8	9.0
Alliance of Young Democrats	24	2	8.3
Hungarian Socialist Party	33	5	15.1
Independents	8	1	12.5
TOTAL	386	28	7.2%

Sources: Janova, M & Sineau, M [1992]
Eberhardt, E. [1990]
Snyder, P. [1992]

Table 5

Women elected to the Polish Sejm - June 1989

Party	Total no. of seats	no. of women	% of women
Solidarity	172	19	11
Ex-Communist Party [CP]	62	13	20.9
Groups previously associated with CP	226	30	13.2
TOTAL	460	62	13.5%

Sources: Janova, M. & Sineau, M. [1992]
Corrin, C. [1992]

Table 6

Women elected to the Czechoslovakian Federal Assembly
June 1990

Party	Total no. of seats	no. of women	% of women
Civic Forum/ Public Against Violence	170	14	8.2
Communist Party	45	2	4.4
Christian Democratic Union/Christian Democratic Movement	40	4	10.0
Movement for Autonomous Democracy - Society for Moravia and Silesia	16	4	25.0
Slovak National Party	15	4	26.7
Co-Existence	12	12	00.0
TOTAL	298	28	9.4%

Sources: Snyder, P. [1992]
Wightman, G. [1990]

Table 7

% of women working in areas of welfare provision
[Former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland]

<u>Czech Republic [1980]</u>		<u>Slovak Republic</u>
Education	72.3%	71.4%
Health services	79%	77.4%

Source: Bodrova & Anker [1985]

Hungary [1987]: % of female students in higher education

Teacher training	51.7% *
Health work	96.3%

* Women training to be kindergarten teachers formed 100% of students

Source: Eberhardt [1991]

Poland [1988]

Education	76.3%
Health services	80.2%

Source: Snyder [1992]

Table 8

Infant Mortality Rate for every 1,000 live births
[The former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland]

1992

Czechoslovakia	15.0%
Hungary	15.8%
Poland	18.0%
[United Kingdom	9.0%
France	7.8%
Portugal	13.1%]

Source: Snyder, P. [1992]

Infant Mortality Rate in the Soviet Union [1989]

Soviet Union	22.3%
Turkmenia	53.0% [1988: see Moscow News, no. 26 1990, p. 13].

Source: Pilkington, H. 'Russia and the Former Soviet Republics. Behind the mask of Soviet unity: realities of women's lives' in Corrin, C. [1992], pp.181-325.

Table 9

Maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births
[The former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland]

1992

Czechoslovakia	9.59%
Hungary	15.41%
Poland	10.67%
[United Kingdom	7.72%
France	9.34%
Portugal	10.12%]

Source: Snyder, P. [1992]

Maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births
[The Soviet Union]

1989

RSFR	50.0%	[second highest in S.U.]
Kirgizia	53.8%	[highest]

Source: Pilkington, H. 'Russia and the Former Soviet Republics. Behind the mask of Soviet unity: realities of women's lives' in Corrin, C. [1992], pp.181-325.

Appendix 1

Profile of selected women politicians in the new national legislatures

FORMER CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Dagmar Buresova

Activist dissident defence lawyer.

Minister of Justice [1990]

HUNGARY

Eniko Bollabas

Founding member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum.

Founder of the Hungarian Feminist Network [1989]

Associate Professor of American Studies at Szeged University
[1977-1990]

Appointed Minister Counselor and Deputy Chief to the Hungarian Embassy in Washington DC. [1990].

Anna Petrosovits

Leader of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party [1990]

Graduate in Economic History.

Lecturer in Economics at Budapest University.

POLAND

Teresa Katarzyna Dobielska-Eliszewska

[Deputy Speaker of the Sejm: 1989]

Qualified doctor - specialist in cancer diseases.
Head of oncology ward of Municipal hospital in Olsztyn

Olga Krzyzanowska

[deputy speaker of the Sejm: 1989]

Qualified doctor: worked in industrial health service in
Gdansk shipyard.

Zofia Kuratowska

[deputy speaker of the Sejm: 1989]

Qualified doctor; physician [haematologist]

Assistant professor of Post-Graduate Education at the
Faculty of Medicine. [Medical Academy, Warsaw]

Chair person of Walesa's Health Commission.
Co-chair on the health team for the round table
discussions.

Professor Ewa Letowska

Solidarity member. Appointed head of the office of Civic
Rights in mid 1980's.

Appointed ombudswoman in November 1987

Iwona Lubowska

MA in classical philology

Graduate of the Post-Graduate School of Political Sciences

PUWP member since 1980 - deputy during communist regime.

Malgorzata Niezabitowska

Deputy in the Sejm

Polish Government spokeswoman

Law and journalism background.

Won the Nieman Professional Journalist Fellowship at Harvard University.

Hanna Suchocka

Deputy in the Sejm 1980-1985 1991-19-

Prime Minister [July 1992-May 1993]

Doctor of Science

Expert in constitutional law

Member of Solidarity since 1980
[Now member of Democratic Union]

RUSSIA

Ella Pamfilova

Elected to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies [1989]

Member of the USSR Supreme Soviet [1989-1991]

Secretary [later co-chair] of the USSR Supreme Soviet's Privileges Standing Committee [until 1991]

Minister for Social Protection [1992]

Galina Starovoitova

Sociologist

Elected to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies in 1989.

Presidential Adviser on Nationality Issues [1990 -1992]

Sources include:

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