

RED 'TEASPOONS OF CHARITY': ZHENOTDEL,  
RUSSIAN WOMEN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY,  
1919-1930

by

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## Abstract

“Red ‘Teaspoons of Charity’:  
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After the Bolshevik assumption of power in 1917, the arguably much more difficult task of creating a revolutionary society began. In 1919, to ensure Russian women supported the Communist party, the Zhenotdel, or women’s department, was established. Its aim was propagating the Communist party’s message through local branches attached to party committees at every level of the hierarchy. This dissertation is an analysis of the Communist party’s Zhenotdel in Petrograd/ Leningrad during the 1920s.

Most Western Zhenotdel histories were written in the pre-archival era, and this is the first study to extensively utilize material in the former Leningrad party archive, TsGAIPD SPb. Both the quality and quantity of Zhenotdel fonds is superior at St.Peterburg’s TsGAIPD SPb than Moscow’s RGASPI. While most scholars have used Moscow-centric journals like *Kommunistka*, *Krest’ianka* and *Rabotnitsa*, this study has thoroughly utilized the Leningrad Zhenotdel journal *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* and a rich and extensive collection of Zhenotdel questionnaires. Women’s speeches from Zhenotdel conferences, as well as factory and field reports, have also been folded into the dissertation’s five chapters on: organizational issues, the unemployed, housewives and prostitutes, peasants, and workers. Fundamentally, this dissertation argues that how Zhenotdel functioned at

the local level revealed that the organization as a whole was riven with multiple and conflicting tensions. Zhenotdel was unworkable.

Zhenotdel's broad goals were impeded because activists lacked financial and jurisdictional autonomy, faced party ambivalence and hostility, and operated largely with volunteers. Paradoxically, these volunteer delegates were "interns," yet they were expected to model exemplary behaviour. With limited resources, delegates were also expected to fulfil an ever-expanding list of tasks. In addition, Zhenotdel's extensive use of unpaid housewife delegates in the 1920s anticipated the wife-activist movement of voluntary social service work in the middle to late 1930s. There were competing visions for NEP society, and Zhenotdel officials were largely unable to negotiate the importance of their organization to other party and state organizations. Overall, this suggests that although the political revolution was successful in the 1920s, there were profound limits to the social and cultural revolution in this era.

## Dedication

To the memory of my mum, Pamela Patterson,  
who fostered and modelled a commitment to learning in all her children.



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## Glossary

Agit-Prop	the agitation and propaganda section
<i>batrachkas</i>	female agricultural wage labourers
<i>bedniak</i>	a poor peasant
<i>byt'</i>	daily life
Collegium	executive-level meetings (of Zhenotdel, Agit-Prop etc...)
FZU	factory training schools
KKOV	peasants' mutual aid society
<i>Kolkhoz</i>	any one of three forms of collective farms: <i>toz</i> , <i>artel'</i> or <i>kommuna</i>
Komsomol	All-Russian Leninist Communist Youth League
<i>kulak</i>	a rich (exploiting) peasant
<i>kustar'</i>	handicraftsman
GSPS	Provincial Council of Trade Unions
GubKom	provincial committee (of party, trade union etc...)
Ispolkom	executive committee (of soviet)
Labour Exchange	Commissariat of Labour's unemployment offices
<i>Likbez</i>	Commission to Abolish Illiteracy
MOPR	International Aid Society of Revolutionary Fighters
Narkomiust	People's Commissariat of Justice
Narkompros	People's Commissariat of Enlightenment
Narkomsobesa	People's Commissariat of Social Security

Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labour
Narkomzdrav	People's Commissariat of Health
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
OMM	Department of Maternity and Infancy Protection
ONO	Department of People's Education
Rabkrin	Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate
<i>raion</i>	district
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
<i>samogon</i>	illegally distilled spirits (moonshine)
<i>seredniak</i>	middle peasant
<i>sel'kory</i>	peasant newspaper or journal correspondents
<i>sel'sovet</i>	rural soviet, first link in the administrative chain, then <i>volost'</i> , <i>uezd</i> , <i>raion</i> , <i>okrug</i> , and <i>guberniia</i> respectively.
<i>shefstvo</i>	patronage society
<i>smychka</i>	union between town and country
<i>sluzhashchii</i>	employee, white-collar worker
<i>uezd</i>	county
VTsSPS	All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions
<i>volost'</i>	township
VIK	<i>volost'</i> (township) soviet executive committee
<i>vydvizhenie</i>	(promotion) of workers and peasants into managerial or administrative jobs
Zhenotdel	women's department of the Communist party

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## Introduction

In 1925, Oskina, a women's department (Zhenotdel) delegate, addressed the Leningrad provincial conference. She haltingly informed her fellow Zhenotdel delegates that she was a "poor peasant, illiterate and estranged from her family."<sup>1</sup> Oskina was told to speak louder. Then, she beseeched the delegates for a "favour": could "they give her a horse?"<sup>2</sup> Oskina's request caused an "uproar" and she was shuffled unceremoniously off the stage and replaced by Chushaeva, a textile worker from the Krasnaia Znamia (Red Banner) mill, who urged women to join the co-operative movement.<sup>3</sup> Chushaeva's exhortation received "applause."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, at the same conference, when another textile worker took her delegate's red kerchief and tied it to a leading male communist leader, this generated "stormy applause."<sup>5</sup> Many elements are present in these vignettes: the role of peasants and workers, the balance between ideology and practice, and the nature of the alliance between Communists and Zhenotdel.

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<sup>1</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, Tsentrāl'n'yi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov g. Sankt-Peterburga, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.175. For consistency, this dissertation, unless in a direct translation, will refer to this organization as "Zhenotdel" although it can be seen in many forms as "the Zhenotdel," "the zhenotdel," and "zhenotdel." Technically, although the Bolshevik party changed into the Communist party in March 1918, for variety I will use both terms. The Bolshevik or Communist party will be capitalized when employed independently as "the Party" or as part of a title, for instance, 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. In most instances, however, "party" like "soviet" will be in the lower case.

<sup>2</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.175.

<sup>3</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, ll.175-6. The co-operative movement was designed primarily to set up agricultural communes and artels; it had weak funding and mixed results in the 1920s, see Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 94.

<sup>4</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, ll.175-6.

<sup>5</sup> The woman worker was at Leningrad's Zheliabov textile mill, the male communist was Grigorii Eremeyevich Evdokimov (see opening section of ch.4 n.11 for more biographical details), see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.76 and TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.148.

Oskina's practical request and replacement by Chushaeva was indicative of the nature of Soviet politics in the mid-1920s. Workers were the new ideological paragon while peasants were deemed mired in backwardness. Interestingly, although both women were Zhenotdel delegates, Oskina, the peasant woman, assumed that Zhenotdel existed to provide practical aid while Chushaeva, the woman worker, imagined that Zhenotdel existed as a platform to propagate party policies. Emblematic of confusion throughout the 1920s, almost six years after its creation, Oskina and Chushaeva highlighted that there was no consensus on Zhenotdel's mandate. In addition, the kerchief ritual symbolized how Zhenotdel wanted to cement its loyalty to the Party and literally "tie" male communists to the cause of Zhenotdel. This necessity grew particularly from how Zhenotdel was structured. In 1919, each Zhenotdel was created by attaching it to the Bolshevik party at every level from Moscow's Central Committee Secretariat, to all districts throughout Soviet Russia. These brief exchanges punctuate how this dissertation is grounded in local archival material, but the nature of these sources is revealing of Zhenotdel as a whole. This study is largely an analysis of the Petrograd/ Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel in the 1920s.

#### Delegates and Delegates' Meetings:

To ensure Russian women supported the Party, Zhenotdel devised a system of delegates and delegates' meetings. Nationally, according to some estimates, around two million delegates served in Zhenotdel.<sup>6</sup> In a hierarchal pyramidal structure, delegates were

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<sup>6</sup> According to P.M. Chirkov, across the Soviet Union, there were 95,000 delegates in 1922, 620,000 in

supported by a much smaller number of supervisory workers called organizers. In turn, the organizers reported to Zhenotdel staff members. Critically, each Zhenotdel was attached to its corresponding party organization: for example, the district Zhenotdel to the district Bolshevik party organization and so on. Throughout the 1920s, an uneasy tension existed between Zhenotdel and the Party. Zhenotdel leaders who were Communist party members often manifested divided loyalties. In addition, jurisdictional overlap was the norm because both the Party and Zhenotdel gave instructions. Complicating matters further, Zhenotdel lacked financial autonomy. Zhenotdel was either funded in a circuitous route through Agit-Prop,<sup>7</sup> or through its party committee. Across the 1920s, the Party reduced its financial commitment to Zhenotdel and compelled an increasing reliance on unpaid delegates.

The delegate system was an elaborate apprenticeship to train women primarily in the soviets, trade unions, factories, educational facilities, hospitals and food services.<sup>8</sup>

Delegates were also encouraged to join numerous collective organizations, especially the Party. Most women served three or six-month terms as delegates and many served

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1927 and 2.2 million in 1932, *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR (1917-1937gg.)* (Moscow: Mysl', 1978), 93. Krupskaja estimated that 10,000, 000 Soviet women passed through the delegates' meetings before they were abolished in 1935, figure quoted in R.C. Elwood, *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 247. Mark Von Hagen argues that army service became "a key component of citizenship and political careers in the new state" and essentially the "School of Revolution" in *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 331. Few women joined the Red Army in the 1920s, and for women, their "School of Revolution," was Zhenotdel.

<sup>7</sup> The agitation and propaganda section (agitprop *otdel*) dates from the 1920 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

<sup>8</sup> Chirkov, *Reshenie*, 93. For an actual delegate's card see, TsGAIPD, f.24, op.8, d.3, l.58. For an indication of the delegates' system's importance see; I. Armand, *Stat'i rechi, pis'ma* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1975), 136-137; and Aleksandra Kollontai *Selected Articles and Speeches* (New York: International Publishers, 1984), 166.



multiple terms. Zhenotdel delegates combined their internship with delegates' meetings. In the city, delegates' meetings were small gatherings of delegates and women which ideally took place twice a month. Delegates also heard women workers' complaints on the factory floor and helped resolve conflict. In the countryside, delegates' meetings were often conducted sporadically with gaps of several months. In delegates' meetings, the delegate's trainee experience would also be "shared" with non-delegates to foster leadership skills in the delegate, and to encourage patterning among those listening.

Delegates were also encouraged to participate in Zhenotdel conferences and campaigns. Officially, these conferences were frequently designated "non-party" and were held at the district to the national level. Conferences were one space where women challenged prescribed roles and expectations. Zhenotdel participated in a staggering plethora of campaigns for delegate and public consumption. Most campaigns during the 1920s were ubiquitous: campaigns against alcoholism, homelessness, illiteracy, domestic abuse, hooliganism, prostitution, religion, epidemics, and even vermin! Targeted campaigns during the civil war and its immediate aftermath urged delegates, for instance, in *subbotniki* ("volunteer" work days) to raise funds for orphans or famine victims. The First Five-Year Plan marked the expectation that delegates would support numerous campaigns on: rationalization, productivity, labour discipline, waste, truancy, promotees, and the preparation of collectivization. Significantly, the prescriptive ideal for most Zhenotdel delegates was to complete internships, conduct campaigns, attend delegates' meetings and participate in conferences, on a voluntary (unpaid) basis.

Despite an official discourse of equality, many Communist party members were not committed to increasing women's participation in the public sphere. From the factory floor to the field, women's roles were often carefully circumscribed. Many organizational questions plagued Zhenotdel and spoke to broader issues about what type of society should be created in the 1920s. Should delegates be selected primarily as a "vanguard" teaching and modelling for other women? Or, should delegates be chosen from the most "backward" layer because these women required the most "self-improvement?"<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, delegates were often in the unenviable position of being "interns," yet expected to manifest exemplary modelling for other women. Not only did the entire existence of Zhenotdel question proletarian unity, but as Zhenotdel evolved and organized more women, the diversity of women's work and lives, also questioned female unity.

In a Bolshevik state predicated on class, Zhenotdel was an uncomfortable reminder of the failure to unite all proletarians. Paradoxically, the better Zhenotdel did its job, and the more women it organized, the more likely the charge of "feminism" could be levied. In addition, did peasant women and women workers share common goals and aspirations? Even among urban women, did housewives and women workers have a common set of interests which would sufficiently bind them to Zhenotdel? To overcome these, and

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, as Lenin famously put it, women's "backwardness and her lack of understanding for her husband's revolutionary ideals act as a drag on his fighting spirit, on his determination to fight. They are like tiny worms, gnawing, and undermining imperceptibly." Lenin as quoted in conversation with Clara Zetkin, in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 698. Another key issue was: should all delegates be treated equally and cover identical topics in their delegates' meetings? Or, should the material be altered and, if so, by how much when specific groups (housewives, peasants, and so on) were targeted?

many more challenges, Zhenotdel required a great deal of support. Instead, archival access has confirmed that activists at all levels of the organization faced inconsistent funding, party ambivalence, and fears its organization would be disbanded. This dissertation argues that how Zhenotdel functioned at the local level, revealed that the organization as a whole was riven with multiple and conflicting tensions. Zhenotdel was unworkable.

### Sources

My central argument has benefited immensely from access to two archival repositories. Significantly, this is the first study to analyse extensively Zhenotdel fonds in St.Peterburg's former party archive (TsGAIPD SPb). It is also the first work to analyse thoroughly Zhenotdel's Leningrad-based *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* and shift the emphasis away from Moscow-centric Zhenotdel journals. Without archival access, Zhenotdel's theoretical journal, *Kommunistka*, and its mainstream journals, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka*, were the foundation of Western Zhenotdel histories. To expand the source base, these journals were used in a supportive capacity. In Moscow, fonds in the former party archive were culled which related either to Zhenotdel directors, leaders, or to the organization directly.<sup>10</sup> Central Zhenotdel documentation is incomplete especially for the post-1925 period where there are only three dela.<sup>11</sup> This lacuna is compounded by

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<sup>10</sup> RGASPI, (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no Politicheskoi Istorii). It is the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, formerly the archive of the Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism.

<sup>11</sup> In the finding aid only three dela are available for the post-1925 period, f.17, op.10, d.494, d.495 and d.496. Delo 494 covers 1927-28, delo 495, 1927 and delo 496, 1931 and were added to the Zhenotdel fond

the fact that, curiously, Zhenotdel's two last directors Klavdiia Nikolaeva and Aleksandra Artiukhina do not have personal fonds in Moscow.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, however, the former party archives in St.Peterburg have 818 dela in the Zhenotdel fonds, with 317 dela from 1925 onwards, and, unlike Moscow, all the high-level Collegium meetings.<sup>13</sup> Due to the limits at the central level, this dissertation became a study of the Petrograd/ Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel in the 1920s. One key finding of this work is the richness of provincial archival fonds relative to their central archival counterparts.

### Historical Precedents

Zhenotdel's overall creation was the culmination of pre-revolutionary efforts by predominantly Bolshevik women to organize Russian women. Briefly, the Revolution of 1905 had a galvanizing effect on women workers who became involved in strike activity and the workers' movement.<sup>14</sup> However, liberal feminist activity among working-class women provoked some Social Democrats to consider more seriously the efficacy of a

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on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1991. Significantly, the Central Zhenotdel Collegium meetings are not available in this extremely limited supply of dela. For confirmation see N.I. Dubinina, *Istoricheskii opit deiatel'nosti KPSS po razvitiu sotsial'no aktivnosti zhenshchin, 1917-1941* (Moskva, 1983), 16. Overall, this probably explains why Wood's fine work *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997) finishes largely in late 1924 and little space is devoted to the second half of the 1920s taking Zhenotdel to its natural conclusion in January 1930 when it was abolished.

<sup>12</sup> While there are no personal files in the former Moscow party archive for these Zhenotdel directors and Central Committee members, there is a personal file for Klavdiia Nikolaeva at TsGAIPD SPb, see f.1728, d.201890, l.2. As Wood explains in Moscow, one has to wonder at internal zhenotdel matters with Nikolaeva and Artiukhina because we are "[W]ithout data from the archives (which appears conspicuously absent)..." *The Baba and the Comrade*, 210.

<sup>13</sup> The Zhenotdel party files are located in two fonds, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13 and f.24, op. 8 with hundreds of dela in each fond. Personal fonds, unlike in Moscow, were also available for more Zhenotdel party members and leaders. Also see Donald J. Raleigh promoting regional repositories in "Doing Soviet History: The Impact of the Archival Revolution," *Russian Review* 61, no.1 (January 2002): 16-24.

<sup>14</sup> Rose Glickman, *Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), chs.5-6.

separate organization for women.<sup>15</sup> With the onset of the Great War, women entered the workforce in greater numbers.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, in 1914 the two wings of the Social Democratic Party, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, decided to capitalize on this new growth by publishing their respective women's newspapers, *Rabotnitsa (Woman Worker)* and *Golos rabotnitsy (The Woman Worker's Voice)*.<sup>17</sup> Both were short lived. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik's *Rabotnitsa* was revived in 1917 and its staff was instrumental in organizing the Petrograd Conference of Working Women in November 1917, the First All-Russian Congress of Women Workers and Peasants in November 1918, and Zhenotdel itself in 1919.

The First All-Russian Congress of Women Workers and Peasants was Zhenotdel's founding congress and set some of the parameters for organizing women. Zhenotdel leader, Konkordia Samoilova, emphasized the role of the women's sections as "technical groups working under the control of our Party organizations."<sup>18</sup> Articulating a tension

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<sup>15</sup> Linda Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 171. Barbara Clements argues that "Kollontai viewed these initiatives with alarm, for she perceived that the feminists were moving away from what she judged to be their narrow bourgeois concerns toward appeals to the working class [and]...Such activity had the potential for weakening the appeal of the Social Democrats," in *Bolshevik Feminist: The life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 44-46. In 1907, Kollontai established the Society of Mutual Aid for Women Workers, a club modelled on the feminist workers' club organized a year earlier.

<sup>16</sup> Overall, in Russian industry the proportion of women rose to 43.2 per cent in 1917, as quoted in S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 23. Also see Alfred Meyer, "The Impact of World War 1 on Russian Women's Lives," in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel and Christine D. Worobec (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 208-224; Glickman, *Russian Factory Women*, 104 and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *The Politics of Industrial Mobilization in Russia, 1914-1917* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 154.

<sup>17</sup> For a critical view of Bolshevik organizational efforts and intentions, see Anne Bobroff, "The Bolsheviks and working women, 1905-1920," *Soviet Studies* 26, no.4 (October 1974): 540-567.

<sup>18</sup> K. Samoilova, *Vserossiskoe Soveshchanie i organizatsiia rabotnits* (Moskva: Knigoizdatel'stvo

throughout the 1920s, Samoilova promoted a party “instrumentalist” approach to organizing, while Aleksandra Kollontai, Zhenotdel’s second director, championed the organization’s “lobbyist” role. Accordingly Kollontai wrote that Zhenotdel’s central task was: “to put before the Party and promote in the sphere of Soviet construction those issues which arise...from the peculiarities of the female sex.”<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically, Zhenotdel bound itself because it had to emphasize the “peculiarities of the female sex” to justify its existence but at the same time maintain the fiction that women and men shared identical interests. As Zhenotdel’s first director, Inessa Armand explained: “Women workers do not have specific female tasks, [they] do not have special interests which differ from the interests of the entire proletariat.”<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Armand clarified the linkage between these universal proletarian interests and final victory. As she put it “All interests, all conditions of the liberation of women workers are insolubly tied with the victory of the proletariat, are inconceivable without it. And that victory is inconceivable without their [women’s] participation, without their struggle.”<sup>21</sup> In a narrow sense, Armand was elucidating that Zhenotdel was created to mobilize women for victory in the civil war. When the aforementioned 1918 Congress

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“Kommunist,” 1919), 22. Part of this new militancy was due to how International Women’s Day was commemorated in Russia, see Choi Chatterjee, *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival Culture, and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910-1939* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> A. Kollontai, “Zadachi Otdelov po rabote sredi zhenshchin,” *Kommunistka*, no.6 (November 1920): 3. The entire article is reprinted in Kollontai’s *Izbrannye stat’i i rechi*, 310-313.

<sup>20</sup> I. Armand, “Zadachi rabotnits v Sovetskoi Rossii, (1919)” *Stat’i, rechi, pis’ma* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1975), 67.

<sup>21</sup> Armand, “Zadachi rabotnits,” 86. One of Zhenotdel’s book titles summarizes nicely this idea: *Bez nikh my ne pobedili by: Vospominaniia zhenshchin-uchastnits Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii, grazhdanskoi voiny, i sovetskogo stroitel'stva* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1975).

was convened, *Pravda*'s headline read, "The Mobilization of Women Workers for the Red Front."<sup>22</sup> When Zhenotdel was formally created a year later, the Bolshevik government was at its most vulnerable point in the civil war, with the White leader, General Denikin, only 250 miles from Moscow.<sup>23</sup> In short, military imperatives helped create Zhenotdel, and its creation in the midst of civil war parallels the image of idealism and revolutionary fervor characteristic of war communism. In a broader sense, however, Armand was also emphasizing that a complete victory in creating a truly revolutionary society was only possible with the full participation of men and women.

#### Zhenotdel's Creation and Liquidation

Precisely which men and women created Zhenotdel is contested. Western Zhenotdel scholars would agree with Gail Lapidus who argues that "the same small group of female activists who had been prominent in prewar efforts to organize women workers - particularly Kollontai, Armand, Krupskaya and Nikolaeva - now played a decisive role in winning official assent to the creation of new organizational mechanisms [Zhenotdel] for the mobilization of women."<sup>24</sup> Carol Eubanks Hayden narrows the group of Bolshevik women down to Kollontai who was "almost singlehandedly responsible for the organization of Zhenotdel."<sup>25</sup> This interpretation is untenable on two grounds: first,

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<sup>22</sup> *Pravda*, 15 November 1918, 1.

<sup>23</sup> This point is widely held, see John Bradley, *Civil War in Russia, 1917-1920* (London: B.T. Batsford Limited, 1975), 171; Evan Mawdsley in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, ed. Harold Shukman (New York: Basil Blackwell Limited, 1988), 146 and Richard Sakwa, *Soviet Communists in Power: A Study of Moscow during the Civil War, 1918-21* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 22.

<sup>24</sup> Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 63.

<sup>25</sup> Carol Eubanks Hayden, "Feminism and Bolshevism: The *Zhenotdel* and the Politics of Women's

Kollontai was absent from Moscow for five months prior to the decision to create the new department; and, second, if any single woman was responsible, the credit lies with Armand, not Kollontai.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Barbara Evans Clements, despite being Kollontai's biographer, champions Armand's seminal role in the creation of Zhenotdel:

[Armand was] astute enough to settle first for the commissions and allow the party leadership to become used to that idea. Then, when the commissions proved unable to mobilize large numbers of women, she could argue for a woman's bureau on the German model, with headquarters in Moscow and a hierarchy of provincial and local departments which would be more directly under control of the central section than the commissions had been. Inessa had gotten the Zhenotdel established and she was well suited to the delicate task of building it.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, Ralph Carter Elwood dismisses the role of all the Bolshevik women, and postulates a unique interpretation that a "more plausible explanation for the establishment of Zhenotdel was that it was a product of organizational housekeeping by the Central Committee itself."<sup>28</sup> In other words, Zhenotdel was only one of nine sections reorganized into the Central Committee Secretariat in September 1919.<sup>29</sup> The historiographical controversy over who actually created Zhenotdel is overdrawn. Significantly, "[W]ho precisely created it is impossible to determine from the available evidence."<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, an examination of Zhenotdel party archival records in Moscow and in St.Petersburg does not settle the controversy. New archival evidence

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Emancipation in Russia, 1917-1930," (PhD diss., University of California, 1979), 110.

<sup>26</sup> In Kollontai's "absence, the party leadership had authorized the conversion of women's commissions into a woman's bureau, the Section for Work Among Women, *Zhenotdel*," in *Bolshevik Feminist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 163. Elwood specifies that "Kollontai herself spent the five months preceding the decision to set up Zhenotdel in Ukraine occupied with other matters," *Inessa Armand*, 241.

<sup>27</sup> Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 241. Similarly, see Lapidus' discussion of the parallels between the creation and reorganization of Zhenotdel and the *Evseksiia* (Jewish Section) in *Women in Soviet Society*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 241.

<sup>30</sup> Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 242.



reveals that it was the Central Committee's decision, over the objections of provincial Zhenotdel leaders,<sup>31</sup> to liquidate the organization in 1930. Nevertheless, this does not prove it was the Central Committee's exclusive decision to create Zhenotdel in 1919. The best hypothesis is that a small group of Bolshevik women lobbied the Central Committee to clarify the status of a plethora of women's organizations; however, the final form was determined by the Central Committee leaders. As noted, in the fall of 1919, this form was a women's section or zhenotdel, attached to the Bolshevik party at every level from Moscow's Central Committee to all districts throughout Soviet Russia.

Ascertaining who created Zhenotdel is linked intrinsically to why this organization was formed. In general, those historians who argue that a small group of prominent Bolshevik women created Zhenotdel contend that this organization had a broad mandate to fully emancipate Russian women while those who argued that the Central Committee created Zhenotdel believe in a narrow mandate to mobilize Russian women for Soviet rule. Was Zhenotdel a lobby group for Russian women or a mouthpiece for the Bolshevik party and fledgling Soviet state? In fact, many Zhenotdel leaders genuinely believed they could serve faithfully both the Bolshevik party and Russian women. In sum, historiographical debates focus primarily on why Zhenotdel was created and the scope of its mandate.

Consequently, there is no consensus on how long Zhenotdel should have lasted. Ideally,

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<sup>31</sup> See the section entitled "Liquidating Zhenotdel and the Collectivization of Agriculture," in chapter 5.

women would not require a separate organizational apparatus from men, and the New Economic Policy (NEP), like Zhenotdel, to paraphrase Lenin's words would "obviously not be for very long."<sup>32</sup> As early as 1922, a Zhenotdel thesis on emancipation, specified that "when women become more conscious and participate more actively in soviet construction, then zhenotdel, and separate work among women, will no longer be necessary."<sup>33</sup> Zhenotdel was designed as a temporary expedient. Thus, Soviet historians argued that Zhenotdel's mandate was completed by 1930, while Western historians argue that women had not reached the same level of emancipation as men and the organization was liquidated prematurely. Provincial Zhenotdel leaders revealed in archival records in late 1929 that Zhenotdel was disbanded too early. As two Western historians put it, the "abolition of Zhenotdel was clearly a political act that had little bearing on the level of emancipation which Russian women had achieved by 1930"<sup>34</sup> and Zhenotdel was "closed down by Stalin in 1930 on the fatuous grounds that its work had been accomplished."<sup>35</sup> Western historians have employed a tone of regret at its abolition referring to "the end of the Proletarian Women's Movement,"<sup>36</sup> or writing that "the era of Bolshevik feminism had ended."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As quoted in Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 28. Tellingly, there is no consensus in Lenin's writings and historical interpretations as to how long NEP 'should' have lasted. See Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*.

<sup>33</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12892, l.46.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Stites, *Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism, 1860-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 344.

<sup>35</sup> Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 275.

<sup>36</sup> Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 344.

<sup>37</sup> Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 273. Similarly, Wendy Goldman discusses how the "abolition of the Zhenotdel in 1930 eliminated an important center of ideas and activities promoting women's interests." *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge

It is precisely the feminist and leftist values that have captivated many Western historians of Zhenotdel. However, echoing Eric Hobsbawm, “Reading the desires of the present into the past, or in technical terms, anachronism, is the most common and convenient technique of creating a history satisfying the need of what Benedict Anderson has called ‘imagined communities’ ....”<sup>38</sup> The foremost historian of Zhenotdel, Carol Eubanks Hayden, in a clear example of projection, writes that “Zhenotdel was the first major historical experiment in effecting complete equality between the sexes which was officially endorsed by any modern nation. It is thus important for women everywhere who are interested in improving their own lives to understand how the Zhenotdel was organized, what were its programs and goals, and what were the reasons for its successes and failures.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, studying the 1920s as opposed to the 1930s, gives the historian an opportunity to write about a kinder, gentler form of communism. Hayden argues that the “episode of the Zhenotdel provides a new and surprising view of the human and socially idealistic face of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, which has for decades been obscured by the tyranny and repression of the Stalin and post-Stalin periods....”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Beatrice Farnsworth in her biography of the Zhenotdel director, Aleksandra Kollontai, contends that one aim in her book is “to persuade the informed

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University Press, 1993), 338; Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 221; Carol Eubanks Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 391 and Wendy Goldman’s detailed discussion in *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin’s Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51-56.

<sup>38</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “The Historian between the Quest for the Universal and the Quest for Identity,” special issue, “The Social Responsibility of the Historian,” *Diogenes* no.168 (1994): 59. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 392.

<sup>40</sup> Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 392.

reader that early Bolshevism differed qualitatively from later Stalinism.”<sup>41</sup>

### Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter aims to highlight how Zhenotdel activists had to operate in a continual atmosphere of reduced personnel, party ambivalence, and fears its organization would be liquidated when trying to organize Russian women in the 1920s. Political and organizational crises were endemic. Zhenotdel struggled to maintain its personnel at all levels. For instance, Aleksandra Kollontai’s experiences as Zhenotdel’s director and her dismissal, were a microcosm of the organization’s multiple challenges throughout the 1920s. These archival debates reveal that the party leadership and key organizations were fundamentally divided on: should Zhenotdel organize women, and, if so, who should be permitted to join. Mirroring the ambiguity at the highest level, the provincial Agit-Prop would periodically assume control over provincial Zhenotdels to organize women. Naturally, this questioned the need for both a separate Zhenotdel at the provincial level, and with reduced responsibilities, at the central level too. In addition, Zhenotdel had to continually prove its proletarian credentials from the charges that it was performing “feminist” work and defend its constituency. Throughout the 1920s, this multi-layered uncertainty eroded both the organization’s credentials and Zhenotdel activists’ confidence.

Chapter two is an analysis of Zhenotdel’s role in combating unemployment during the

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<sup>41</sup> Beatrice Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), xiii.

New Economic Policy (NEP), the single largest crisis facing Russian urban women in the 1920s. Here archival research reveals acrimonious and gendered interpretations of the nature of female unemployment between various party and state officials. Zhenotdel leaders wrongly assumed that Bolshevik factory managers and trade unionists wanted more women in the workplace.

In chapter three, two groups of urban women are examined simultaneously, housewives and prostitutes, because both were to be brought out of the private into more public, and acceptable, forms of production. Zhenotdel, for ideological reasons, was slow to realize the potential of housewives, the largest sector of the urban population. From especially 1925 onwards, the organization did modify its rhetoric and embrace housewives as delegates in its journals and campaigns. Significantly, unpaid housewife delegates were an integral part of the Zhenotdel delegate system in the 1920s and this anticipates the wife-activist (*obshchestvennitsa*) movement of voluntary social service work in the middle to late 1930s. Organizing prostitutes generally followed broader political patterns and more sympathy was manifested during NEP, with high unemployment, and less sympathy during the First Five-Year Plan when more work was available to women.

In chapter four, again Zhenotdel was determined to bring women from the “private” to the “public” and organize the largest overall group, peasant women, and turn them into more acceptable Soviet citizens. Zhenotdel, like its party and state counterparts, was essentially an urban project convinced that the Russian peasantry was a repository of

religious prejudice, backwardness, darkness and a lack of “consciousness.”

Nonetheless, archival material, in conference transcripts and to a lesser degree, in field reports, give us insights into the lives of peasant women and the Zhenotdel project.

Lastly, in the social hierarchy, the Bolshevik paragon was the factory worker. This chapter will offer some clues about how women workers were participating and integrating into the broader Soviet project in both the NEP and early First Five-Year Plan eras through a discussion of Leningrad workers’ clubs. In balance, the factory space was integral to women’s organizing in the 1920s. Women workers were more active, socially engaged and skilled when they predominated in the workforce. When the First Five-Year Plan was introduced, sources highlight labour strife and manifold generational and gender tensions on the factory floor from the unemployed to the female worker promotees.

The inclusion of archival material both challenges and confirms Zhenotdel’s historical record. For instance, the inclusion of the voices of Russian women themselves does challenge stereotypes of the 1920s. Zhenotdel’s strained relationship with key organizations and agencies is largely confirmed by archival access. While the archival debates might focus narrowly on, for example, unemployment or prostitution, officials were often articulating their broader vision for NEP society. There were competing visions for NEP society, and Zhenotdel officials were largely unable to negotiate the importance of their organization. Zhenotdel was unworkable and this points to the limits of the social and cultural revolution in the 1920s.

## Chapter 1

### “Zhenotdel is not a Women’s Organization”: The Politics of Feminism and Communism”

In 1923, a letter by Maria Pozdeeva, head of the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel, explained “that zhenotdel is not a women’s organization to defend the rights of women, but a section of the party apparatus for work among backward women workers and peasant masses.”<sup>1</sup> This quotation encapsulates the multiple and conflicting tensions prevalent in this chapter and throughout the dissertation: anxiety about feminism, its status as a party organization, its proper constituency and latent fears over liquidation. Pozdeeva provided an unusual disclaimer that Zhenotdel was not a “women’s organization for all women” because of a concern that her organization would be labelled “feminist.” Pozdeeva affirmed that Zhenotdel was a “section of the party apparatus,” but most of the 1920s pointed to profound tensions between operating an organization exclusively for women, in a state organized along class-based principles. In effect, Zhenotdel virtually did become a “women’s organization for all women” because Zhenotdel organized a wide range of women: unemployed workers, housewives and peasants. Nevertheless, Pozdeeva emphasized “backward women workers and peasant masses” as Zhenotdel’s natural constituency to defend the organization’s proletarian credentials and decrease the likelihood of liquidation.

The broader significance of both this chapter and dissertation is, because there was so

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<sup>1</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46. See Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 107-113, for

little consensus on these major organizational issues, Zhenotdel activists were directly hampered in their practical endeavours. This chapter will open with an examination of Petrograd city Zhenotdel delegates and their participation rates in meetings, to suggest a new bottom up way to rationalize Zhenotdel's creation. Some of the personnel challenges Zhenotdel faced will then be addressed. Symptomatic of this ongoing issue was Aleksandra Kollontai's experience in Politbiuro and Orgbiuro meetings<sup>2</sup> and her convoluted dismissal as Zhenotdel director. These meetings showed multiple tensions and mirrored future conflicts. Kollontai wanted to broaden Zhenotdel's constituency by convening the Congress of Eastern Women<sup>3</sup> and this anticipated future debates over organizing both unemployed workers and housewives. The highest trade union body, the Central Council of Trade Unions, (VTsSPS) wanted Zhenotdel liquidated and Orgbiuro was indifferent to Zhenotdel's plight. This disconnection with many party members and leading organizations was continued at the provincial level as the Leningrad Zhenotdel struggled with Agit-Prop to maintain its institutional and jurisdictional integrity. In the broader context of anxieties about NEP, graphic illustrations of Zhenotdel's "proper" constituency occurred on multiple levels in 1923. Publicly, leading Bolsheviks displayed fears about the Party's relationship to feminism in the press and privately, Pozdeeva

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some of the theoretical barriers involved in organizing women among Social Democrats and Communists.

<sup>2</sup> In January 1919, the Central Committee established the Political Bureau (Politbiuro) and Organizational Bureau (Orgbiuro); the former was responsible for political matters and the latter for organizational ones.

<sup>3</sup> The liberation of the so-called Eastern women was the Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist women of the non-western borderlands of Caucasia, the Volga, and Central Asia. A specific Zhenotdel Congress of Eastern Women was deemed a vital rallying point. As Shoshana Keller argues: it was a "complex effort that encompassed not only unveiling by eliminating the practices of arranged marriage, bride-price, child marriage, the seclusion of women from public life, polygyny, and other customs," *To Moscow, Not Mecca: the Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 115. Also see the seminal, Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and*



intervened to chasten a local Zhenotdel leader who wanted a broader, more inclusive constituency for the organization. Paradoxically, the better Zhenotdel did its job, and the more types of women it organized, the more likely the charge of “feminism” could be levelled. Additionally, under the guise of the campaign of rationalisation the Party severely cut the provincial organization’s resources in 1928. Throughout the 1920s, party ambivalence was reflected in not matching the funding to meet increasing Zhenotdel’s tasks and broadening its constituency. Zhenotdel’s intertwined crises of liquidationism, constituency, feminism and party identity confronted the organization with ongoing and multiple challenges.

### Questionnaires and Personnel

Historians have traditionally focussed on the reasons why Zhenotdel was originally created in 1919 by examining the ideological climate, the central leadership and a small coterie of Bolshevik women. But what was the response of Russian urban women themselves? Did they “require” a separate organizational apparatus? The following evidence comes from unpublished Zhenotdel questionnaires and provides eloquent and colourful testimonies that suggest many women were reticent about participating in the new Soviet order. In January 1920 the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel began to issue detailed questionnaires to all of its Petrograd city members. Interestingly, one question asked the women if they spoke up at meetings, and, if not, why not. In total, 155 women responded to this question and only thirteen, or 8.4 per cent, indicated that they spoke up

at meetings.<sup>4</sup> Not only did the overwhelming majority not speak up at meetings, they chronicled their reluctance in their own words.

Some women considered that they did not have the correct political background or work experience to participate. Fascinatingly, even as early as January 1920, several women indicated that they did not speak up because they were not Bolshevik party members.<sup>5</sup> A handful of women replied that their particular occupation held them back from talking publicly; they responded, “No, unskilled labourer,”<sup>6</sup> another “No, work at a sewing shop,”<sup>7</sup> yet another, “No, basic profession a milliner.”<sup>8</sup> Many women responded that they lacked work experience. Butkevich, a twenty-two year-old nurse wrote, “I only have just begun to work”<sup>9</sup> a sentiment echoed by Gorkagova, also twenty-two, while a typist considered herself “unprepared.”<sup>10</sup> Only two women specifically responded that the reason they did not speak up was because they were “semi-literate.”<sup>11</sup>

Others responded that they lacked time or were not in the habit of making time for meetings. Antopova, a thirty-four year-old widow with four children, answered, “No, I

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<sup>4</sup> In total, 323 women completed questionnaires in Petrograd city but only 155 answered the aforementioned question, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654 and 12655. The types of meetings were not clarified, but were probably agitational or factory committee meetings.

<sup>5</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, ll.16; 17; 36; 141. Each page represents a separate questionnaire and woman.

<sup>6</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.38.

<sup>7</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.107.

<sup>8</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.146.

<sup>9</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.70.

<sup>10</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.100 and see, l.80.

<sup>11</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, ll.76; 140. Overall, the Petrograd women did not explicitly use a lack of literacy as a reason for not participating.

must take care of the children after work.”<sup>12</sup> Half a dozen women responded that they did not speak up because they had never attended any meetings.<sup>13</sup> For example, Burakova, a hospital cleaning woman, offered an elaborate response, “No, because I was sick and after my sickness I was on holiday.”<sup>14</sup>

Many women’s responses expressed a lack of confidence, a dislike of public speaking and a sense of feeling inarticulate. One eighteen year-old woman wrote, “I do not understand the question”<sup>15</sup> while others expressed a general lack of confidence, “No, I cannot, I do not know how,”<sup>16</sup> or “I cannot”<sup>17</sup> or “No, because I do not know what I must do.”<sup>18</sup> Griekova, a forty year-old postal worker, wrote that she was “indifferent”<sup>19</sup> to public speaking mirrored those more emphatic responses like, “no taste for this matter,”<sup>20</sup> and, “No, I do not like it.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, obviously eager to appear diligent, one woman, a twenty-four year-old print worker, offered helpfully, “No, but I speak up in private conversations!”<sup>22</sup> Several women answered that they were unaccustomed to public speaking and organizational work. Gaeva, a thirty year-old clerk, wrote, “No, because I

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<sup>12</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.3 and see, ll.65; 137.

<sup>13</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, ll.15; 23; 47; 23; 102; and 118.

<sup>14</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.63.

<sup>15</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.19.

<sup>16</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.2.

<sup>17</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.83.

<sup>18</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.138.

<sup>19</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.109.

<sup>20</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.62. Another wrote, “I have no taste for it,” TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.78.

<sup>21</sup> TsGAIPD, SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.96.

<sup>22</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.50.

have never participated in organizations.”<sup>23</sup> The overwhelming majority of women surveyed felt they were too inarticulate to participate in a public forum.<sup>24</sup> Alekseeva, a nineteen year-old seamstress wrote, “I do not have any talent [for public speaking],”<sup>25</sup> another “I do not speak well,”<sup>26</sup> yet another, “I do not know words.”<sup>27</sup> In sum, these sentiments were reiterated constantly: “cannot make speeches,”<sup>28</sup> “no oratory talent,”<sup>29</sup> or “no gift with words.”<sup>30</sup>

Overall, these questionnaires answered by 155 women give the historian a fascinating glimpse into their political “consciousness” and their own words.<sup>31</sup> On balance, fewer than ten percent of the surveyed women spoke up at meetings, and these findings of widespread lack of confidence and inexperience can be extrapolated to suggest that women, from the Bolshevik perspective, did need a separate organization. The assumption, borne out by the questionnaires’ responses, was that the political education of women could be facilitated more effectively through a separate gender organization. It would be Zhenotdel’s very separateness as an organization dedicated wholly to women and still a party organization that would cause profound tensions throughout the 1920s.

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<sup>23</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.102, also see ll.60 and 62.

<sup>24</sup> Ten women expressed a lack of confidence in speaking ability, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, ll.41; 42; 53; 89; 123; 126; 133; 136; 143 and 145.

<sup>25</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.41.

<sup>26</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.53.

<sup>27</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.89.

<sup>28</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.133.

<sup>29</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.126.

<sup>30</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.136. Vangusheva, a twenty year-old clerk, responded, “No, I do not feel I have a talent for agitation,” see TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12654, l.120.

<sup>31</sup> Archival access has broadened the “conversation,” see “[W]e hear only one side of the conversation, what the Bolshevik government wanted women workers and peasants to believe.” Wood, *The Baba and the*

Zhenotdel, like other party organizations, had considerable difficulty keeping qualified personnel.<sup>32</sup> Leading Bolshevik women chose to work in the education department rather than in Zhenotdel.<sup>33</sup> For a variety of reasons, prominent Bolshevik women refused to work in Zhenotdel. Interestingly, Angelica Balabanoff was offered Zhenotdel's directorship in the early 1920s but declined because she considered it a ruse to alienate Kollontai: "the Central Committee had wanted me to substitute for her [Kollontai] in the leadership of the women's movement, thus facilitating the campaign against her and isolating her from the women of the masses."<sup>34</sup> Emma Goldman, Nadezhda Krupskaya, and Elena Stasova all professed a lack of interest in Zhenotdel work.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, Elena Stasova contended that after the Secretariat was reorganized in March 1920, Krestinski offered her a Zhenotdel position, but she responded that "I have no disposition towards this work, and I declined."<sup>36</sup> Many historians have accepted this statement at face value<sup>37</sup> but the archival record reveals that Stasova exercised an integral role in the Petrograd Zhenotdel. Stasova's personal file reveals that the Petrograd Provincial Communist Party assigned her to Zhenotdel work on 17 January 1921, and by

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*Comrade*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> According to Zvi Gitelman "The relatively large numbers of Jews who entered the Party in the 1920s shunned the Evseksiia [Jewish Section] for the more prestigious and promising areas of Communist activity." *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 492. Also see Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Evans Clements, "Baba and Bolshevik: Russian Women and Revolutionary Change," *Soviet Union/Union Sovietique* 12, part 5 (1985): 171.

<sup>34</sup> Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), 251.

<sup>35</sup> See Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 332-334 and Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 46, 79-80.

<sup>36</sup> Elena Stasova *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Mysl'," 1969), 176 and Elena Stasova, *Stranitsy zhizni i bor'by* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1957), 106.

<sup>37</sup> See Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 334; Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 208; and Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 245.

January 1922 she was a member of the Zhenotdel Petrograd Collegium drawing a monthly salary of 13,500 rubles.<sup>38</sup> For a complex set of reasons women resisted Zhenotdel work. Polina Vinogradskaia, who had been helping out at the front during the civil war, was unhappy when re-assigned to less exciting Zhenotdel work and appealed to Zhenotdel director, Inessa Armand, to let her do something else.<sup>39</sup> One Zhenotdel director, Alexandra Artiukhina, argued that women, once promoted, were embarrassed by their “Zhenotdel origins.”<sup>40</sup> According to Konkordia Samoilova, a Zhenotdel leader, Party comrades accused Zhenotdel workers of “feminism,” and many women in the Party looked disparagingly at Zhenotdel work as being “beneath their dignity.”<sup>41</sup> In short, there are many possibilities, but no conclusive evidence, as to why Elena Stasova was deceptive about her Zhenotdel work.

### Kollontai’s Resignation Letters and Nikolaeva’s Thwarted Directorial Debut

This reticence to work in Zhenotdel was compounded by a significant flux in leadership

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<sup>38</sup> See her Lichnaia Registration Card in TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.497563, n.p. All the Petrograd/Leningrad party personal files have no opisi. Moreover, as early as January 1920 Stasova chaired important Zhenotdel conferences and Zhenotdel Collegium meetings, see the stenographic report where Stasova heads a Petrograd Zhenotdel Conference, RGASPI, (16-19 January, 1920), f.17, op.10, d.202, ll.102-192, and 148. Elena Stasova chaired a Petrograd Zhenotdel district and county leaders’ conference (8 February, 1921) filed at, RGASPI, f.17, op.10, d.282, l.23 and numerous Petrograd Zhenotdel Collegium Meetings in TsGAIPD SPb, (24 January, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.1; TsGAIPD SPb, (6 February, 1921), f. 16, op.13, d.12670, l.3; TsGAIPD SPb,(12 February, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.7; TsGAIPD SPb, (15 February, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.9; TsGAIPD SPb, (19 February, 1921), f. 16, op.13, d.12670, l.12; and TsGAIPD SPb (24 February, 1921), f. 16, op.13, d.12670, l.14. Compare the matching signatures in her party card in TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.497563, n.p. TsGAIPD SPb, (1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, ll.11 and 14 with the signature under her photograph on the title page of *Vospominaniia*. Wood also discusses Stasova’s earlier role in Zhenotdel, see *The Baba and the Comrade*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Polina Vinogradskaia, *Sobytiia i pamiatnye vstrechi* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1968), 199.

<sup>40</sup> Alexandra Artiukhina, “Povorot k novomu,” *Kommunistka*, no.14 (1929): 10.

<sup>41</sup> Konkordia Samoilova, *Organizatsionnye zadachi otdelov rabotnits* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe

personnel from late 1920 to early 1922. The director, Inessa Armand, died in September 1920 and Konkordia Samoiloova, in May 1921. After Inessa Armand's death, Aleksandra Kollontai assumed Zhenotdel's directorship but was compromised politically by her involvement in the Workers' Opposition.<sup>42</sup> At some point in late 1921 or early 1922, Kollontai was relieved of her duties as director of Central Zhenotdel. Both the exact timing and reasons for her losing the directorship have been obscure because "Kollontai herself does not tell exactly when and how she lost her position as director of the women's section...."<sup>43</sup> Kollontai's main biographers, Barbara Evans Clements and Beatrice Farnsworth, both admit they do not know exactly when Kollontai was removed from her post; however, they both believe the dismissal was punishment for her involvement in the Workers' Opposition.<sup>44</sup> This linkage between the Workers' Opposition and her dismissal from Zhenotdel's directorship has been the standard Western historical interpretation.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the archival record suggests another more nuanced interpretation because in Kollontai's personnel fond there is both a revealing resignation letter and a letter based on her diary.

The resignation letter is addressed to the Politbiuro and is neither dated nor stamped, but

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izadatel'stvo, 1920), 27-28.

<sup>42</sup> The Workers' Opposition, led by trade unionists, was a group formed within the Bolshevik party in 1920 who deplored the spread of bureaucratization in party and state organs. Significantly, the name Workers' Opposition was coined by Lenin in the course of his attacks on it. See Aleksandra Kollontai's *The Workers' Opposition* (Chicago: 1921) and Sakwa, *Soviet Communists*, 247-60.

<sup>43</sup> Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 182.

<sup>44</sup> Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, 216 and Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai*, 258-59.

<sup>45</sup> Elwood puts it most succinctly, "Kollontai...was fired as Zhenotdel's director in February 1922 for her role in the Workers' Opposition." *Inessa Armand*, 275. Other historians concur: Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 333; Hayden, "Feminism and Bolshevism," 184; Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 181-182;

it was probably written on 13 May, 1921.<sup>46</sup> Three key points are raised. First, the central reason that Kollontai offers her resignation is the failure to convene a promised Congress of Eastern Women. Second, she writes that the executive body of the Trade Unions, the Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS) wants Zhenotdel liquidated. Third, she noted that there was a general campaign orchestrated by leading party organs to undermine Zhenotdel. Kollontai requested that the issue of abolishing the Congress of Eastern Women be addressed in the 14 May Politbiuro meeting.<sup>47</sup> Kollontai wanted Politbiuro discussions about the Congress to occur “without the interference of leading party members” otherwise a damaging public “flare-up threatens to break out at the All-Russian Trade Union Congress.”<sup>48</sup> Overall, trade union hostility towards Zhenotdel has been well documented.<sup>49</sup> Kollontai then chastises primarily the Central Council of Trade Union’s and the Orgbiuro’s lacklustre support. As she puts it bluntly, the Politbiuro must seriously consider the consequences of “VTsSPS’s inopportune question of Zhenotdel’s liquidation,” and furthermore this question “is not receiving a needed rebuff by Orgbiuro.”<sup>50</sup> Encapsulating tensions throughout the decade, Kollontai warned that the “campaign against Zhenotdel [has] already brought disorganization in zhenotdel work and that to deprive Zhenotdel RKP (b) of influence and authority in the present critical

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Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, 216 and Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai*, 258-59.

<sup>46</sup> RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1. Kollontai discusses issues raised in a 12 May meeting which she wants readdressed in a 14 May meeting.

<sup>47</sup> RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1.

<sup>48</sup> RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1.

<sup>49</sup> Stites argues that, “under the banner of anti-feminism, the leaders called for the abolition of Zhenotdel. This was partly anger over jurisdictional overlap - a common cause of inter-organizational friction in those years; but at a more menacing level, it reflected rank-and-file workers' hostility to female competition in the labor market.” *Women’s Liberation*, 341-42. See Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 116-19 and 166-69.

<sup>50</sup> RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1.



moment is the greatest mistake when our party needs the strength of the entire party apparatus.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, Kollontai’s final sentence read that “I consider this my resignation notice as director of TsK RKP (b) Zhenotdel [because of ] this kind of attitude towards Zhenotdel on behalf of leading party organizations.”<sup>52</sup> If Kollontai actually resigned in May 1921, it would fundamentally challenge the historiography. It would suggest both a new timeline and rationale for her departure, and no explicit linkage to the Workers’ Opposition in the spring of 1922.<sup>53</sup> Presumably, this archival letter was not published by Soviet authorities because it revealed acrimonious leadership relations.

Further acrimony and another resignation threat was levelled 26 August 1921, in a Kollontai letter based on her diary excerpts. Fascinatingly, the letter revealed that Lenin, Shliapnikov and Kollontai supported a Congress of Eastern Women in these Politbiuro and Orgbiuro meetings, while Molotov and Stalin did not. In addition, this document provides a rare, unpublished glimpse into Soviet leaders’ attitudes towards Zhenotdel because, as the historian Richard Stites puts it, “how the leadership divided over the issue has never become public record.”<sup>54</sup>

In the following excerpt Kollontai wonders why the Congress of Eastern Women was

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<sup>51</sup> RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1.

<sup>52</sup> RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1. Kollontai in a footnote forwarded a “request that besides myself, Comrade Kasparova, who is responsible for organizing a Congress of Eastern Women, attend the politbiuro meeting.” RGASPI, (1921), f.134, op.1, d.329, l.1.

<sup>53</sup> Clement’s argues that in “late January or early February 1922 Kollontai received the news that she had been removed as head of the Zhenotdel [and Lenin’s] tolerance toward her [Kollontai] ended when, in early 1922, the news arrived that she had sent her pamphlet, *The Workers’ Opposition*, abroad to be published by socialists critical of the Bolsheviks.” *Bolshevik Women*, 228.

cancelled: “I object passionately. ‘Why did the Orgbiuro consent?’ V. I. Lenin smiled, a tired smile. ‘What is to be done? We [are] often wise after the fact.’”<sup>55</sup> Kollontai elaborated that “I protest, I speak about the disorganization, which has an effect on the work of Zhenotdel etc...Lenin now listened attentively...I was told that Lenin reproached Molotov, but despite that, during voting the issue failed.”<sup>56</sup> Kollontai was informed that the voting “was very acrimonious” and added that she and Shliapnikov “[were] pained at the results.”<sup>57</sup> She revealed that, “I argued with Molotov, I even threatened to resign [over the cancellation.]”<sup>58</sup> This suggests although Kollontai tendered her resignation in May 1921, she was still Zhenotdel’s director in August 1921. Old frictions continued because, as she further elaborated “[W]e often saw that the Politbiuro often met with the Central Trade Union. I did not like these types of people.”<sup>59</sup> Symptomatic of Zhenotdel’s low priority throughout the 1920s, she explained that although “V. Il’ich [Lenin] was the chairman” the report discussing the Congress was “only five minutes!”<sup>60</sup> Kollontai then divulged, “Lenin thinks clearly about other

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<sup>54</sup> Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 342.

<sup>55</sup> It was thanks to Barbara Allen and her doctoral research on Shliapnikov, [“Worker, Trade Unionist, Revolutionary: A Political Biography of Alexander Shliapnikov, 1905-1922.” Indiana, 2001] that I secured this valuable document RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.25. The letter is a synthesis of Zhenotdel’s history with leading party figures and organizations based on selections from Kollontai’s diary.

<sup>56</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.25.

<sup>57</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.25.

<sup>58</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26. Nevertheless, there are instances where Molotov recognized the “new work conditions” [NEP] and as Secretary of TsK RKP co-signed instructions “to strengthen [the] Zhenotdel apparatus, improve the qualifications of its workers” and so forth, see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 November, 1921), f.16, op. 13, d.12666, l.110.

<sup>59</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26.

<sup>60</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26. Kollontai explained her dislike to the pivotal year of 1917, “Their leader [VTsSPS] Khipchuk I remembered in 1917 how I fought with him in the Petrograd Soviet,” see RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26.

matters, and he looks tired.”<sup>61</sup> She recounts Stalin’s position against the Congress of Eastern Women:

‘What for? Why drag women of the veil here? We will have too many problems to deal with. The husbands would protest. It’s too early. Who wants their affairs to be examined?’<sup>62</sup>

Stalin displayed clearly both a conservative and pragmatic attitude that a Congress of Eastern Women was premature, potentially dangerous, and could highlight Soviet problems. Although Stalin wrote rarely about women in the 1920s, the aforementioned opinion is consistent with his published, rather paternalistic views.<sup>63</sup> Kollontai’s pointed response reveals her frustration at the decision-making process and Zhenotdel’s general lack of respect:

In the winter we planned three times to have an Eastern Congress [of Women] and three times it was cancelled, in agreement with Orghiuro, and I was not informed, and Zhenotdel was not notified of the cancellation!<sup>64</sup>

Overall, the combination of these letters (resignation and diary-based letters) highlight the divisiveness of convening a Congress of Eastern Women and suggest that this contributed to Kollontai’s resignation. Ultimately, it is unknown if Kollontai resigned temporarily. The more likely scenario is that she attempted to use the threat of resignation (twice) as leverage in the summer of 1921. In any event, the distinct possibility exists that lobbying for the Congress of Eastern Women isolated Kollontai

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<sup>61</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26.

<sup>62</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26. See especially Marianne Kemp, “Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s,” *International Journal of the Middle East Studies* 34 (2002): 263-278 and Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> See I. Stalin, “K piatoi godovshchine pervogo s’ezda rabotnits i krest’ianok,” *Kommunistka* no. 11 (November 1923), 1 and I. Stalin, “Rabotnitsy i krest’ianki, pomnite i vpolniaite zavety Il’icha,” *Kommunistka*, no.1 (January 1925):1.

further, and contributed to her dismissal. She still remained actively involved in Central Zhenotdel meetings and work until the end of the year. The archival record lists her as the chair in a number of Zhenotdel meetings concerning women and the legal system and the International Women's Secretariat in late 1921.<sup>65</sup> In December 1921, Kollontai was working diligently as is apparent in one document informing Petrograd Zhenotdel members that they can call her in her Moscow apartment from 10 p.m. until 1 a.m. in the morning!<sup>66</sup>

While Kollontai was fulfilling her directorial duties, a series of meetings held by the Central Committee Secretariat, Orgbiuro and Politbiuro was considering replacing Kollontai with Klavdiia Nikolaeva. The protocols of these meetings are found in Klavdiia Nikolaeva's personal party file in St.Petersburg.<sup>67</sup> On 3 December, 1921 the Central Committee Secretariat confirmed the appointment of Nikolaeva as Zhenotdel director and sent the application for confirmation to the Orgbiuro.<sup>68</sup> On 5 December, 1921 the Orgbiuro confirmed Nikolaeva's appointment and mandated that she leave for

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<sup>64</sup> RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26.

<sup>65</sup> The International Women's Secretariat dates from the 1907 Second International's Stuttgart meeting that required all socialist parties to fight for women's political rights. This body gradually saw its stature and autonomy erode and was effectively dissolved by 1926. These circulars were Central Zhenotdel meetings, headed by Kollontai, and sent to Petrograd Zhenotdel, see TsGAIPD SPb, (25 November, 1921), f.16, op.13, d. 12784, ll.53; TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12784, l.71; and TsGAIPD SPb, (12 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12784, l.72. The Protocols of Central Zhenotdel meetings in 1921 are incomplete because none are available between 9 September 1921 to December 1921 in the proper delo, see RGASPI, (1921), f.17, op.10, d.54.

<sup>66</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (12 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12784, l.72.

<sup>67</sup> See Protokol No. 109 Secretariat TsK RKP (b), (3 December, 1921), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.2; Protokol Orgbiuro TsK RKP (b), (5 December, 1921), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.3; Protokol No.123 Secretariat, TsK RKP (b), (6 January, 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.5; and Protokol No.89 Politburo TsK RKP (b), (12 January, 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.6. There is no personal file of Klavdiia Nikolaeva located in RGASPI.

Moscow within the week.<sup>69</sup> On 6 January, 1922 the Central Committee Secretariat urged that “all measures be implemented quickly to arrange for Nikolaeva to go to Moscow [and] be at the Central Committee’s disposal on 12 January.”<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, in the space of a week, Nikolaeva’s new appointment was rescinded. On 12 January, 1922 the Politbiuro decreed, maddeningly without a single word of explanation, “to leave Comrade K. Nikolaeva in Petrograd.”<sup>71</sup>

Along with Kollontai’s departure in early 1922, Zhenotdel’s priority would also be compromised by the fact, that the women who later assumed Zhenotdel’s directorship, Sofia Smidovich, Klavdiia Nikolaeva and Aleksandra Artiukhina, lacked the stature and dynamism of their predecessors.<sup>72</sup> After Kollontai’s departure to a diplomatic posting, the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was convened shortly thereafter in the spring of 1922 and its Party Review Commission reported that Central Zhenotdel had complained it was not being treated equally to other Central Committee departments. Significantly, unlike the other directors, Zhenotdel’s director was asked to sit outside in the hall during Orgbiuro meetings and was only called into the meeting when a point arose concerning work

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<sup>68</sup> Protokol No.109 Secretariat TsK RKP (b), (3 December, 1921), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.2.

<sup>69</sup> Protokol Orgbiuro TsK RKP (b), (5 December, 1921), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.3.

<sup>70</sup> Protokol No.123 Secretariat, TsK RKP (b), (6 January, 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.5.

<sup>71</sup> Protokol No.89 Politbiuro TsK RKP (b), (12 January, 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.201890, l.6. Nikolaeva would eventually assume the directorship in Moscow after Sofia Smidovich.

<sup>72</sup> As Elwood puts it: “the Women's Sections found themselves in a precarious situation made only worse by the loss of their three strong and independent leaders - Armand in 1920, [she died] Samoilova who died of cholera in 1921, and Kollontai who was fired as Zhenotdel's director in February 1922 for her role in the Workers' Opposition. Their successors lacked the influence to stop the gradual erosion of the organization's powers,” in *Inessa Armand*, 275. Also see Clements’ overview of Zhenotdel directors, *Bolshevik Women*, 267-270. Smidovich’s role as Zhenotdel’s director is absent from her personal file in RGASPI, f.151, op.2. Similarly in her husband’s personal file, P.G. Smidovich, there is no Zhenotdel

among women and then she was requested to sit outside again.<sup>73</sup>

### Liquidationism and Agit-Prop

This graphic illustration of a marginalised Zhenotdel at the Party's highest level was duplicated on the provincial level with many party organizations wanting to disband Zhenotdel entirely. Zhenotdel's first major battle with "liquidationism" occurred in the wake of the 1921 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. This fractious Congress passed no general resolution on work among women, and the only mention of Zhenotdel occurred in a resolution on the Party's tasks of agitation and propaganda: "Zhenotdels and departments for work in the village should be included in the system of the agitation departments of the given Party organization."<sup>74</sup> This single sentence had dire consequences for Zhenotdel because many party committees seized upon it as an excuse to subordinate the local Zhenotdel departments to Agit-Prop departments or else to dissolve the women's departments entirely. Consequently, a Zhenotdel report for the year 1921 profiled how the department struggled to maintain its existence. This 1921 report revealed there was an "incorrect understanding by the provincial committees of the point of the resolution of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress...about the inclusion of the Zhenotdels in the general system of the Agit-Prop."<sup>75</sup> More specifically, in "Ufim and Vladimir provinces, Vologda and Kuban-

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correspondence between the couple either, see RGASPI, f.151, op.1. Party authorities did include a copy of Smidovich's medical certificate ratifying his illness and death on 16 April, 1935, see f.151, op.1, d.64.

<sup>73</sup> KPSS, *Odinnadtsati s"ezd RKP (b). Stenograficheskiĭ otchet* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1961), 67.

<sup>74</sup> KPSS, *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuz a rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh*, 2 vols., 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1954), 1.433. Hereafter referred to as *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh*.

<sup>75</sup> *Otchet otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin, za god raboty*, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe

Chernomore oblasti and Turkestan...the departments lost their independence and were turned into sub-sections of the Agit-Prop.”<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, it should not be construed that Zhenotdel leaders were unanimous in maintaining departmental independence. By the spring of 1922, Klavdiia Nikolaeva, Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel Head, attended a Central Zhenotdel Collegium meeting on “organizational questions”<sup>77</sup> in Moscow. Nikolaeva explained “that...because of the New Economic Policy, [she] considers it necessary to merge Zhenotdel with Agit-Prop.”<sup>78</sup> Nikolaeva was alluding to the financial constraints NEP imposed and argued that a merger was the best use of resources.

In Petrograd, at least, Zhenotdel was merged with Agit-Prop but the controversy continued. For example, in September 1922 a meeting was convened with Agit-Prop and Zhenotdel provincial representatives to address Zhenotdel’s organizational status. Interestingly, according to official decrees, the Petrograd Zhenotdel, was supposed to be operating independently but in fact was operating as Agit-Prop’s sub-department. As one Zhenotdel leader, Glebova put it, “Piter’s [Petrograd] organization works as a subdepartment which contradicts the decrees of the 11<sup>th</sup> [Party] Congress and Central Zhenotdel...”<sup>79</sup> The question was whether to continue the “illegal” status of Petrograd Zhenotdel as a subdepartment or to reinstate its independence. Although Pozdeeva, the

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izdatel’stvo, 1921), 46.

<sup>76</sup> *Otchet otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin, za god raboty*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> RGASPI, (March/April 1922), f.17, op.10, d.80, l.5.

<sup>78</sup> RGASPI, (March/April 1922), f.17, op.10, d.80, l.5.

<sup>79</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.2.

Provincial Zhenotdel Head, notes dryly that “opinions were divided,”<sup>80</sup> a heated, lively meeting ensued in which most Zhenotdel representatives supported an independent department. Curiously, while most Zhenotdel representatives voted for independence, most of the recorded comments were supportive of remaining as Agit-Prop’s subdepartment.<sup>81</sup> In short, the Collegium’s minutes were not representative of the actual voting breakdown. The arguments for continued amalgamation were the usual ones levelled at the organization: improved status, increased personnel efficiency and reduction of parallelism. Overall, Zhenotdel work would become general party work. Romanov, head of Petrograd Agit-Prop indicated, “that earlier he was not interested in this work [among women], and now he felt responsible for it, he is interested in contributing in every way possible.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Shitkina, Zhenotdel leader, wanted to increase the number of organizers and to combine general party work under the leadership of Agit-prop “to break the sluggish (*kosnost*) party workers’ attitude toward this[zhenotdel].”<sup>83</sup> Overall, Lebedeva, Zhenotdel Petrograd Collegium member, gave the most detailed avowal of Agit-Prop’s presence:

Let us suppose we take meetings, ... they are organized by much better workers, meetings are livelier, attendance is better, ...this new type of work, abolished a large part of parallelism and gives us an opportunity of seizing broader masses

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<sup>80</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1. According to her personal file, Pozdeeva had become the Head on 27 April, 1922 see f.1728, op. 488425.

<sup>81</sup> The meeting records that 25 people voted for independence but, regrettably, does not give the total number in attendance but during the proceedings 9 people spoke out actively against independence. RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, ll.1-2.

<sup>82</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1.

<sup>83</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1. Maria Mikhailovna Shitkina would be the provincial head of Petrograd/Leningrad Zhenotdel from late 1923 to December 1928, see her personal file TsGAIPD SPb f.1728, d.423296. Gorelova argued that “a subdepartment was the most expedient approach,” see RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1. Grishina was also supportive, see RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1.



because the number of workers has increased.<sup>84</sup>

In a strange turnaround, Lebedeva's Collegium colleague, Notarius "spoke categorically for the necessity of an independent department, because Agitotdel did not lead any work [among women] whatsoever, but at the end [of the meeting] dispatched a note changing her opinion."<sup>85</sup>

In a carefully constructed three-part argument, Sheina, a Zhenotdel Collegium member, opposed vociferously Petrograd Zhenotdel continuing as Agit-Prop's sub-department. First, Sheina argued that it was incorrect to merge with Agit-Prop because a "Central Committee circulated letter instructed contact with *all* departments [my emphasis]."<sup>86</sup> Here, Sheina voiced the sentiment that for Zhenotdel to be involved in general party work it should not be strictly affiliated with one organization, namely Agit-Prop. Second, Sheina argued that, "the sub department lessened the qualifications of the organizers, [because] organizers among women need to be as qualified as in other areas."<sup>87</sup> In other words, Zhenotdel organizers gained expertise from their speciality and doing general Agit-Prop work reduced their qualifications for work among women. Third, Sheina concludes tersely that there were "[N]o results whatsoever from the sub department."<sup>88</sup> To sum up, this heated Collegium meeting revealed that most representatives voted to reassert Zhenotdel's organizational independence.

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<sup>84</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, ll.1-2. Vasil'eva and Lavrent'eva also believed attendance and work quality improved under Agitotdel, RGASPI, (1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, ll.1-2.

<sup>85</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1. Why Notarius switched sides is unknown.

<sup>86</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1.

<sup>87</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1.

Interestingly, however, only two days later, on 23 September 1922, the Petrograd Provincial Party Congress convened, but passed conflicting resolutions. The Party Congress passed resolutions sanctioning subsuming Zhenotdel as Agit-Prop's sub-department.<sup>89</sup> The stenographic report of the Provincial Party Congress revealed none of the tension present in the Collegium meetings. The resolutions passed emphasized the familiar refrain that work among women needs to be "strengthened" and brought "closer to general party work."<sup>90</sup> Thus, "Zhenotdel needs to be a sub-department of Agit-Prop" and this will bring it "closer to the broad mass of women."<sup>91</sup> Resolutions passed also stressed that "Zhenotdel's provincial head needs to join the Agit-Prop Collegium" and that there "needs to be closer ties with Orgotdel (Organizational Department)."<sup>92</sup> Consequently, the archival record illustrates that although most Petrograd Zhenotdel representatives wanted organizational independence, the Provincial Party Congress, in contravention of Central Committee decrees, sanctioned subsuming Zhenotdel with Agit-Prop. On multiple levels, there was disconnect not only between the various levels of government but between Zhenotdel leaders and high-ranking provincial party members. Even decisions passed in Zhenotdel's Collegium carried little force and contributed to an unworkable organization. Once again Agit-Prop prevailed.

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<sup>88</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1.

<sup>89</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, Protocols of Petrograd Provincial Party Congress, (23-26 September 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, ll.3 and 5.

<sup>90</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, Protocols of Petrograd Provincial Party Congress, (23-26 September 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.5.

<sup>91</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, Protocols of Petrograd Provincial Party Congress, (23-26 September 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.5.

<sup>92</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, Protocols of Petrograd Provincial Party Congress, (23-26 September 1922), f.16, op.13,

A central question remains: did Zhenotdel's work improve under Agit-Prop? Overall, Sheina's findings that there were "no results" were collaborated in Zhenotdel's published and unpublished reports.<sup>93</sup> A nation-wide 1921 Zhenotdel report detailed scathingly Agit-Prop's indifference and ineptitude: "the Agit-Prop department did not bring anything new into the work, as formerly they were little interested in it, but on the other hand the Zhenotdel was even more isolated from general party work...."<sup>94</sup> The report further chronicled that along with the subordination of the women's departments to Agit-Prop, Zhenotdel's tasks were simply eliminated. Provincial committees ceased to render assistance to the women's departments. These committees "began to [not only] order Zhenotdel workers out on other assignments, for example, in Pskov, Ivanov-Voznesensk, but an agitational campaign in connection with [the] re-election of *delegatki* was prohibited."<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Gomel's provincial committee would not sanction a Zhenotdel directors' conference.<sup>96</sup> Overall, the report concludes that in a "whole series of provinces at the provincial party congresses the question was raised about Zhenotdel's liquidation in one or another way; this took place in Tver, Astrakhan, Kostroma and other provinces."<sup>97</sup>

By 1923, subsuming Petrograd Zhenotdel with Agit-Prop showed limited organizational results. The Central Zhenotdel requested that provincial Zhenotdels specify how often

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d.12789, l.5.

<sup>93</sup> RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.336, l.1.

<sup>94</sup> *Otchet otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin, za god raboty*, 46.

<sup>95</sup> *Otchet otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin, za god raboty*, 46.

<sup>96</sup> *Otchet otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin, za god raboty*, 46.

they submitted a Zhenotdel report to the GubKom (Provincial Party Committee). Pozdeeva replied that for the Provincial Party Congress “a special [Zhenotdel] report is not submitted.”<sup>98</sup> Curiously, Pozdeeva argued that in Provincial Party Committee meetings “a Zhenotdel report is not merited [because] reports from all departments are impractical.”<sup>99</sup> She clarified that “only issues of a fundamental character”<sup>100</sup> should be submitted to these meetings. The aforementioned statements suggest that Pozdeeva clearly believed that most Zhenotdel work was not of a fundamental character and that it did not deserve a higher profile. She implied that Zhenotdel work was discussed infrequently among high-level Agit-Prop meetings because reports on women workers and peasants are “placed periodically at Agit Collegiums...”<sup>101</sup> In Petrograd, at least, the merger with Agit-Prop did not improve Zhenotdel’s status or access to executive party bodies. Across the 1920s, Zhenotdel activists at all levels failed to submit reports to the appropriate party department. In particular, this made accountability and access to accurate information extremely difficult. Moreover, the questions posed suggest that Central Zhenotdel was uncertain as to how Zhenotdel functioned at the provincial level. Thus, a month later, in June 1923, in the protocols of a Central Zhenotdel Collegium’s meeting, Sofia Smidovich, Zhenotdel director, reminds her colleagues that “Piter [Petrograd] it is not a department but a Zhenotdel sub-department attached to Agit-

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<sup>97</sup> *Otchet otdela TsK RKP po rabote sredi zhenshchin, za god raboty*, 46.

<sup>98</sup> RGASPI, (23 May, 1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.167.

<sup>99</sup> RGASPI, (23 May, 1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.167. See TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.488425, l.64.

<sup>100</sup> RGASPI, (23 May, 1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.167.

<sup>101</sup> RGASPI, (23 May, 1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.167.

Prop....”<sup>102</sup>

Earlier, at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1922, Smidovich herself suggested that Zhenotdel should be liquidated. It should be put out of its “miserable existence” or given qualified personnel to operate effectively: “If the work is unnecessary, then that needs to be acknowledged. If it is necessary, then qualified workers need to be sent and all the work raised to a known height. It is better to liquidate the departments for work among women than to have them continue to drag out the miserable existence which they are dragging out in the majority of provinces.”<sup>103</sup> At this same Congress, Smidovich drafted the resolution that discussed “the approach towards the female proletarian masses needs the most attention because in the conditions of a petty-bourgeois environment [NEP] employed women face the dangers of [becoming] déclassé.”<sup>104</sup> Significantly, it was symptomatic of a more general trend at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the relationship between the Party and the working class. One anxiety was the extent the latter was supposedly becoming “déclassé” because of the New Economic Policy.<sup>105</sup>

### Feminism and the “Second” Liquidationist Wave

The specific fear of women becoming “déclassé” was connected to Zhenotdel’s broader anxieties about its proper constituency. During the period of war communism, an era of

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<sup>102</sup> RGASPI, (13 June, 1923), f.17, op.10, d.92, l.38.

<sup>103</sup> KPSS, *Odinadtsatyi s’ezd RKP (b)*, *Stenograficheskii otchet*, 457.

<sup>104</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.25.

<sup>105</sup> For example, a party census of 1922 showed that only 15 per cent of all members were working in manual industrial jobs, as quoted in Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 131, and see especially pp.131-2 for a

heightened class struggle, it was much simpler for Zhenotdel to choose its constituency of workers and peasants. But, NEP resulted in a multiplication of different types of urban women: those who were unemployed and became housewives; those working in private enterprises; those working as traders; those engaging in prostitution; and, in Kollontai's words, those women who were dependent on Nepmen, the "doll-parasites." Somehow, these previous groups had to be reconciled with the traditional Zhenotdel focus on workers and peasants.

The issues of Zhenotdel's constituency and the liquidationist crises were intertwined deeply with the broader issue of the Bolshevik party's relationship to feminism. No doubt coinciding with the broader anxieties of a return to a limited capitalist system [NEP], from especially mid 1922 to mid 1923, a specific party anxiety about "feminism" surfaced both publicly and in the archival record. Publicly, in September 1922, the 17<sup>th</sup> Petrograd Provincial Party Congress specified that a central reason the Petrograd Zhenotdel was made a sub-department of Agit-Prop was "to avert feminist work."<sup>106</sup> The archival record reveals that reports conducted by the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel for the months of September and October 1922 indicated that "lately...petty-bourgeois, feminist organizations" existed which were masquerading as "unions, artels and co-operatives."<sup>107</sup> Zhenotdel conducted an investigation of these women's organizations to

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discussion of party deproletarianization see Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 185.

<sup>106</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23-26 September 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.6.

<sup>107</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (September-October 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.43.

clarify their “political physiognomy.”<sup>108</sup> The report stipulated that following the Zhenotdel investigation, the matter was forwarded to the Provincial Party Committee Biuro and Provincial Party Executive Committee where this decree was enacted: “All purely women’s organizations bearing no industrial character whatsoever will be closed.”<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless, the archival sources do not record any actual “feminist” organizations! The problem remained that Zhenotdel encouraged unemployed women to form artels and to join co-operatives,<sup>110</sup> but at what point exactly did these exclusively female organizations become “feminist”? The decree further stipulated, “Special women’s literature should not be published with a feminist tendency.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Zhenotdel was mandated to create literature geared towards women but precisely when it became “feminist” was decidedly ambiguous. According to a Zhenotdel thesis on female liberation, faithfully adhering to standard Marxist doctrine, feminists were “exclusively against men,” but the “women’s movement is not separate from the worker’s movement.”<sup>112</sup> Zhenotdel was in the unenviable position of specifically concentrating on women when their interests were supposedly identical to the general worker’s movement. Consequently, Zhenotdel needed to be vigilant against all forms of “feminism” to maintain party credibility.

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<sup>108</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (September-October 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.43.

<sup>109</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (September-October 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.43.

<sup>110</sup> Women were to form artels and to join co-operatives see: TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.5 and TsGAIPD SPb, (1921-1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.13. Also see Z. Lilina, “Istoriia zhenskogo rabocheho dvizheniia, polozhenie zhenshchin v pervobytnom obshchestve,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.2, (1923): 16-17 and M. Melent’eva, “Koopratsiia obidela,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.3, (1923): 31.

<sup>111</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (September-October 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.43.

<sup>112</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12892, l.46.

Thus, it was a Zhenotdel sponsored decree against feminism, which was passed in November 1922. From the protocols of the Petrograd Provincial Communist Party a three-point decree entitled “The Struggle against Feminism” was passed.<sup>113</sup> It decreed that the resolution was a Zhenotdel Provincial proposal and mandated that “organizations, artels of intellectual and physical labour and leagues of labouring women be closed.”<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, this resolution goes further than the aforementioned Provincial party decree passed only a month earlier that permitted women’s industrial organizations.<sup>115</sup> The decree clarified that “private organizations and artels which are...absent of industrial activities [need] to be closed.”<sup>116</sup> Lastly, it emphasized that “Henceforth all permissions and ratifications of new women’s organizations are to be regulated by soviet institutions in concert with the Provincial Zhenotdel.”<sup>117</sup> This resolution reveals a Bolshevik party and Zhenotdel, acting in unison, devising legislation to control the spread of state and private women’s organizations. Nevertheless, there is no indication of how many people or resources were devoted to regulating these organizations in the form of leagues, artels, co-operatives or societies.

Once again, in the spring of 1923 many of these tensions within the Party and Zhenotdel about “feminism” surfaced publicly with a series of articles between Vera Golubeva, deputy head of Central Zhenotdel, and her critics, mostly Zhenotdel leaders.

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<sup>113</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 November, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12899, l.77.

<sup>114</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 November, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12899, l.77.

<sup>115</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (September-October 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.43.

<sup>116</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 November, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12899, l.77.

<sup>117</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 November, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12899, l.77. Top party members, Zhigarev and



Golubeva's major criticism was that Zhenotdel concentrated its efforts almost exclusively on women workers. The organization had no way to reach out to the hundreds of thousands of newly unemployed women who were descending into a "swamp of philistinism" and advocated not to "work only with women workers."<sup>118</sup> Golubeva was promoting broadening Zhenotdel's constituency beyond workers and peasants. Moreover, she went on to propose that, in order to attract these women outside of industrial production, Zhenotdel should organize "special societies," comprised of both men and women and they would be dedicated to facilitating the "full economic, legal and day-to-day emancipation of women."<sup>119</sup>

Highlighting specific anxieties about Zhenotdel and broader fears about NEP society, Golubeva's article provoked considerable controversy. She was accused of not really understanding Zhenotdel's proper function, constituency and methods of operation. She was lambasted for failing to point out that Zhenotdel's proper function was to raise the political consciousness of "backward female masses" and attract them to the Party.<sup>120</sup> Concerned about the proletarian purity of NEP society, Zhenotdel's proper constituency was industrial workers, not housewives, nor the unemployed. As one Zhenotdel detractor of Golubeva put it, "The work should be limited to a narrow circle of women who are linked with production, and among them to systematize and deepen Zhenotdel's

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Pokrovskii, also sponsored the decree, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12899, l.77.

<sup>118</sup> V. Golubeva, "Rabota zhenotdelov v novykh usloviakh," *Pravda*, 1 February, 1923: 3.

<sup>119</sup> V. Golubeva, "Rabota zhenotdelov v novykh usloviakh," *Pravda*, 1 February, 1923: 3.

<sup>120</sup> F. Niurina, "Zhenotdely RKP ili 'osobyie obshchestva,'" *Pravda*, 9 February, 1923: 3. Similarly, Hugh D. Hudson discusses how in 1926 there were competing visions about the role of the *sel'kory* in "Shaping

educational work and to make the woman worker literate in Marxism.”<sup>121</sup> Yet another detractor elaborated that Zhenotdel should not switch its constituency to housewives or the unemployed because women still represented 28.8 per cent of the workforce and the unemployment crisis had bottomed out.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Zhenotdel’s proper method of operation was the delegates’ system, not: ”special societies,” and working under the aegis of the Party in the soviets, trade unions and co-operative movement.<sup>123</sup>

In support of Golubeva, Kollontai wrote an article entitled, “Not a ‘Principle’ but a Method,”<sup>124</sup> from her diplomatic posting abroad. She emphasized that female unemployment was a serious problem that could last decades and therefore Zhenotdel should undertake new strategies and methods for organizing non-proletarian women. More interestingly, Kollontai posed a basic issue: did Golubeva’s arguments constitute “feminism”? Kollontai argued that “feminism” was a “terrible word” only in the conditions of a bourgeois state because the danger existed that women could be convinced that their condition could improve only within the limits of the state.<sup>125</sup> However, in the Soviet Union, a worker’s republic, feminism could be progressive: “Should it be considered harmful if women strive to unite together in order to transform daily life in the spirit of communism, to remove those phenomena which oppress women

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the Peasant Political Discourse during the New Economic Policy: the Newspaper *Krestianskaia Gazeta* and the Case of ‘Vladimir Ia.’” *Journal of Social History* 36, no.2 (Winter 2002): 303-317.

<sup>121</sup> Pavlovskaiia, “Otliki na stat’iu t. Golubevoi,” *Pravda*, 10 February, 1923: 4.

<sup>122</sup> O. Zanevina, “Po povodu stat’i tov. Golubevoi,” *Pravda*, 7 February, 1923: 4.

<sup>123</sup> See especially S. Smidovich, “Soveshchanie zavedushchikh oblastnymi zhenotdelami,” *Kommunistka* no.5 (May 1923): 11.

<sup>124</sup> A. Kollontai, “Ne ‘printsip,’ a ‘metod,’” *Pravda*, 20 March, 1923: 4.

<sup>125</sup> A. Kollontai, “Ne ‘printsip,’ a ‘metod,’” *Pravda*, 20 March, 1923: 4. In brief, in bourgeois states

in a government where power is in the hands of the workers?”<sup>126</sup> The danger was the “less that Soviet authorities are now in a position to sponsor government efforts and the emancipation of women in daily life, the more inevitable the growth of ‘feminist tendencies’ in Russia.”<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the “former ‘bourgeois equal righters’ are already now attempting to use these tendencies. Zhenotdel...should find the means not to stifle or silence this phenomenon, but to subordinate it to themselves, to win monopoly of the struggle for women’s emancipation.”<sup>128</sup> Kollontai stated that Golubeva’s “special societies” were not an issue of principle, but merely a question of tactics.<sup>129</sup>

The Bolshevik party’s immediate tactic was to summon the esteemed Klara Zetkin to counter Kollontai’s support for Golubeva. For Zetkin delegates’ meetings “were the pathway to emancipation”<sup>130</sup> and Golubeva’s “special societies” smacked of a proposal that is “in essence an expression of the most genuine bourgeois equal-rightism.”<sup>131</sup> Overall, Zetkin reminded Golubeva that she was living in a worker’s republic where women were already guaranteed full, equal rights and there was no need to change course. In Zetkin’s view, the only obstacles to women’s emancipation were cultural and political backwardness and the weakness of the Soviet economy, and Golubeva’s

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women and men had to be united to overthrow capitalism.

<sup>126</sup> A. Kollontai, “Ne ‘printsip,’ a ‘metod,’” *Pravda*, 20 March, 1923: 4.

<sup>127</sup> A. Kollontai, “Ne ‘printsip,’ a ‘metod,’” *Pravda*, 20 March, 1923: 4.

<sup>128</sup> A. Kollontai, “Ne ‘printsip,’ a ‘metod,’” *Pravda*, 20 March, 1923: 4.

<sup>129</sup> A. Kollontai, “Ne ‘printsip,’ a ‘metod,’” *Pravda*, 20 March, 1923: 4.

<sup>130</sup> K. Tsetkin, “Rabota zhenotdelov v novykh usloviakh,” *Pravda*, 4 April, 1923: 1.

<sup>131</sup> K. Tsetkin, “Rabota zhenotdelov v novykh usloviakh,” *Pravda*, 4 April, 1923: 1. See Marilyn J. Boxer, “Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept of ‘Bourgeois Feminism,’” *American Historical Review* 112 (February 2007): 131-158.

proposed “societies” could not remedy these obstacles.<sup>132</sup> The controversy ended both with Golubeva apologizing for her lack of clarity but sticking to her original positions<sup>133</sup> and a formal resolution at the subsequent Party Congress.

In April 1923, the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress passed a formal resolution condemning the “feminism” inherent in the views of Golubeva and Kollontai: “These [feminist] deviations could facilitate the creation of such special societies, which under the banner of improving the day-to-day position of women, in fact could lead to the breaking away of the female part of the labouring population from the common class struggle.”<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, in May 1923, Smidovich echoed similar anxieties when she called the proposals of Golubeva and Kollontai “highly dangerous.”<sup>135</sup> Smidovich argued that “special caution” was required in response “to any kind of attempts to create all sorts of ‘societies,’ which are capable of leading to organizational consolidation of feminist tendencies and which unavoidably would become a concentration of the forces of Party enemies and consequently of the working class.”<sup>136</sup> Moreover, Golubeva’s “special societies” were condemned as having a “vague character” and were an attempt “to replace the work of the soviets, trade-unions and cooperative organs under the direction

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<sup>132</sup> K. Tsetkin, “Rabota zhenotdelov v novykh usloviakh,” *Pravda*, 4 April, 1923: 1.

<sup>133</sup> V. Golubeva, “Rabota zhenotdelov v novykh usloviakh,” *Pravda*, 13 April, 1923: 4.

<sup>134</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1923), f.16, op.13, d.12900, l.18.

<sup>135</sup> S. Smidovich, “Soveshchanie zaveduushchikh oblastnymi zhenotdelami,” *Kommunistka* no.5, (May 1923): 11.

<sup>136</sup> S. Smidovich, “Soveshchanie zaveduushchikh oblastnymi zhenotdelami,” *Kommunistka* no.5, (May 1923): 11.

of the Party in the area of the emancipation of women.”<sup>137</sup>

Significantly, Zhenotdel’s broader anxiety about feminism had an impact on organizing at the local level. In June 1923, Maria Pozdeeva, Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel head, penned the unpublished letters to Shishkova, of the Cherepovets Zhenotdel lambasting Shiskova’s subordinate, Aleksandra Orlova, of the Tukhvinsk county zhenotdel.<sup>138</sup> In the first letter, Maria Pozdeeva warns that Zhenotdel will not permit Comrade Orlova “to conduct her [Zhenotdel] work with a feminist bias,” and if not “it is imperative that she be dismissed from work among women.”<sup>139</sup> A second, more detailed letter followed two days later. Pozdeeva expressed her “surprise” that the Tukhvinsk Zhenotdel printed Orlova’s article entitled “Dear Women.”<sup>140</sup> According to Pozdeeva, this article is infused with a “feminist bias” and that “it is clear that she completely does not understand Zhenotdel’s tasks, she considers that Zhenotdels are women’s organizations, organized to defend the rights of ‘women’ everywhere.”<sup>141</sup> In Pozdeeva’s words, Orlova was guilty of discussing the common bonds of “women everywhere, without differentiating between bourgeois women and proletarians.”<sup>142</sup> Pozdeeva, goes on to impress upon Shiskova that she “must make it known that zhenotdel is not a women’s organization to defend the rights of women, *but a section of the party apparatus for work*

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<sup>137</sup> S. Smidovich, “Soveshchanie zaveduishchikh oblastnymi zhenotdelami,” *Kommunistka* no.5, (May 1923): 11.

<sup>138</sup> See TsGAIPD SPb, (21 June, 1923), and (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.43 and l.46.

<sup>139</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.43.

<sup>140</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46.

<sup>141</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46.

<sup>142</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46.

*among backward women workers and peasant masses* [my emphasis].”<sup>143</sup> Pozdeeva concluded by reiterating her call for Orlova to correct her “feminist bias,” or face dismissal.<sup>144</sup>

These two letters are interesting for several reasons. Given the broader public backdrop of the Golubeva/Kollontai feminist controversy, it is perhaps not surprising that a Zhenotdel Provincial head, Maria Pozdeeva, intervened to counteract “feminist bias” in a local or county Zhenotdel. The language used in the public press and in the private letters is very similar. The letters also suggest that there certainly was no uniformity on how to interpret Zhenotdel’s constituency and that at the local level some wanted it to be defined in broader, and more inclusive terms. If we keep in mind the proliferation of different types of women during NEP, then advocating that Zhenotdel should defend the rights of all women seems reasonable. Nevertheless, the Zhenotdel leadership wanted to emphasize its role as an extension of the Communist party, and did not want to be associated with feminist tendencies. Finally, the letters illustrate the ambiguity of Zhenotdel’s role; it was working with women but continually had to defend its work as legitimate party, not feminist work. In broader debates about Zhenotdel’s role, Pozdeeva was unequivocal. Zhenotdel was not a pressure group for all women, but a party organization for “backward women workers and peasants.”

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<sup>143</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46.

<sup>144</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46. It is unknown what happened to Orlova or Shishkova.

In a similar vein, Zhenotdel had to continually overcome the charges that its work was not an example of bourgeois “equal rightism.” In 1923 the Petrograd Zhenotdel specifically instructed delegates to be aware of “all sorts of tattlers, gossip mongers and intellectual equal righters (*intelligentkiravnopravki*) [who were] secret enemies of workers [because] they inflated our mistakes.”<sup>145</sup> Interestingly, “intellectual equal righters”, i.e. liberal feminists, are conflated with tattlers and gossip mongers all trying to undermine Soviet rule. The broader significance is that because Zhenotdel’s constituency was only women, it could always be subject to charges of “feminism” and “equal rightism.” As Elizabeth Wood explains “the women’s sections faced a daunting task of navigating between the Scylla of too much activism on behalf of women (which led to charges of “feminism”...) and the Charybdis of too little activism (in which case they were chastised for “passivity,” “inactivity,” “lack of consciousness,” and the like).”<sup>146</sup> It was exceedingly difficult to navigate a course that promoted the Bolshevik party and promoted women, and therefore the continuing charge of “feminism.” For instance, the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1924 indicated that the “tendency of a feminist bias condemned at the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress still exists.”<sup>147</sup> Significantly, Zhenotdel’s legitimacy was undermined by “feminist bias” throughout the 1920s and this often provided the clarion call to liquidate the organization.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> From the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel’s “In Commemoration of the Delegate-Worker,” see TsGAIPD SPb, (1923), f.16, op.13, d.12900, l.133.

<sup>146</sup> Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 214.

<sup>147</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1923/24), f.16, op.13, d.12900, l.134.

<sup>148</sup> Stites argues that trade unionists “under the banner of anti-feminism,...called for the abolition of

In the late 1920s, a resurgence of party attempts to liquidate local Zhenotdels occurred in the wake of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in late 1927. Termed by one historian as the “second” liquidationist wave,<sup>149</sup> this Party Congress noted that Zhenotdel was receiving insufficient party direction and was therefore not coordinating its work properly with other party departments. Thus, this Congress set up a Party Commission for Rationalization, to aid Zhenotdel to reconstruct their political work to avoid “parallelism” with Agit-Prop work. In June 1928, Zhenotdel’s director, Artiukhina, wrote that the “Rationalization Commission,” had reduced “parallelism” by simply transferring Zhenotdel’s work to Agit-Prop and then dissolving forthwith the local Zhenotdel.<sup>150</sup> According to Artiukhina, local zhenotdels had been dissolved by this Rationalization Commission in Vladimir, Ural, Briansk, Saratov, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Kostroma and even in Leningrad itself; and she reminded party officials that only the Party Congress or Central Committee had the authority to liquidate zhenotdels.<sup>151</sup>

In the wake of this Rationalization Commission, on 4 October, 1928 a Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium meeting discussed the disintegration of Leningrad district Zhenotdels because of a lack of paid staff, conflicting party directives, and Agit-Prop indifference.<sup>152</sup> Throughout Leningrad city there were fifty organizers of women workers but only fifteen now remained; Moskovsko Narvskii, Vyborg, Vasilievskii Ostrov,

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Zhenotdel.” *Women’s Liberation*, 341

<sup>149</sup> Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 351.

<sup>150</sup> A. Artiukhina, “Likvidatsionnyi zud nuzhno uniat’,” *Kommunistka* no.6, (June 1928): 3-4.

<sup>151</sup> A. Artiukhina, “Likvidatsionnyi,” 3-4.

<sup>152</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, ll.46-48.



Volodarskii, Tsentral'nyi and Petrogradskii all operated at the district level with only two paid Zhenotdel employees.<sup>153</sup> According to Provincial Head, Maria Shitkina, the Leningrad Provincial Party Committee had “promised to give supplementary employees in four districts but now nothing is said” and according to her colleague this translated, on average “to one zhenotdel employee, excluding housewives, for 50,000 people.”<sup>154</sup> The district Zhenotdel employees’ tasks were compounded by the reduction of women worker organizers. Volodarskii district went from seven to one organizer and Moskovsko Narvskii district went from eleven to also one organizer.<sup>155</sup> It was in this atmosphere of reduced paid staff and organizers that half the district Zhenotdel leaders contemplated liquidating the organization entirely. With lukewarm Party support, Vyborg’s Drozdova put it best: “We need to address concretely, whether or not Zhenotdel should exist, if yes, then it is necessary to give supplementary workers.”<sup>156</sup> These latest reductions in either staff or pay were only the culmination of continual battles throughout the 1920s where Zhenotdel attempted merely to maintain what it was legally entitled to.<sup>157</sup>

Notwithstanding paramount staffing issues, Zhenotdel also received contradictory provincial and central party directives. The Leningrad Provincial Party Committee issued

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<sup>153</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, ll.46-47.

<sup>154</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, ll.46-47.

<sup>155</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, ll.46-47.

<sup>156</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.47. Zhenotdel’s final fate is discussed in ch.5.

<sup>157</sup> A TsK Circular stated that “inform all Party Committees that Zhenotdel Heads need to paid no less than the Heads of other Party Committee Departments,” TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.15 – a probably common dispute, see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 April, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13035, l.35 and disputes over delegates’ and organizers’ pay, TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.15; TsGAIPD SPb, (1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.38; TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.9; TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.15 and TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.7.

a directive indicating that an organizer of women workers was necessary in workplaces where women did not exceed 65 per cent of the total workforce.<sup>158</sup> Centrally, the Moscow Central Committee issued a directive specifying that a paid organizer was necessary in workplaces where women workers numbered higher than 750.<sup>159</sup> The Zhenotdel head lamented that “nothing can be done because the districts do not have any [clear] instructions about the relative ratio of women worker organizers.”<sup>160</sup>

Into this jurisdictional overlap, Agit-Prop assumed responsibility for women workers, but Zhenotdel’s head scathingly noted, “Agit-Prop considers that zhenotdel work is less important and it can be combined.”<sup>161</sup> Combining Agit-Prop and Zhenotdel work left women workers without organizers. At Treugol’nik (Red Triangle), despite the fact that it had 7,934 women workers in a labour force of 16,748, the factory “receives three organizers, but it does not want to give one organizer for women workers.”<sup>162</sup>

Combining, of course, was a central component of rationalization but it was often a pretext to undermine Zhenotdel’s work.

Overall, this chapter has emphasized that the issues of attracting qualified personnel, defining constituency, defending against charges of feminism, and fending off threats of liquidationism affected Zhenotdel throughout the 1920s. In balance, the documents in

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<sup>158</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.46. See chapter 5, this supports the idea that where female labour predominated, the female labour force was stronger and therefore did not need an organizer.

<sup>159</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.46.

<sup>160</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.46.

<sup>161</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.46.

<sup>162</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op. 13, 13246, l.97; TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.47.

Klavdiia Nikolaeva's personal party file in St.Petersburg were the most revealing archival material in illuminating Kollontai's dismissal as Zhenotdel director. First, the Secretariat and Orgbiuro were keen to replace Kollontai quickly, and with Nikolaeva at the helm, but the Politbiuro cancelled this replacement. Second, the process of ousting Kollontai was underway in early December 1921, well before the publication of her critical pamphlet *The Workers' Opposition* in the spring of 1922. This strongly suggests she would have been replaced irrespective of the publication. Third, Nikolaeva, not Sofia Smidovich, was the first choice to replace Kollontai; nevertheless, Smidovich is first listed as Central Zhenotdel director in a circular dated 18 February, 1922.<sup>163</sup>

Zhenotdel's and Kollontai's low status at the highest reaches of the Party has not only been confirmed in the archival material, but its contents often reflected broader tensions of this era. As a fellow Worker Oppositionist, Shliapnikov supported Kollontai convening the Congress of Eastern Women, while future allies Molotov and Stalin did not. Stalin was against a Congress of Eastern Women because it would inaugurate unprepared women and provoke outraged husbands. Debates over the Congress, echoed future conflicts over who should join Zhenotdel and what type of society the Party wanted to create. The VTsSPS wanted to liquidate Zhenotdel, but battles over who should organize women were continued after Kollontai's departure by trade union and Agit-Prop organizations at the provincial and local level. The threats of liquidationism

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<sup>163</sup> This is a Central Zhenotdel circular No.240 sent to the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel, TsGAIPD SPb, (18 February, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12785, l.9. Kollontai's dismissal supports Clements' contention that in "late January or early February 1922 Kollontai received the news that she had been removed as head of the

had particular resonance because Zhenotdel's work, which naturally focussed on women, could be subject to charges of feminism. In addition, organizing was compromised because Zhenotdel central orders, and provincial party directives, were often conflicting. The provincial party organization promised but never delivered on funding additional Zhenotdel employees. It was in this general strained atmosphere that district Zhenotdel leaders, in effect, advocated self-liquidation of Zhenotdel. Across the 1920s, Zhenotdel's intertwined crises of liquidationism, constituency, feminism and party identity confronted activists with ongoing and multiple challenges that shaped many issues. For instance, Zhenotdel in practical organizing, often felt restricted in helping one constituency, unemployed workers, because aiding any "non-proletarian" group risked charges of "feminism." Female urban unemployment, the following chapter's topic, crystallized many tensions within the organization and broader society.

## Chapter 2

### ““Dead Souls””: The Urban Unemployed

As early as 1908 Alexandra Kollontai explained the significance of paid employment for women:

Only the total disappearance of those (economic) factors, only the evolution of those economic forms that once caused the enslavement of women, can effect a radical change in their social position. In other words, women can only become truly free and equal in a world that has been transformed and based on new social and economic principles.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, a woman could only be “truly free and equal” in paid labour organized under “new social and economic principles,” namely socialism. As she elaborated succinctly, in “order to enjoy real equality with man, the woman must first of all become economically independent.”<sup>2</sup> Here, Kollontai was borrowing from Marxist theorists, primarily Engels, Bebel and Zetkin that economic independence contributes to equality. But for women unemployment had more profound consequences than for men, because women were already more closely associated with the “unconscious” private sphere. As Kollontai explained rather disparagingly in a 1913 *Pravda* article, “What level of consciousness is possessed by a woman who sits by the stove...?”<sup>3</sup> Emblematic of the broader paradox between Bolshevism and women’s role in the new state, this chapter will examine how Zhenotdel dealt with the issue of female urban unemployment during the

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Kollontai, “Introduction to The Social Basis of the Woman Question,” [1908] in *Selected Articles and Speeches* (New York: International Publishers, 1984), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Kollontai, *Social Basis*, 34 as quoted in Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Kollontai, “Women’s Day” [February 1913], *Selected Articles*, 63.

New Economic Policy in Leningrad. Overall, Zhenotdel activists adopted a three-prong strategy. They helped individual women and began a public awareness campaign of the socio-economic effects of unemployed women in their publications. The centrepiece of this chapter, however, evaluates Zhenotdel's participation in Narkomtrud's ((Commissariat of Labour) Special Commission on Unemployment.<sup>4</sup>

The definition of unemployment is much disputed in a peasant country like the Soviet Union in the 1920s where “many people in the countryside are ‘unemployed’ in the straightforward sense that work which they would like to take on is not available to them in their village and many more are ‘underemployed’ in the more ambiguous sense that the marginal productivity of their labour is very low indeed.”<sup>5</sup> This chapter will deal mostly with urban, not rural, unemployment because this was Zhenotdel's focus and rural employment was exceedingly difficult to measure. Definitional problems are compounded by the problem of whether women who have never been in the paid workforce and not registered as looking for work are, in fact, “unemployed.”

Men and women often perceived the problem of unemployment differently in the Commission on Unemployment. Male officials in the Commission believed women

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<sup>4</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19. Protocols for this “special commission” are outlined in, TsGAIPD SPb, (2 March, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12800. At this meeting the Commission was known as the Provincial Petrograd Labour Department's Special Commission for the Struggle against Unemployment. Confusingly, by 1924 the Commission was revamped and known variously as the Commission for the Study of Female Labour, the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour, the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry, and the Commission for the Improvement of Female Labour in Industry. For clarity I will use the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry and shorten it to the Commission.

<sup>5</sup> R.W. Davies, “The Ending of Mass Unemployment in the USSR” in *Labour and Employment in the*

remained unemployed because their lack of physical strength, mental capacity and skills made them unprofitable. Zhenotdel's female officials chronicled a culture of harassment and employment discrimination. All manner of practices and stereotypes reduced women's employment opportunities: there was preferential male hiring, men were given over-time rather than hire more women and managers specifically requested male labour from the Labour Exchanges at all skill levels. In contrast, trained girls and women were not hired in their speciality, women were excluded from many factory shops, women were deemed incapable of heavy physical labour, and, given the often fractious work environment with men, women wanted to work with other women. Moreover, Zhenotdel pleaded that, unlike men, women should be retained in the paid workforce because unemployment increased the likelihood of prostitution and child abandonment. Zhenotdel had access to productivity studies which emphasized women made good, reliable productive workers but the organization continued to construct arguments which connected women to the problematic realms of sexuality [prostitution] motherhood [child abandonment]. There are four major and conflicting sources for measuring unemployment in the 1920s: the urban population census of March 1923 and the general population census of 17 December 1926, trade union data on unemployed trade unionists registered with them, the censuses of unemployed trade unionists of October 1925 and October-November 1927, and the Commissariat of Labour's data of the Labour Exchanges on registered unemployed.<sup>6</sup> This chapter relies heavily on the Commissariat

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*USSR*, ed. David Lane (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), 21.

<sup>6</sup> See R.W. Davies and S.G. Wheatcroft, "A Note on the Sources of Unemployment Statistics," in *Labour and Employment*, ed. David Lane (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), 36. For a full discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each source, see 36-49.

of Labour's Labour Exchange data because these are the statistics most frequently cited in the Zhenotdel archival fonds.

When Zhenotdel was created in the fall of 1919, labour shortages were so severe during 1919 and 1920 that the government resorted to militarization and other coercive labour practices to maintain a work force for the war effort.<sup>7</sup> With the introduction of the New Economic Policy in March 1921, and post-war dislocations, the job market changed rapidly with unemployment becoming a national phenomenon. The New Economic Policy coincided with the introduction of *khozraschet* or cost accounting and rationalisation which meant simply that enterprises should attempt to keep income above costs and show a profit in their operations. Consequently, there was a general move toward economic efficiency, as smaller, less profitable enterprises were shut down and heavy industrial factories were consolidated to larger, more efficient plants.<sup>8</sup> In the quest for efficiency, hundreds of thousands of workers, who were deemed unskilled and marginally productive, were also laid off; these massive layoffs fell most heavily on working women.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, throughout the 1920s, the movement of peasant migrants into the cities had a profound influence on urban unemployment.<sup>10</sup> In the short

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<sup>7</sup> For an interesting discussion of labour discipline and Universal Labour Duty see Sakwa, *Soviet Communists*, 88-93 and William J. Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), ch.1.

<sup>8</sup> Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 100-101.

<sup>9</sup> See: Chase, *Workers*, 149-150; Goldman, *Women*, 109-118; R. E. Johnson, "Family Life in Moscow during N.E.P." in *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 111-117; Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 115-116; and Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 104-106.

<sup>10</sup> For example, according to R.W. Davies, "Rural-urban migration, encouraged by the growth of opportunities for work in towns and on building sites, was the driving force which exerted a constant



term, however, the demobilization of army veterans most adversely affected female unemployment.

There is widespread consensus that the unemployment of Russian women was part of a broader European phenomenon of routinely dismissing women after the Great War because veterans were given hiring priority.<sup>11</sup> The demobilization of the Red Army with 4.1 million soldiers, plus the enactment of a February 1922 Commissariat of Labour decree specifying that veterans should receive preferential treatment when seeking work, translated into layoffs of women and juvenile workers.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, women who had served in the armed forces were not covered under these decrees, ostensibly because they had joined voluntarily and not as a result of compulsory recruitment. As the historian Elizabeth Wood explains “Women might have received equal rights to bear arms as citizens of the new regime, but they were not granted equal benefits at the conclusion of the war.”<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the civil war, the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel responded slowly to growing numbers of unemployed women. At the highest level, meetings of the

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pressure on the authorities to provide more work, and it strongly influenced the pattern of urban unemployment.” *Ending of Mass Unemployment*, 24 and Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 104-105.

<sup>11</sup> Chase, *Workers*, 142; Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 178; Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 153-54; and Chris Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers and the New Economic Policy: Shop-floor culture and state policy, 1921-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 25. The Party’s executive committee passed a decree against the incorrect dismissals of women workers from war factories, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.26. See other European examples, Karen Hagemann, “‘Equal but not the Same’: The Social Democratic Women’s Movement in the Weimar Republic,” *Bernstein to Brandt*, 133-143, 136 and Robert L. Frost, “Machine Liberation: Inventing Housewives and Home Appliances in Interwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 1993): 112-113.

<sup>12</sup> Chase, *Workers*, 141-142 and Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 154.

Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium, unemployment was discussed for the first time in early August 1921, despite the fact that women were increasingly laid off from late 1920.<sup>14</sup> Tellingly, Zhenotdel was distracted by an organizational crisis where its own members, and leading party functionaries, wanted to subsume its activities under Agit-Prop.<sup>15</sup> Zhenotdel was concerned with maintaining its organizational integrity and this superseded responding to the accelerating crisis of female unemployment. Overall, Zhenotdel leaders experienced a massive adjustment during the implementation of NEP because women were not increasingly drawn into the paid workforce, but severely curtailed.

When the unemployment crisis began, Zhenotdel correspondence records indicate that the organization lobbied on behalf of individual unemployed women who required work, day care, or schooling. For example, on 8 July 1922, Glebova, deputy head of the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel, sent a request to the Treugol'nik factory that the unskilled worker, Praskov'e Petukhova, be given work in view of "her critical situation [because] she has three children and was abandoned by her husband."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Glebova, sent a request for day care spots for a Red Army wife, Shepeleva, with five children who needed to find work and who was in a "very difficult situation because her husband was 'missing without a trace'."<sup>17</sup> Most of the women who were helped on an individual basis were mothers with dependent children. In the public awareness

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<sup>14</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 August, 1921), f. 16, op.13, d.12670, l.30.

<sup>15</sup> Stites argues "there was a widespread movement among local party organs in the early 1920s to liquidate Zhenotdels and to subsume their work under propaganda and agitation sections," *Women's Liberation*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 July, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12899, l.27.

campaigns, Zhenotdel officials also emphasized protecting employment for mothers with dependent children. Accordingly, when Zhenotdel representatives entered the Labour Exchange Committee, in June 1922, they drafted “a binding resolution [that] those women with young children without male support have a preference in being sent out to work before other women workers...irrespective of their work record.”<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, most warnings emphasized that the consequences of female unemployment were child abandonment and prostitution. In 1922 numerous party circulars and resolutions emphasized how “Unemployment pushes the woman worker into prostitution and trade and uprooting her sometimes from the ranks of the working class.”<sup>19</sup>

Zhenotdel’s opportunity to publish material on unemployed women was enhanced by the fact that by 1921, seventy-four weekly publications were carrying a special page devoted to the “woman question.”<sup>20</sup> In 1922 and 1923 Moscow’s *Kommunistka* and Petrograd’s *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*, published numerous articles concerning the plight of unemployed women.<sup>21</sup> Also in Zhenotdel’s press, Sofia Smidovich, Zhenotdel director, discussed the “petty-bourgeois encirclement” which occurred when women workers went

<sup>17</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (12 February, 1922), f. 16, op.13, d.12899, l.4.

<sup>18</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.25.

<sup>19</sup> 17th Provincial Petrograd Party Conference Bulletin, (23-26 September, 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.5.

<sup>20</sup> A. Kollontai, *The Peasant and the Working Woman in Soviet Russia* (Moscow: International Secretariat on Work among Women of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, 1921), 15.

<sup>21</sup> See I. Bergauz, “Rol’ birzhi truda v bor’be s bezrobotitsei,” *Kommunistka*, nos.6-7 (June-July 1922): 3; Kollontai, “Novaia ugroza,” *Kommunistka*, nos.8-9 (August-September, 1922): 6; Shmidt, “Zhenskaia bezrobotitsa i bor’ba s neiu,” *Kommunistka*, no.6 (June 1923): 23. See Shitkina’s discussion of female unemployment and the remedy of skills training in “Zadachu shkol fabzavucha,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.1 (1922): 9-10 and Kanatchikova’s “K podnatiuu kvalifikatsii zhenskogo truda,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.6 (1923): 20-22.

back into their households or went into prostitution or other forms of “parasitism.”<sup>22</sup> By 1927 this approach was reiterated; as one Zhenotdel representative put it in “many cases, [unemployed] women abandon their children and go into crime or prostitution.”<sup>23</sup> It was this spectre, child abandonment and prostitution, not a woman’s right to be employed on equal terms as men, which Zhenotdel invoked frequently. Zhenotdel could have emphasized that women made reliable productive workers not that factories should continue to employ women because unemployed women might abandon their children or become prostitutes. Ironically, by continually reiterating female vulnerability and the need for protectionist measures, Zhenotdel leaders contributed to the stereotype of needy women rather than capable workers. Overall, European Marxists, including Bolsheviks, were divided on whether or not women needed special protective work regulations. For example, the German Marxist Klara Zetkin “had absolutely rejected special protective regulations for women and instead emphasized the principle of equality of men and women as the yardstick for socialist policy...[because] this would reduce women’s opportunities to the advantage of ‘unprotected’ men...”<sup>24</sup> The archival record indicates that when extensive, comparative work studies were conducted in the mid 1920s, contrary to popular belief, women were not “unproductive” to employ vis-à-vis men. These studies indicated that women did not take more work breaks than men, and women produced at a similar level to men.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Zhenotdel representatives, whether in public awareness campaigns or in the Labour Exchanges, continued to emphasize female

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<sup>22</sup>See Smidovich, “Soveshchanie zaveduishchikh zhenotdelami chlenov Vserossiiskogo S’ezda Sovetov,” *Kommunistka*, nos. 1-2, (January-February 1923): 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55.

<sup>24</sup> Frevert, “Women Workers,” 42-43.

<sup>25</sup> See the productivity studies cited on pages 90-91.

vulnerability throughout the 1920s.<sup>26</sup>

The Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry

In the 1920s Soviet officials, like their Western counterparts, debated extensively the issue of female protective labour legislation.<sup>27</sup> The Petrograd Zhenotdel first discussed the issue of female unemployment at its Collegium meeting in August 1921.<sup>28</sup> At Zhenotdel Collegium meetings the following spring, a report by Zhenotdel's Kanatchikova, revealed that in April 1922 there were "at the present time at the Labour Exchange [are] registered up to 20,000 unemployed people of which 15,000, or 72 per cent, were women."<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the "situation for unemployed women was extremely difficult and demanded absolute immediate and energetic help."<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the Petrograd Soviet's last meeting set up a special commission "to devise methods to help the female unemployed."<sup>31</sup> One method was the creation of a Commission, organized under the auspices of the Commissariat of Labour, eventually called the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry and comprised of Labour, Social Security, Komsomol, Trade Union, Soviet, and Zhenotdel

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<sup>26</sup> As one Zhenotdel representative put it, in "many cases, [unemployed] women abandon their children and go into crime or prostitution." TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55.

<sup>27</sup> The most comprehensive account of female protective labour legislation is: Melanie Ilić, *Women Workers in the Soviet Interwar Economy: From 'Protection' to 'Equality'* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999). The following chapter deals with British, Canadian, and American examples to design gender specific protective work legislation, see *The Woman Worker, 1926-1929*, ed. Margaret Hobbs and Joan Sangster (St.John's, Newfoundland: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1999), ch.2.

<sup>28</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (4 August, 1921), f. 16, op.13, d.12670, l.30.

<sup>29</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19.

<sup>30</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19.

<sup>31</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19.

leaders.<sup>32</sup> As noted, it will simply be called the Commission and it only gradually began to function. Despite its creation in March 1922, the Commission, by December 1924 “still has not begun because the Commissariat of Labour had a massive staff change.”<sup>33</sup>

Mirroring many of Zhenotdel’s broader anxieties, the Commission’s staff was undecided on the fundamental issue of whether or not the Commission should exist. There was opposition to the issue of dealing only with female unemployment stemming from a long-standing ideological reticence to divide working-class according to gender. As one Commission leader explained defensively, in classic Marxist rhetoric, “managers are accused of not studying the female issue, we study labour as a whole, not separating out women and youth.”<sup>34</sup> In contraindication, official party pronouncements often challenged the notion of a unified working-class experience. For instance, in September 1922, a 17<sup>th</sup> Provincial Petrograd Party Conference bulletin emphasized that “NEP most of all affects the position of women workers and leaves her in difficult material conditions [because] unemployment pushes the woman worker into prostitution and trade and uproots her sometimes from the ranks of the working class.”<sup>35</sup> The second part of the above quotation reveals a prevalent Zhenotdel fear that unemployed women would be uprooted “from the ranks of the working class.” The usual terminology utilized was that

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<sup>32</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19. As noted, protocols for this “special commission” are outlined in TsGAIPD SPb, (2 March, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12800. At this meeting the Commission was known as the Provincial Petrograd Labour Department’s Special Commission for the Struggle against Unemployment. By 1924, with numerous previous titles, the Commission was eventually known as the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry. I will shorten it to the Commission.

<sup>33</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1924), f.16, op.13, d.12998, l.96.

<sup>34</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56.

<sup>35</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22-26 September, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.5.

urban women without paid work would be “déclassé.” Thus, a typical resolution was the one given at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1922, that “the approach towards the female proletarian masses needs the most attention because in the conditions of a petty-bourgeois environment [NEP] unemployed women face the dangers of [becoming] déclassé.”<sup>36</sup> In both examples women workers were separated out from the general working-class. The subtext is clear, working-class identity came through paid employment in the workforce, not through belonging culturally to the working class. In short, paid work conferred proletarian status and it was especially important for women, who were already associated with the “unproductive” private sphere, to secure permanent employment. Female unemployment threatened Zhenotdel’s core constituency and undermined Zhenotdel’s proletarian credentials. Thus, it was deemed vitally important for Zhenotdel to galvanize the maximum number of state and party organizations to curb female unemployment.

### Workplace Dismissals and Married Women

Without doubt, therefore, the widespread, chronic female unemployment was, in the words of one historian, the “most serious problem which developed for the Zhenotdel with the introduction of the NEP.”<sup>37</sup> For example, in 1922 Vera Golubeva, deputy head of Central Zhenotdel, sent a copy to all Zhenotdels of a “resolution passed by the Commissariat of Labour, the Commissariat of Social Security (Narkomsobesa) and the VTsSPS about the order of workplace dismissals of women workers. Central Zhenotdel

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<sup>36</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.25.

<sup>37</sup> Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 178.

recommended bringing to the notice of the appropriate organs all cases of incorrect dismissals of women.”<sup>38</sup> Numerous Commissariat of Labour decrees stipulated that men and women were to be considered equally in the event of a layoff, but the incorrect workplace dismissals of women was a recurrent problem in the 1920s.<sup>39</sup>

More specifically, two key issues which needed rectification were that married women were deliberately laid off in the new era of cost-accounting and when they went to register at Labour Exchanges they were denied benefits because of their marital status. Consequently, in early 1923, Zhenotdel Provincial leaders passed several resolutions in Collegium meetings condemning firing married women simply because they were married.<sup>40</sup> This reflected a widespread European practice that layoffs should be borne by married women because they already had a wage-earner in the family.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1927, a Zhenotdel delegate claimed that factory managers discriminated against married women: “Even if she wants to work, they fire her anyway. They say, ‘You have a husband - go home to your kitchen.’”<sup>42</sup> Overall, a “moral economy” existed whereby

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<sup>38</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12785, l.18.

<sup>39</sup> For evidence concerning the incorrect dismissals of women workers and that women did not leave work voluntarily see, TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12851, l.26 and TsGAIPD SPb, (February 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.18. Also see: Goldman, *Women*, 115, Chase, *Workers*, 149 and Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 158.

<sup>40</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 February, 1923), f. 16, op.13, d. 12902, l.18 and TsGAIPD SPb, (8 February, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.21.

<sup>41</sup> German historian Ute Frevert writes: “The situation was especially difficult for married women who took the Weimar constitutional clause on sexual equality at face value and claimed for themselves the right to a job *and* a family, a right which was granted to men as a matter of course. Endless debates over female *Doppelverdiener*, ‘dual-income earners’, the title given to married women in gainful employment, demonstrated however, how flimsy the law was in reality. Irrespective of their actual economic and family situation, these were the first women to be dismissed from work during demobilization after the First World War.” in *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1989), 197 and Hagemann, 143.

<sup>42</sup> *Vsesoiuznyi s’ezd rabotnits i krest’ianok. Stenograficheskii Otchet. 10-16 oktiabria 1927 goda*, 220 as



within a family unit married women should be laid off first if their husbands were employed. Similarly, not only were married women routinely and explicitly laid off in the early years of NEP, but they faced additional discrimination when they went to register and to apply for benefits at the Labour Exchanges. In 1922 and 1923 the Petrograd Labour Exchanges routinely dismissed married women from their rolls. Married women were explicitly excluded from registering, especially recent migrants and mothers without dependent children.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, sources do not reveal the number of married women affected by this practice. Nevertheless, this distinction between the registered and unregistered unemployed was of no small importance because “as long as the hiring of workers had to go exclusively through the labour exchanges, the unregistered unemployed had a limited opportunity of getting a job.”<sup>44</sup>

Predictably, the unregistered unemployed were also unable to collect unemployment benefits. Thus, the denial of registration to married women reduced the opportunity of finding employment and meant a forfeiture of unemployment benefits. According to one historian in “the USSR in the 1920s...the unemployment regulations gave unemployed women the same rights as unemployed men;”<sup>45</sup> however, unemployment regulations gave preferential treatment to male, not female veterans, and married women were denied

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quoted in Goldman, *Women*, 115. Koenker also discusses the issue of double wage earners or *dvoyniki*, see “Men Against Women,” 1457 and Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 158.

<sup>43</sup> “Polozhenie rabocheho rynka i promyshlennost’ v Petrograde,” 86 as quoted in Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 158.

<sup>44</sup> J. L. Porket, *Work, Employment, and Unemployment in the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Macmillan Press, 1989), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Davies, “The Ending of Mass Unemployment,” 24. In reality the Soviet system mirrored Weimar Germany: “women were subjected to a stricter means test in order to qualify for benefits, under the assumption that most women were provided for by their fathers or husbands, and to eliminate the problem

the opportunity to register at the Labour Exchanges. In sum, this suggests that women were not independent citizens in the new soviet regime but discriminated against according to their sex or defined by their marital status at the Labour Exchanges.

Labour Exchanges did not retain a monopoly of hiring in the 1920s. In 1923, employers won the right to hire certain employees, bookkeepers, specialists, managers and so on, without going through the Labour Exchanges.<sup>46</sup> Encouraged by this victory, employers “continued to attack that agency’s monopoly on labor, arguing that it could not satisfy the demands of industry for certain workers.”<sup>47</sup> Due to employer pressure, the obligation to hire workers exclusively through Labour Exchanges was relaxed in the summer of 1924 and abrogated in January 1925.<sup>48</sup> Employers wanted the freedom to hire whom they wanted and at this juncture “hiring became a more or less private matter between the employer and the job seeker.”<sup>49</sup>

Overall, trade unions were displeased with the repeal of the obligation to hire workers exclusively through the Labour Exchanges. Furthermore, a November 1924 decree granted rural migrants equal rights at the Labour Exchanges, which as one historian explained was “a decree which the unions rightfully perceived as a blow to urban union

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of double-earners,” in Elizabeth Bright Jones, “A New Stage of Life? Young Farm Women’s Changing Expectations and Aspirations about Work in Weimar Saxony,” *German History* 19, no.4 (2001): 563.

<sup>46</sup> Chase, *Workers*, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Chase, *Workers*, 140.

<sup>48</sup> Porket, *Work*, 44 and Chase, *Workers*, 140.

<sup>49</sup> Porket, *Work*, 44. Chase argues “[O]ne reason for the exchanges’ failure was the behavior of and pressure put on them by employers who wanted a free labor market so that they could hire whomever they wished.” *Workers*, 138.

protectionism.”<sup>50</sup> In December 1926, during the Seventh Trade Union Congress some delegates complained that the new hiring procedure, as well as the officially urged greater concern for the unorganized or non-union unemployed, had broken the trade union monopoly and opened the factory gates to non-unionists.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, this Congress passed a resolution that in collective agreements 90 per cent of the personnel should be recruited through the Labour Exchanges.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the role of the Labour Exchanges in the hiring of workers increased noticeably in 1927.<sup>53</sup>

### Rationalisation and the Labour Exchanges

In 1927, the profile of Labour Exchanges was also augmented by a country-wide rationalisation drive implemented to improve economic efficiency.<sup>54</sup> That year, the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry, held many heated discussions to discover why women were either dismissed or underemployed in various industries due to rationalisation.<sup>55</sup> On 21 October 1927 the Commissariat of Labour released unemployment figures which indicated that there were 100,000 women

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<sup>50</sup> Chase, *Workers*, 138.

<sup>51</sup> Margaret Dewar, *Labour Policy in the U.S.S.R. 1917-1928* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1956) 116.

<sup>52</sup> Dewar, *Labour Policy*, 117.

<sup>53</sup> Porket, *Work*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> See Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 186. For a discussion of rationalisation and the Weimar rationalization movement, see Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Rationalization was also promoted in North America, see Hobbs and Sangster, *The Woman Worker, 1926-1929*, 37-38.

<sup>55</sup> See the Commission's following meetings: TsGAIPD SPb, (28 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.44; TsGAIPD SPb, (27 April, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.45; TsGAIPD SPb, (4 May, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.46; TsGAIPD SPb, (18 May, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.47-49; TsGAIPD SPb, (25 May, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.50; TsGAIPD SPb, (29 June, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.51; TsGAIPD SPb, (28 September, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.53-54; TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.55-58.

and 40,000 men registered at the Leningrad Labour Exchange.<sup>56</sup> In response to the figures released, a meeting of the Commission was convened on 1 November, 1927. How did these Soviet officials interpret these figures? Overall, there was a marked gendered interpretation to these discussions.

Most male members of the Commission dismissed the significance of 100,000 unemployed women versus 40,000 unemployed men. Women registered at the Labour Exchanges were variously described as “a lot of padding (*balast*), who do not want to work” to simply empty figures or “dead souls.”<sup>57</sup> Granted, there was a problem with “dead souls” but that women were most likely to be registered fraudulently is not clear. This opinion was shared by Berednikov who commented that, “not all the unemployed are equally needy, one has such unemployed, who simply register, but they do not need work.”<sup>58</sup> Most interestingly, Commission member Dushenkov argued that “100,000 is a huge figure [but] from this 100,000 figure, fifty per cent registered are housewives and various former princesses, which by chance have become women workers.”<sup>59</sup> Here Dushenkov, without any supporting evidence, speculated that fifty per cent of the unemployed women were not real workers, but “housewives and former princesses.” Moreover, he emphasized their artificial proletarian status by suggesting that these women had only “by chance have become women workers.” Significantly, the more the ranks of unemployed women could be seen as non-proletarian, the more it was not

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<sup>56</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.83.

<sup>57</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56 and l.57 respectively.

<sup>58</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56.

<sup>59</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56.

considered to be a working-class crisis. Finally, according to the official Shimanov “the state of female unemployment should not be regarded as a catastrophe, so [we] should not create legislation prohibiting dismissals of female labour.”<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, from the preceding discussion male trade unionists and Labour Exchange leaders found female unemployment more acceptable than male unemployment. In a pointed response to Shimanov, the Zhenotdel representative, Nekrasova countered “100,000 unemployed women is a disturbing phenomenon but no one notices the female rate of unemployment because it is not the male rate of unemployment.”<sup>61</sup> Not only was female unemployment perceived differently by men and women in these debates, the causes of female unemployment were widely contested.

#### The Causes of Female Unemployment: A Gendered Battleground

Male plant managers and trade unionists often emphasized women’s own failings, their lack of physical strength and psychological weaknesses, and these were intrinsically linked to the production hazards of “male” work. Another variation of women’s weaknesses was the continual tirade on their lack of qualifications. The conditions of *byt’* (daily life) which disproportionately affected women rounded out the discussion of why it was unprofitable to hire women workers. In contrast, Zhenotdel leaders emphasized a culture of sexual harassment, retrograde attitudes and unfair hiring practices. There were “traditions” of preferential male hiring, men were given over-time

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<sup>60</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13293, 1.56.

<sup>61</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13293, 1.56. Generally, one can distinguish between men and women in

rather than hire more women, and managers specifically requested male labour from the Labour Exchange. Managers also routinely practiced discrimination on the factory floor, because neither newly-trained girls and women were sent into their specialty, nor women fully capable of heavy labour jobs. In this contested space, there was the most consensus that the conditions of daily life (primarily cooking, cleaning, child-rearing) made women less able to train for additional qualifications and less desirable as workers because of these time constraints. There was also consensus that women needed better work skills or needed re-qualifications to improve employment and promotion prospects.

Women were purportedly not hired to do certain jobs because of their lack of physical strength. In a 1927 plenum, Adashev, a trade unionist, argued that, “there is no phenomenon of displacing mass female labour. In tanneries [we] have dismissals because the work is arduous. A woman cannot work as long as a man, she tires sooner and takes more breaks.”<sup>62</sup> Women were not supposed to do metal and machine-tool work because according to male workers “they menstruate every month and this makes them lose strength.”<sup>63</sup> In the Leningrad Electroapparat factory, “Joiner, mechanical repair, stamp operator, blacksmith shops do not [hire women] due to the heavy workload and production hazards.”<sup>64</sup> In the Leningrad shoe factory Skorokhod, “to stitch soles by

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the Commission because most Russian surnames add an “a” or feminine adjectival ending for women.

<sup>62</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56. It was a plenum of Trade Union, Zhenotdel and Labour Exchange representatives.

<sup>63</sup> Bol’shakov, ‘Mozhet li byt’ zhenshchina slesarem,’ *Rabotnitsa* no.8, (1926): 20.

<sup>64</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.96. As Goldman dryly notes planners “recognized that women were physically weaker than men, they did not hesitate to set high targets for women as loaders and stevedores in overland transport, as surface workers around the mines, and as agricultural laborers, all jobs that required backbreaking work,” *Women at the Gates*, 149.

hand, males are used because a powerful muscular effort [is required]<sup>65</sup> and in the factory's heeling shop "screwing and tightening is done by men..."<sup>66</sup> In both Imperial and post-Soviet Russia women were excluded frequently from jobs because of a perceived lack of physical strength.<sup>67</sup> Not only was physical strength an issue, but protecting women from physical or production hazards were also explanations used to exclude women. In the Electrotechnical Red Triangle Trust (Treugol'nik) factory, which employed almost 17,000 workers in the mid-1920s, women were not admitted to "the rolling press and washing shops due to the dangers and difficulties of this department's operation..."<sup>68</sup> As already noted, the Leningrad Electroapparat factory, did not hire women in the joiner, mechanical repair, stamp operator, blacksmith shops due partly to production hazards.<sup>69</sup> Often, the actual "production hazards" were left unspecified but ostensibly connected to women's reproductive capacity. There were numerous studies commissioned to examine the effects of certain jobs on women's reproductive capacity.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, regulations listed professions and sectors of industry prohibited to women, while others detailed jobs where women should be given preference.<sup>71</sup> Men were also

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<sup>65</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, 1.96.

<sup>66</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, 1.97.

<sup>67</sup> For Imperial Russia see Glickman, *Russian Factory Women*, 151-152. In the post-Soviet era, see Sarah Ashwin and Elain Bowers, "Do Russian women want to work?" in *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30-32 and Elain Bowers, "Gender Stereotyping and the Gender Division of Labour in Russia," in *Conflict and Change in the Russian Industrial Enterprises*, ed. Simon Clarke (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996), 193.

<sup>68</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, 1.97.

<sup>69</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, 1.96.

<sup>70</sup> See Ilić, *Women Workers*, ch.9 "Restricted Occupations," 130-148 and Lisa Granik, "The Trials of the Proletarka: Sexual Harassment Claims in the 1920s," in *Reforming Justice in Russia, 1864-1996. Power, Culture, and the Limits of Legal Order*, ed. Peter H. Solomon (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 156 n.26. In a contemporary example, "people will tell you that women cannot be airline pilots because of the gynaecological risks imposed by the vibrations, although the same vibrations neither harm men's fertility nor affect the female cabin staff!" in Elain Bowers, "Gender Stereotyping," 194.

<sup>71</sup> Granik, "The Trials," 134. See women workers' employment rights during pregnancy, E. Ch. "Chto

given preferential job treatment because women were deemed psychologically inadequate. In Leningrad's Treugol'nik factory women are not admitted to "the rolling press because in the shop leadership's opinion they lack composure (*khladnokroviia*) [literally coldblooded] and [are] prone to absent-mindedness (*rasseiannost'iu*)...."<sup>72</sup>

Women were also stereotyped as lacking in authority. In January 1928 at a Provincial Zhenotdel Meeting, a trade union delegate, Rosenblum, gave a detailed report on women in trade unions and in leadership positions. He concluded "We have some branches of female labour, where almost nearly always women workers work, but all the same, men are promoted to even the most insignificant post."<sup>73</sup> Why? In Rosenblum's opinion, it was the trade unions' "fault to a significant extent, but [also] the managers, and finally lower-level supervisors...because of the attitudes of the masters and shop heads towards women workers are: '*babas*, who will listen to them?'"<sup>74</sup> Rosenblum surmised that this "is a stereotypical objection when the factory committees and industrial meetings promote women workers. Why promote? Who will listen to her."<sup>75</sup> This example was also selected because men simply derided women as "*babas*" and deemed them unsuitable for certain work or promotions. At the Proletarskaia Pobeda (Proletarian Victory) textile mill one Zhenotdel delegate complained that "I know one case where six people died, men were hired [and] no women. What the hell can women do? [when we

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dolzhna znat' rabotnitsa ob okhrane zhenskogo truda," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.5, (1923): 15-17.

<sup>72</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.97.

<sup>73</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.12, d.8, l.41. See Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 215.

<sup>74</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.12, d.8, l.41. See the discussion of *baby* in ch.4, fn.79.

<sup>75</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.12, d.8, l.41.



hear] ‘We cannot take *babas?*’”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, another Zhenotdel delegate explained how local transport trade unions engaged in promotion:

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, International Women’s Day, a woman worker organizer goes here, there and everywhere to dig up someone on the local committee and says: ‘Lets promote women workers in such work,’ and they say ‘Are you crazy? Why are you always trying to push the issue of *babas?* Go away.’<sup>77</sup>

This archival evidence is supported by statistical data that confirms that even in overwhelmingly female-dominated industries, men were promoted to leadership positions. For example, in 1921 women represented nationally about 73.5 per cent of tobacco workers, 74.5 per cent of the canteen workers, and 58.8 per cent of the textile union membership.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, in the executive administrative bodies of the textile industry in thirty-eight provinces, there were ten women out of a total of 194 people.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, *Kommunistka* reported that women were 3.5 per cent of the presidiums of central committee trade union councils and 3.7 per cent of the central committee of the unions they represented.<sup>80</sup> One reason women occupied so few trade union leadership positions in the 1920s was the perception that they were not authoritative.

Women were also deemed unemployable, or at least unprofitable, because they were intrinsically linked to *byt*’ or daily life. In a 1926 Leningrad survey, factory managers declared that women were not permitted to do “accurate and more complex work”

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<sup>76</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.12, d.8, l.97.

<sup>77</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.12, d.8, ll.55-56. See Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 191; 218.

<sup>78</sup> Kollontai, *The Peasant and Working Woman in Soviet Russia*, 16.

<sup>79</sup> Kollontai, *The Peasant and Working Woman in Soviet Russia*. 17.

<sup>80</sup> B. Briskin, “Za shagom shag,” *Kommunistka* nos.6-7, (June-July 1922): 3.

because they “quite often leave to get married after training” and “frequent sick holidays (pre-natal and post-natal period and so on)” made them generally unprofitable for industries.<sup>81</sup> A transport delegate reported that among trade unionists the following attitude prevailed “Why should women go further and increase their qualifications, when we have such a view, ‘if you get married, anyway you will be busy with children at home.’”<sup>82</sup> A Proletarskaia Pobeda mill delegate concurred:

If we see, year after year, the number of men is raised, the number of women is opposite, it is lowered. Here such a view is promoted: ‘What for should I take a woman, she will be four months pregnant and not be working. What use is she to me.’ As a result women are not hired.<sup>83</sup>

Overall, the difficulties women faced because of childcare and household responsibilities made hiring them more problematic. The assumption, of course, was that childcare and household matters were fundamentally female, not male responsibilities.

A lack of qualifications or the need to re-qualify for a different job was also connected to child-care and household responsibilities. As put by Bliukis, a Trade Union official, on “re-qualifying or changing one’s profession, . . . the production and trade union technical schools are in the evenings, but for women this is inconvenient, because after work they rush home to their children.”<sup>84</sup> Many reports indicate that women were not hired because they lacked the appropriate qualifications. In the Leningrad Skorokhod factory of “almost 5,000 workers, women were not employed in the polishing/ grinding machine work, in the sandal and linen enterprises, and screwing machine work because of a lack

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<sup>81</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.98.

<sup>82</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.55. See Goldman, *Women at the Gates*. 215.

<sup>83</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.97.

of qualifications.”<sup>85</sup> Throughout the 1920s, Zhenotdel pursued press campaigns and received quotas for girls and women in training schemes to emphasize that skills were the key to improved employment prospects.<sup>86</sup> Men and women in the Commission believed that skills or re-qualifications were instrumental to improve employment prospects.<sup>87</sup> To sum up, male trade unionists, Labour Exchange members, and factory managers were more likely to point to alleged deficiencies within females themselves: physical weaknesses, health hazards, mental failings, the conditions of daily life, and a lack of skills to explain why women were unable or at least unprofitable to be hired. In 1926 the Electroapparat factory consisted of 1,131 factory and white-collar workers of which only 109 were women.<sup>88</sup> The administrative personnel explained why such few women were hired in the various shops:

Electricians - do not take [women], because it is not common to do so. Joiner, mechanical repair, stamp operator, blacksmith shops do not due to the heavy workload and production hazards. Toolmakers-grinders, locksmiths, metal and lathe operators qualified women can work, but are ancillary [workers]. In assembly women work in drilling [and] painting but they are not allowed to do other work. In 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Assembly, using women as the workforce is unprofitable in complex work.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56.

<sup>85</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, ll.96 and 97. The report specified: “Of course we have a number of shops entirely staffed by women, such as: sewing and cutting cloth.” See Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 20.

<sup>86</sup> Petrograd’s first issue of *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* in 1922 discussed the importance of the factory training schools and how 100 girls out of 800 youths were currently enrolled, see M. Shitkina’s “Zadachu shkol fabzavucha,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*, no.1 (1922): 9-10 and Kanatchikova’s “K podniatuu kvalifikatsii zhenskogo truda,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.6, (1923): 20-22. By 1927, two of the eight Commission’s recommendations dealt with increasing the number of girls in factory schools and brigades and improving qualifications, see #4 and #5, TsGAIPD, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, ll.100-1.

<sup>87</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, ll.100-101.

<sup>88</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.96.

<sup>89</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.96. For a background into metalworking in St.Petersburg, see Heather Hogan, *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers and the State in St.Petersburg, 1890-1914* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) and in the 1920s, see Clayton Black’s “Party Crisis and the Factory Shop Floor: Krasnyi Putilovets and the Leningrad Opposition, 1925-26,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no.1 (1994): 107-126.

In contrast, Zhenotdel officials challenged most, but certainly not all, of these assumptions about female weaknesses. Zhenotdel recommended that women be eligible for “promotion to leadership work in [factory] shops appropriate to their physiological states” and encouraged training in “fine linen, knitted goods, stockings, cardboard box, embroidery and so on.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, Zhenotdel was more likely to shift responsibility for female unemployment onto the attitudes, behaviour, and hiring practices of men. In terms of physical weaknesses, women, are generally weaker than men. Nevertheless, Zhenotdel officials were adamant that women could perform many “male” jobs. As one Zhenotdel leader succinctly put it take “the wartime, for example, who worked, for the most part in our metal plants - women.”<sup>91</sup> Wartime examples were invoked frequently to prove that women could perform many of the so-called male jobs.<sup>92</sup> Zhenotdel also frequently printed photographs of smiling women successfully engaged in “male” jobs in their publications.<sup>93</sup>

Zhenotdel also emphasized that the women who attempted to enter “male” jobs faced hostility from male workers. In 1914, the Bolshevik paper *Rabotnitsa*, had complained about male workers’ sexually coarse treatment of women workers.<sup>94</sup> In 1917 the

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<sup>90</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.100. This mirrors one mining school instructor who explained, “Girls do not need to study to be masters. They should study only stockings and lace,” in Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 216.

<sup>91</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55.

<sup>92</sup> As a 1926 industry-wide report noted “what was clearly showed in the years of imperial and civil war women need to be the basic reserve of the qualified workforce.” TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99.

<sup>93</sup> See 1925’s three-part article “Novaia ekonomicheskaiia politika i partiia bol’shevikov,” *Rabotnitsa*, no.10: 6; *Rabotnitsa*, no.11:7 and *Rabotnitsa*, no.12:6-7. See Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 77.

<sup>94</sup> *Rabotnitsa* (23 February, 1914), no.1: 11. Also see Smiths’s discussion of sexual harassment and rape in St. Petersburg factories, “Workers and Supervisors: St.Petersburg 1905-1917 and Shanghai 1895-1927,” *Past and Present*, no.139 (May, 1993): 141 and Kevin Murphy in Moscow’s Hammer and Sickle in

Menshevik, Eva Broido, claimed that sexual harassment was rife, and that the culprits were not only foremen, but fellow male workers.<sup>95</sup> The historian Diane Koenker argues generally that in the 1920s in the printing industry there was a “gender battleground” but more specifically, widespread harassment of women by men.<sup>96</sup> Other historians, such as Wendy Goldman, Anne Gorsuch, and Elizabeth Wood, all discuss various forms of sexual harassment of women by men in the 1920s.<sup>97</sup>

The Zhenotdel archival records support the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace. For example, the 1926 industry-wide study done by the Commission noted that the “expansion of female labour is least effected in the workplace by mockery, occasionally, on behalf of males, that was noticed in wood-working and metal-work shops.”<sup>98</sup> The report elaborates that according to “engineer Kondrat’ev’s statement pestering girls and foul language also has a place in production....”<sup>99</sup> Harassment was a significant factor in the workplace because the remainder of the report discussed how: it

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*Revolution and Counter-revolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 13.

<sup>95</sup> Eva Broido, *Zhenshchina-Rabotnitsa* (Petrograd, 1917), 7.

<sup>96</sup> Diane Koenker, “Men Against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Socialist Workplace,” *American Historical Review* (December 1995): 1439; 1446. Also see Chase, *Workers*, 110.

<sup>97</sup> The most extensive discussion of sexual harassment is Granik’s “The Trials.” Also see Goldman, *Women*, 136-137 and her, *Women at the Gates*, 227-230; Anne E. Gorsuch, “‘A Woman is Not a Man’”: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928.” *Slavic Review* 55, no.3 (Fall 1996): 637; Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 71 and Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Worker’s*, 100. In the post-soviet era, “[S]exual harassment appears to be on the increase and the law preventing it evidently is not enforced.” in *Russian Women in Politics and Society*, ed. Wilma Rule and Norma C. Noonan (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 2; 74; 160-162. Lynne Attwood concurs: the “increasing competition for work means that women can more easily be exploited by their bosses, and sexual harassment and sexual abuse are now rife” in *She was asking for it’: rape and domestic violence against women*, in *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 103.

<sup>98</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99. This is the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry.

<sup>99</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99.

“often paralyses the desire of women to work, ... women attempt to leave different shops for those where women predominate, and... women leave [work] entirely.”<sup>100</sup> Tellingly, women wanted to work with other women and were reluctant to take on jobs, or promotions, where they would be in a minority. There is some evidence that women were also reluctant to accept promotions because of workplace harassment. In 1929 a seven-month study analysed female promotees in the Leningrad Province and concluded that these women were subject to “rude and uncomradely attitudes [and] neither the party nor [factory] administrations imposed any penalties.”<sup>101</sup> The precise nature of the “rude and uncomradely attitudes” was left unspecified but what is clear is that women workers received no support from the factory administration or the Party. Into this contested workspace, some women workers in leadership positions were not conforming to male ideals of womanhood or work and were actively opposed.

Male training staff also reinforced expectations of what they considered to be appropriate female work. As the Zhenotdel’s Bokaeva argued, “there exists an incorrect pedagogical

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<sup>100</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99. The Zhenotdel archival record rarely chronicled sexual assault. See Koenker’s study of the printing industry where sexual assault complaints were much more common among women night shift employees, “Men Against Women,” 1454. Ward emphasizes that women wanted or needed night work, because of “family ties, machine idiosyncrasy, pay systems, traditional patterns of work, social relations at the frame and the disturbing impact of the new workforce,” in *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 226, Eric Naiman, “The Case of the Chubarov Alley: Collective Rape, Utopian Desire and the Mentality of NEP,” *Russian History* 17, no.1 (1990): 1-30 and Oleg Kharkordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study in Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 128-129.

<sup>101</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (11 September, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.169. The report was authorized by the Central Committee (TsK VKP (b)) and was conducted from 23 July, 1928 until 1 March, 1929 in Leningrad Province. Similarly, Wendy Goldman argues that “Women were passed over for training and promotions and subject to vicious abuse when they entered “male” shops or apprenticeships. Men frequently refused to work with women, asserting that newcomers did not belong in certain jobs or sections of factories,” in “Industrial Politics, Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women’s Movement in the U.S.S.R.” *Slavic Review* 55, no.1 (Spring 1996): 72.

approach towards girls in the factory training schools (FZU) of the metalworking industry, where they [the instructors] say, that this is not your speciality, it would be better for you to study textile production and so on.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, another instructor discouraged women doing machine-tool work because “[I]nstead of encouraging the girls in their new work, the instructor puts them off by frequent ‘explanations’ about the different abilities of [male and female] students.”<sup>103</sup> Female trainees were also denied work assistance to encourage resignations. In October 1927 in a Leningrad paper factory:

When a man worked, [there] was a stocker and a tally-clerk, who did accounts on defective products, but when a female worker trainee started to work, then all work was loaded on her, and she could not handle the work and had to decline this work because she did not receive any help whatsoever. In her place a man was promoted who worked some time, he did not want to work without an assistant, they gave him an assistant.<sup>104</sup>

In 1928 at the Leningrad October Railway Station there was a total of 1,056 workers and fifty-six women and from this number there was a total of 654 conductors of which thirty-eight were women.<sup>105</sup> The Zhenotdel delegate, Nikolaeva, recounted that two girls training to be conductors approached her to switch to Proletarskaia Pobeda textile mill:

Two girls came to me and they said, ‘transfer us to the textile factory training school,’ when we asked, ‘why do you want to transfer?’ they said: ‘because they [instructors] told us that it is not your place and for you it’s all the same upon graduating you won’t obtain work here, but you will work as unskilled labourers, or you will be sent to the [labour] exchange.’<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.57. The factory training school FZU was known variously as *fabricno-zavodskoe uchilishche*, *fabrzavuch*, or FZU school; it could be integrated within an existing shop or a separate enterprise altogether.

<sup>103</sup> A letter by N. Zyblikova under the heading “Mozhet byt’ zhenshchina slesarem” in *Rabotnitsa*, no.11, (1926): 17.

<sup>104</sup> An example from a Leningrad Oblast’ Zhenotdel Conference held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, 1928. TsGAIPD, f.24, op.8, d.12, l.109. Also see V.H. “Strashno podoiti k podmasteryam,” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 13 (1926): 15-16 and Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 159.

<sup>105</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.55.

<sup>106</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.55. Thomas G. Schrand provides numerous examples of how foremen and male workers viewed women with hostility and or relegated them to unskilled labour, “The Five-Year Plan for Women’s Labour: Constructing Socialism and the ‘Double Burden’, 1930-1932,” *Europe*

This example was selected because the instructors did not want the girls to work in transport and the girls were taunted with the prospect that even when their training was completed they would work as unskilled labourers or be sent to the unemployment office. Moreover, the girls wanted to be transferred to a textile factory school ostensibly because more women worked in textiles. Overall, the Commission recognized the workplace harassment of women; it stated that the solution was to “raise the cultural level, especially among the young and those newly arrived from the countryside...through cultural enlightenment.”<sup>107</sup> Fully consonant with Bolshevik ideology, it was primarily “young” and “peasant” workers who were deemed guilty of harassing women workers on the factory floor, while veteran, male cadre workers were irreproachable.

Young women or girls were also routinely sent to the Labour Exchanges after the completion of training programmes, while their male peers were hired in the factory. At a plenum meeting of the Commission Kliueva, a Commissariat of Enlightenment official, argued that “[T]hey [managers] do not use girls in production [because] of their narrow-mindedness [and] boys are left in production while the girls are sent to the Labour Exchange - although they are equally qualified.”<sup>108</sup> The official Kir’anova reiterated this point; after submitting a report on female unemployment to this plenum she concluded that a central issue was that “girls finishing at the factory school are sent directly to the Labour Exchange, but the boys are employed [immediately] in production, irrespective of

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*Asia Studies* 51, no.8 (1999): 1455-1478 and Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 123.

<sup>107</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99.

<sup>108</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.57.



their abilities.”<sup>109</sup> To emphasize that women, irrespective of skill, were registered disproportionately at the Labour Exchanges, Kir’anova went on to specify that there “are 50,000 female trade unionists registered at the Labour Exchange, but only 20,000 men [trade unionists].”<sup>110</sup> This issue of trained girls being sent directly to the Labour Exchanges rather than into production, in Kir’anova’s opinion, merited that “the Provincial Executive Committee create a special committee on this issue.”<sup>111</sup> According to the archival record no such committee materialised. In 1928 a Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium meeting discussed the fact that “[unemployed] male workers went straight [back] to work or other factories, but women remained unemployed.”<sup>112</sup> Moreover, this meeting again singled out the factory training schools where the “boys finishing the factory school find a speciality, but girls are sent into auxiliary work, although they [the girls] finished their studies not worse than the boys.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, despite identical skills the factory schools deemed the boys “skilled” workers and the girls “supplementary”, in effect, “help-mate” workers. This finding is consistent with female representations in Soviet political iconography of the 1920s where women played secondary, supportive roles to men.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, it complements the findings that skill

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<sup>109</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55. Trained girls or women were routinely bypassed see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.55 and TsGAIPD SPb, (2 June, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.23.

<sup>110</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55.

<sup>111</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55.

<sup>112</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 June, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.23.

<sup>113</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 June, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.23.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Waters argues “The male figure remained the universal - the symbol of the proletariat, revolution, and the victory of socialism. The female form, once allegory was abandoned, played only a supportive role, standing for women or the peasantry, subordinate social groups,” in “The Female Form in Soviet Political Iconography, 1917-32,” in *Russia’s Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel and Christine D. Worobec (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 242. See Victoria Bonnell, “The Representation of Women in Early Soviet Political Art,” *The Russian Review* 50, no.3 (July 1991): 267-288; Susan Reid, “All Stalin’s Women:

was largely defined as a masculine attribute.

Not surprisingly, a Leningrad province-wide trade union report conducted in 1927-28 found that the more complex and responsible the work, the lower the percentage of women therein.<sup>115</sup> It is possible that some recent female graduates from factory schools were as skilled as their male colleagues but not classified as such. Women workers, the report specified, were in lower, less responsible jobs because they had “insufficient technical literacy,” but the report also acknowledged that women were not promoted because “the strength of female workers was under-estimated.”<sup>116</sup>

The issue of hiring newly trained men over trained women was part of a larger pattern of keeping women out of the factories generally, and certainly keeping them from doing “male” jobs. Many reports indicated that the historical tradition of hiring men only was applauded. As summarized by a 1926 industry-wide report “the use of female labour in production is impeded by...the ‘glorious old’ traditions of preference of male labour in metallurgy, timber and electro-technical industries [*italics in original*].”<sup>117</sup> Numerous factory shops did not hire women because they traditionally had not done so.<sup>118</sup> As one

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Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 133-173 and Victoria Bonnell, “The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art of the 1930s,” *American Historical Review* 98, no.1 (February 1993): 55-82.

<sup>115</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.146.

<sup>116</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.146.

<sup>117</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.98.

<sup>118</sup> At the Electroapparat, “Electricians - do not take [women], because it is uncommon,” TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.96. In the Skorokhod factory, “Locksmiths employs 250 men in the leadership’s opinion because of shop tradition...” TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.97. At the Red Triangle factory’s rolling press women are barred because “in the shop’s leadership’s opinion,... earlier women were not admitted to this work.” TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.97. Schrand quotes one foreman “who considered the arrival of women in his [bottling] shop ‘the highest form of punishment’”

Zhenotdel article explained, women were associated with lower wages in late Imperial Russia and this caused disputes between male and female workers, with the former not admitting women to various factory shops and ousting them from factories and plants entirely.<sup>119</sup>

Tradition and patriarchal attitudes help explain why factory managers would specifically request male workers from the Labour Exchanges. Zhenotdel officials were infuriated that factory managers consistently only requested men, not women, from the Labour Exchanges when work was available. As Kliueva put it, “What can the Commission do concerning work requests when the factory managers give a request for only male labour although women can fully carry out this work?”<sup>120</sup> Her conclusion is supported by statistical data from the Labour Exchanges who permitted what was known as “named requests.” In Petrograd in 1922, almost 70 percent of all those sent to jobs were “named requests.”<sup>121</sup> The Labour Exchanges also recorded whether the “named requests” were for male or female workers. Interestingly, from January 1922 to March 1923, requests for male workers averaged 8,099 per month, while those for females averaged 2,842. Even in the unskilled category, there were sixty-five requests for every 100 unskilled male workers while only twenty-four were made for the same number of female workers. Whether the requests were for unskilled, skilled or white-collar workers the pattern was

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see this and numerous other misogynistic attitudes, in “The Five-Year Plan,” 262.

<sup>119</sup> Lilina, “Istoriia zhenskogo rabocheho dvizheniia,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*, no.5 (1923): 14. Also see Glickman, *Russian Factory Women*, 87-88 and Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar, *Women and Work in Russia 1880-1930: A Study in Continuity Through Change* (New York: Longman, 1998), 86-88.

<sup>120</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.57.

<sup>121</sup> M. Nefedov, “Itogi raboty Petrogradskikh Birzh Truda za 1922g,” as cited in Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 157.

consistent; men were always requested in larger numbers. Nationally, between August and October 1923, there were approximately eighty-five named requests for every 100 male unemployed and only thirty-seven for every 100 unemployed females.<sup>122</sup>

Overall, the Labour Exchanges were legally obliged to funnel all the unemployed to the factories or plants. Although impossible to verify statistically, some evidence suggests that nepotism was rampant in the 1920s and correct procedure was not followed in the Labour Exchanges. In May 1928, a Rabkrin (Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate) investigation published an article in *Trud*, the trade union newspaper, entitled "Bribe-takers in the Labour Exchange" which chronicled patronage and favouritism. It also noted that in order to get full-time or public works jobs, many people had been forced to bribe officials.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, as one Zhenotdel official argued, "many arrive from the countryside with families and they settle at our factories and plants, and the managers hire them because they are brothers or in-laws. It is thanks to this, that the female unemployment rate does not decline."<sup>124</sup> A trade union official concurred that "[T]he Labour Exchange needs to pay heed to the abnormal phenomenon of managers, who get their workforce at the [factory] gates and those discharged from various towns. This workforce does not circulate through the Labour Exchange...."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> All aforementioned statistics in the paragraph are from Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 157-158.

<sup>123</sup> An example from the Moscow Labour Exchange and is quoted in Chase, *Workers*, 140-141.

<sup>124</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.57.

<sup>125</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56. Similarly, Porket argues that in the 1920s "it continued to be alleged that in quite a few places workers were still hired 'at the factory gates.'" *Work*, 45. In Leningrad, see Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 90. Goldman's work *Women at the Gates* deliberately employs this metaphor because it speaks to how women were hired at the gates, barred from

In addition, although there were fixed quotas for girls in training programmes in factory schools or brigades, Zhenotdel officials pointed out that “factory training schools fill up, in the majority of cases, from those whose parents make good money.”<sup>126</sup> In October 1927, a transport delegate, Anufrieva, reported the following:

I think, that not in a single factory training school there does not exist a fixed per cent of girls ... we were sent guidelines, in which they say that girls can be accepted only in the lathe department and only up to 20 per cent. Factory training school has two girls and ‘absolutely no more are accepted.’ It does not matter how well they study, more than two are not accepted in the factory school.<sup>127</sup>

Paradoxically, the above suggests that the quota system could be used to discriminate against girls who would only be admitted up to the prescribed quota and no more.

Simply put, some factory managers wanted to limit girls in their training programs.

Factory managers also wanted to limit the number of women in their factories and chose to give their predominantly male workforce more over-time rather than hire more women. It was one of the eight recommendations made by the Commission that to reduce female unemployment “the Labour Inspection chambers [must] secure maximum curtailment of over-time work, admitting this only in especially exclusive cases.”<sup>128</sup> In Leningrad, at least, it was admitted that “currently over-time in industry occupies a significant place in production....”<sup>129</sup> More specifically, “the Electroapparat Plant

certain jobs at the factory gates and then especially during the First Five-Year Plan the gates were opened.

<sup>126</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 October, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.84.

<sup>127</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.12, l.111. Setting quotas for female students backfired when the female workforce increased and managers did not increase the percentage of female students. As Schrand puts it, “although women comprised approximately 27% of the industrial labour force in 1930, the Sovnarkom quotas guaranteed them only 20% of the enrolment in industrial training,” in “The Five-Year Plan,” 1464.

<sup>128</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.101.

<sup>129</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99.

recorded 7,295 overtime hours within three months, Skorokhod 3,504 overtime hours within three months and Red Triangle 13,363 over-time hours “only” in December by 1,902 workers.”<sup>130</sup> In short, in these male-dominated factories, managers elected to give workers more over-time rather than hire more women.<sup>131</sup>

It was the factory managers’ attitudes and behaviour which sought to limit women’s participation in the workforce through the use of selective hiring and promotion practices, training programs, and over-time. It was reiterated constantly, by both men and women in the Commission, that managers were the largest impediment to the expansion of female labour. In a 1926 industry-wide report commissioned by the Commissariat of Labour, it was the first recommendation that to decrease female unemployment “it is necessary to struggle against administrative sluggishness (*kosnost*) in their views on women....”<sup>132</sup> It specified that “several measures impede the use of female labour in production: sluggishness and short-sightedness of the administrative personnel [managers]...saying that it is not a women’s place to do accurate and more complex work....”<sup>133</sup> Most Commission members blamed managers for holding retrograde views on women as workers.<sup>134</sup> Most, however, would not have endorsed Zhenotdel’s Nekrasova’s damning conclusions that, “[Technically] factory managers endeavour to

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<sup>130</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.99.

<sup>131</sup> In 1926 the Electroapparat factory consisted of 1,131 blue and white-collar workers of which only 109 were women TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.95. In 1926, in Electroapparat; Electro-technical Trust of Red Triangle; Chemical Trust of Skorokhod; Leather Trust; and the Kalinin Machine Trust, 41,769 people were hired of which only 2,326 (5.2 percent) were women, TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.95.

<sup>132</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.100.

<sup>133</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.98.

<sup>134</sup> Male and female Commission members blamed managers: Kir’anova, Dushenkov, Bogdanov,

draw in a larger group of female labour into production, but it is the opposite they want. They try to introduce as few as possible women into production and if they do dismissals, it is from women and they do not want to improve female re-qualifications.”<sup>135</sup> In general, factory managers believed that it was economically unproductive to hire women.<sup>136</sup>

As noted earlier, the crux of the issue was whether women were economically unproductive to hire vis-à-vis men? In 1926, one such study was conducted by the Commissariat of Labour through its Commission. The study’s mandate was “to examine the causes impeding much broader use of female labour in production.”<sup>137</sup> This detailed study filed reports on the following enterprises: Electro-apparat, Electrotechnical Trust of Red Triangle, Chemical Trust of Skorokhod, Leather Trust, and the Kalinin Machine Trust. In the Commission’s synopsis “it’s obvious...not the growth in the use of female labour in industries but a sharp drop ( especially paper, tanneries, electro-technical and metallurgy).”<sup>138</sup> Significantly, in 1926 from the aforementioned enterprises, 41,769 people were hired of which only 2,326 were women or only 5.2 per cent of the new workforce.<sup>139</sup>

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Nekrasova, Bokaeva, and Kliueva, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.56-57.

<sup>135</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56.

<sup>136</sup> Kir’anova argued: “Our managers are sluggish, [they say] that women are unprofitable, taking time off work although on maternity, this is not true - only a little time-off work (without a good cause) [but] among men after the holidays [drunkenness], and even during work time some [men] waste time smoking,” in TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.55. Ward argued “Post-holiday absenteeism was a ‘mass phenomenon’ in Leningrad’s Ravenstvo’s mill in 1928, ‘in the mule rooms the selfactors stood idle while the rest of the factory was working flat out.” *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 76-77. Mule rooms were exclusively male-dominated. For male drunkenness, see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 217.

<sup>137</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.95.

<sup>138</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.95.

<sup>139</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.95.

For our immediate purpose, this study compared the productivity of tens of thousands of male and female workers in these varied industries throughout the Leningrad area. The findings were explicit: “in labour intensification, the work-rate, work quality, both at school and at work, women, are indistinguishable from men.”<sup>140</sup> Similarly, “[I]njuries and work illnesses among women are a proportional ratio to men.”<sup>141</sup> In balance, despite the stereotypes, women were as competent and productive as men. Other comparative productivity studies conducted confirm that women generally performed at a similar level to men.<sup>142</sup> One such study conducted by the Commissariats of Labour and Health examined 138 heavy industrial tasks and concluded “that there were no sanitary-hygienic reasons or concerns related to levels of illness, traumatism or the economic effectiveness of labour why women should not be employed in a whole range of tasks in heavy industry.”<sup>143</sup>

Nevertheless, even Zhenotdel publications contributed to the stereotypes of weaker women workers. In 1923, Zhenotdel’s *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*, published a lengthy article about women workers and their employment rights; it emphasized “women were more often sick than men,” that “women, in general, had a weaker organism than men,” and “women were more susceptible to production harms.”<sup>144</sup> It was in the realm of their

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<sup>140</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.98. Similarly, see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 243.

<sup>141</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.100. In late Imperial Russia, “[B]y 1913 when the senior factory inspector enumerated the industries that were employing women for the first time, he reported that manufacturers were finding that “women have the same productivity as men and are also more precise and indulge in less truancy.” [Svod, 1913]” as quoted in Glickman, *Russian Factory Women*, 88-89.

<sup>142</sup> See reports in Ilič’s *Women Workers*, 37-38 and Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 168.

<sup>143</sup> Ilič, *Women Workers*, 37.

<sup>144</sup> E. Ch. “Chto dolzhna znat’ rabotnitsa ob okhrane zhenskogo truda,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.5 (1923): 15-17; 17.



reproductive capacity and pregnancy that women workers needed the most protection, not only for themselves but to protect their unborn children. Pregnancy and its aftermath, was not seen as natural when combined with work, but often described in language akin to a disease. The article noted that women should have maternity leave because “work in the two month post-natal period can stimulate an irregular condition in mothers and turn women into invalids.”<sup>145</sup> Paradoxically, Zhenotdel leaders were attempting to explain why women needed protective employment legislation, but in the process reinforced stereotypes of weak, needy women.

Of course, a “special” gender separate Commission for unemployed women also reinforced similar stereotypes. Nevertheless, more resources were also required to keep the Commission operating effectively. Not only was work prepared unsatisfactorily, Commission representatives neglected to attend meetings or to send qualified personnel. In 1927 the Labour representative, Avdeev, singled out Zhenotdel for particular rebuke:

It was a basic task to resolve unemployment, but when this issue became severe, when women were registered far more at the Labour Exchange than men and requests were far fewer, then this issue was raised at the Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Party Executive Committee. Of course, but it is much easier to say the Commission did little, but who needs to be interested in this work, not Zhenotdel, they did not always provide a representative and if a representative was selected for the Commission, it was a new one who did not know what was going on.<sup>146</sup>

A week earlier, Avdeev, went on to clarify that the Commission faced three central issues. First, “to clarify definitively who needs to lead the present Commission, the

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<sup>145</sup> E. Ch. “Chto dolzhna znat’ rabotnitsa ob okhrane zhenskogo truda,” 15.

<sup>146</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.57. Broikhshtein, of the Commissariat of Social Security, concurred that “all say that the Commission works poorly, and so who is guilty, after all

Commissariat of Labour or the Provincial Council of Trade Unions (GSPS).”<sup>147</sup> After five and a half years the Commission’s leadership was still being debated. Second, Avdeev, wanted “to secure concrete funds to fulfil the Commission’s work.”<sup>148</sup> This suggests the Commission operated at a low financial priority. Third, he sought “active support on behalf of Zhenotdel, the Trade Unions and party organizations....”<sup>149</sup> which implies their support was lacklustre. In brief, five years after the Commission’s creation, Avdeev still argued that it needed stronger leadership, more funds, and better support from its members.

In summation, across the 1920s, the Commission had been unsuccessful in mitigating neither the percentage nor numbers of unemployed women. In April 1922 there were 15,000 women registered at the Petrograd Labour Exchange comprising 72 per cent of the total,<sup>150</sup> and five and a half years later by October 1927 there were almost 100,000 unemployed women comprising 71.4 cent of the registered unemployed at the same exchange.<sup>151</sup> Significantly, women made up virtually the same percentage of the unemployed in 1922 as in 1927 and in round numbers, female unemployment had increased 6.66 times. As late as 1927, only ten per cent of women versus fifty per cent of men registered at the Leningrad Labour Exchange were receiving unemployment

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the Commission has seven people from representatives in various institutions, which do not show up and that dragged conducting basic work, ” TsGAIPD SPb, (1 November, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.56.

<sup>147</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 October, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.84.

<sup>148</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 October, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.84.

<sup>149</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 October, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.84.

<sup>150</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19.

<sup>151</sup> These figures came from the Leningrad Labour Exchange on 13 October, 1927 and presented to a 21 October, 1927 plenum of the Commission, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.86.

benefits.<sup>152</sup> With access to fewer benefits, unemployment was usually more dire for women than men. Arguably, unemployment for women had more severe consequences than for men not only because women received fewer benefits, but because women were already associated with the private, “unproductive” sphere. In the 1920s, managers associated women workers with *byt’* or domesticity and, often, a subverted class consciousness.<sup>153</sup> Managers and trade unionists often found female unemployment tolerable because they denigrated women workers’ class credentials by referring to them as “babas,” “housewives” or “princesses.”<sup>154</sup> Hiring whomever they wished usually translated into employers hiring men, not women. To encourage managers to hire more women, Zhenotdel, in retrospect, could have used the productivity studies to publicize that women made efficient, productive workers rather than raise the spectre that unemployed women might become prostitutes or abandon their children. Overall, the battle against female unemployment provides evidence as to why many Zhenotdel leaders promoted an end to NEP and supported those party officials who offered greater government economic involvement and full employment under the banner of the First Five-Year Plan.

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<sup>152</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.83. I disagree with Ward’s assessment that, “female registration should properly be seen as a marginal, opportunistic element in the labour market. There is very little evidence to suggest that chronic unemployment, regardless of gender, was a feature of the industry,” in *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 149. Using his own figures “women were two-thirds of the nation’s jobless mill hands late in 1926” but women overall were disproportionately not receiving unemployment benefits, so there is a gendered element to this discussion. *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 133. See “Report from t. Grishnaia about Women in the Garment Factories” in Petrograd “there are 1,140 unemployed people in the union, of this 900 are women.” see TsGAIPD SPb, (26 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.78.

<sup>153</sup> The foregoing analysis of unemployment supports the historian Joan Wallach Scott’s analysis that “Work, in the sense of productive activity determined class consciousness...; domesticity was outside production, and it compromised or subverted class consciousness;” therefore “class, was a gendered construction,” *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 79.

<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, according to Chase “a high unemployment rate is intolerable in any society, but ... particularly embarrassing to the leaders of the world’s first socialist workers state, *Workers*, 138.

Zhenotdel leaders assumed that Bolshevik party members, as either trade union leaders or factory managers, wanted more women in the paid workforce. The Commission's challenges were often a microcosm of Zhenotdel itself: personnel shortfalls, insufficient funds, poor accountability, and lack-lustre support from other agencies. Although Zhenotdel lobbied on behalf of women in the Commission, it did not attend all meetings and sent junior personnel. In general, male factory managers and trade unionists emphasized that women remained unemployed because of their physical weakness, mental failings, susceptibility to production hazards, and lack of qualifications. In contrast, the Zhenotdel leaders usually emphasized women remained unemployed because of the attitudes, behaviour and hiring practices of men. Overall, in many workplaces a culture of harassment prevailed and male preferential hiring was the norm. Men and women concurred that lack of skills and the conditions of daily life affected adversely women's employment opportunities. For many factory managers during NEP, the easiest solution was to limit female employment and not fundamentally alter the workplace or society. Zhenotdel wanted to expand communal eating facilities, day cares and laundries to encourage women to move into the paid workforce. Two groups of urban women, housewives and prostitutes, who remained out of "production," will be discussed in the following chapter. Paradoxically for Zhenotdel, there were benefits to the organization if some women remained in the private sphere.

## Chapter 3

### “We Parted Like Sisters”: Housewives and Prostitutes

In 1923, Kollontai wrote a short, moralistic tale about a housewife who discovers that her husband has brought a prostitute home to their apartment. The husband was a worker but in the new climate of the 1920s reinvented himself as a NEPman, or businessman. He began to embody “bourgeois” degeneracy. He dressed smartly, ignored his wife, drank alcohol regularly and even began to “use scent.”<sup>1</sup> While the husband slept, the two women, the housewife and the prostitute, discussed their difficult lives and realised their mutual male economic dependency and vulnerability. The wife experienced an epiphany and declared, “You won’t believe it...but as I listened to her my sympathies shifted completely. I began to feel sorry for the girl. I suddenly realised that if I had no husband I would be in exactly the same position as this young woman.”<sup>2</sup> Kollontai concludes that the housewife feels revulsion for her husband and leaves him to become economically independent, and that the two women “parted like sisters.”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter, like Kollontai’s fictional story, will analyse how Zhenotdel organized housewives and prostitutes. According to Marxist theory, there are some obvious linkages between these groups as both are economically reliant on males for their

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<sup>1</sup>Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 218 and in A. Kollontai, “Sestri,” *Kommunistka* nos.3-4, (1923): 23-26.

<sup>2</sup> Kollontai, *Selected Writings*, 223.

livelihood and are ostensibly practising a “parasitic” non-productive form of labour.

Zhenotdel attempted to bring both housewives and prostitutes out of the private into more acceptable public spheres of production. Thus, this chapter will be divided into two sections. The first half will discuss how Zhenotdel organized housewives and the second half will explore how Soviet officials debated the issue of prostitution.

In the 1920s, Zhenotdel leaders only slowly began to broaden their constituency to housewives because they felt a natural affinity with women workers. Moreover, despite official proclamations that women workers were the best delegates because of their level of political consciousness, housewives often made excellent delegates because they had more time. It was an awkward reality that revealed one of Zhenotdel’s ideological and political paradoxes. To assuage their discomfort, Zhenotdel leaders employed a more proletarian language and constructed housewives (*domokhoziaki*) as workers’ wives (*zhenrabochi*) in their publications. Similarly, there was a perceptible shift to highlight domestic and family responsibilities in their journals to make the Soviet housewife more productive, more efficient, in effect a rationalized housewife.<sup>4</sup> Predictably, there was not a comparable attempt to create a rationalized prostitute nor augment the status of the prostitute through a linguistic recasting! While Zhenotdel leaders manifested sympathy for prostitutes, and viewed the phenomenon as a vestige of capitalism and widespread unemployment, as the decade wore on, attitudes became more conservative.

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<sup>3</sup> Kollontai, *Selected Writings*, 224.

<sup>4</sup> For other European examples, see Mary Nolan, “Housework made Easy”: The Taylorized Housewife in Weimar Germany’s rationalized Economy,” *Feminist Studies* (Fall 1988): 549-78 and Robert L. Frost, “Machine Liberation: Inventing Housewives and Home Appliances in Interwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 18, no.1 (Spring 1993): 109-130.

Nevertheless, Zhenotdel policy in the 1920s was fairly consistent: the prostitute needed to be reformed and channelled into productive “regular” work behaviour.

### Housewives’ Time and Their Uneasy Relationships

On 8 March, 1925, Diukova, a housewife delegate from Vasil’evskii Ostrov, in Leningrad, addressed participants of the 4th Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel Conference: “In the past, housewives knew only their stove, cooking, chamber-pots and children and nothing more. The majority of housewives had never worked. And, after they got married, they did not know factories, nor plants. Now, Zhenotdel districts are paying ‘special attention,’ to housewives. And, now housewives attend courses, political lessons and party school, we now even have some who have joined, or want to join, the ranks of the communist party. We housewives have more free time and we, as mothers, need in the first place, to attend various day care facilities, where we have an inherent maternal eye and feeling, and understand that in these facilities, everything is not all right. I call upon housewives to acknowledge that women workers are occupied at the factories and plants and remain free only for a few hours.”<sup>5</sup> Diukova’s speech highlights the relationship between housewives and women workers, the privileging of paid work over unpaid work, the time available to housewives and women workers and the inherent or “special” abilities of mother housewives.

Like white-collar workers, housewives have been “hidden” in the social narrative of the

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<sup>5</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.157.

1920s, as most historical works have concentrated on blue-collar male workers.<sup>6</sup>

Zhenotdel organizers attempted to refashion their terminology. They constructed three terms, housewives, a hyphenated housewives/ workers' wives and simply, workers' wives. Zhenotdel leaders, in an effort to augment the status of a housewife had constructed a new category: she was now a worker's wife. However, she was not fully proletarian, but a wife of a worker. Similar to Gregory Massell's argument that Moslem women were supposed to act as a surrogate proletariat in the absence of an urban proletariat in Central Asia, one could also argue that housewives became surrogate proletarians constructed as wives of workers.<sup>7</sup> In short, by substituting the term workers' wives for housewives Zhenotdel leaders were attempting "social integration by articulating an affirmative proletarian universalism."<sup>8</sup>

This "affirmative proletarian universalism" was particularly crucial because of the New Economic Policy's historical context. A sanctioned limited market economy had helped create massive, disproportionate and chronic unemployment for women. Consequently, NEP resulted in a multiplication of different types of urban women: those who were unemployed and became housewives, those working in private enterprises, those working as traders, those engaging in prostitution, and, in Kollontai's words, those women who

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Orlovsky, "'The Hidden Class,'" 220-252. In contrast for the 1930s, housewives and the *obshchestvennitsa* movement are discussed by: Mary Buckley, "The Untold Story of *Obshchestvennitsa* in the 1930s," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no.4 (1996): 569-586; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste," in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Rebecca Balmas Neary, "Mothering Socialist Society: The Wife-Activists' Movement and the Soviet Culture of Daily Life, 1934-41," *Russian Review* 58, no.3 (July 1999): 396-412 and Thomas G. Schrand, "Soviet 'Civic-Minded Women' in the 1930s: Gender, Class, and Industrialization in a Socialist Society," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no.3 (Autumn 1999): 126-150.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, xxii-xxiii.



were dependent on Nepmen, the “doll-parasites.” There was a high degree of fluidity in these categories and among housewives there were wives of white-collar, blue-collar, handicrafts (*kustar*) and red-army men. Zhenotdel had to compete particularly with trade union and Komsomol organizations to organize women, and with a reduction in personnel and funds allocated to creating a socialist society, this task was onerous.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, housewives during NEP were the largest group of urban women.

Housewives dominated the urban landscape because, despite the fact the number of “women in factory production doubled between 1923 and 1929, women’s share of the industrial labour force remained fairly constant at 28%.”<sup>10</sup> As Artiukhina, director of Zhenotdel in 1927 stated, “84% of the women who needed jobs - wives of workers and peasant migrants - had never worked for wages.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite their numbers, Zhenotdel activists were extremely ambivalent about organizing housewives, slow to adopt strategies and methods, and underestimated housewives’ abilities. This multifaceted ambivalence stemmed from a Marxist antipathy towards housework and by extension, housewives, a privileging of the public sphere over the private sphere, and a fear that organizing housewives would compromise organizing women workers. In contrast to the accepted historical view, both Western and Soviet, the archival record shows that Leningrad housewives were active and competent Zhenotdel

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<sup>8</sup> Orlovsky, “The Hidden Class,” 222.

<sup>9</sup> NEP imposed financial restrictions on Zhenotdel: Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 178; Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 266; Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 91; and Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 339.

<sup>10</sup> B. Marsheva, “Zhenskii Trud v 1931 godu,” *Voprosy truda*, 1 (1931): 2 in Goldman, *Women*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Goldman, *Women*, 113.

delegates.<sup>12</sup> The main reason why housewives made good delegates is that, simply put, they had more free time than women workers. Why were Zhenotdel organizers reluctant to organize housewives? Many Zhenotdel activists, like most Bolsheviks, believed that “consciousness” could only be attained through paid labour in the public sphere. There existed a privileging of paid public work, over unpaid private work. Above all “[P]articipation in the work force by women was widely assumed to be the necessary and sufficient condition for the elevation of their consciousness.”<sup>13</sup> As Wendy Goldman puts it, soviet theorists “assumed that women would only be free if they entered the world of wage labour” and Elizabeth Waters concurs that it “was frequently stated that women must be freed from housework in order to attend meetings, that *meshchanstvo* was incompatible with political consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> All women, but particularly housewives, were associated with the private sphere, where “political backwardness”, “passivity” and “counter-revolutionary” influences supposedly resided.

Overall, there was considerable anxiety and ambivalence about a separate women’s section and, more specifically, this ambivalence was compounded by organizing

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<sup>12</sup> Hayden accepts uncritically Bolshevik women organizers’ descriptions of housewives, as they were described as hostile to Soviet power and “completely uninvolved in the life of society.” Zhenotdel workers went from door to door talking to women in their apartments, they offered the housewives representation in the local soviet and tried to convince them to participate in delegates’ meetings and elections. Judging from Unskova’s reports from the Moscow region, these efforts were largely unsuccessful because of “too few proletarian elements” among the housewives,” in “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 146-147. Also see Chirkov, *Reshenie* 217 and Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 345. Briefly, the delegate system was an elaborate apprenticeship system for women to train in the soviets, trade unions, educational facilities, hospitals and food services. For an indication of the delegates system’s importance, see Chirkov, *Reshenie* 93; Armand, *Stat’i*, 136-137; and Kollontai *Selected Articles*, 166. According to Chirkov, across the Soviet Union, there were 95,000 delegates in 1922, 620,000 in 1927 and 2.2 million in 1932, *Reshenie* 93.

<sup>13</sup> Koenker, “Men Against Women,” 1439.

<sup>14</sup> Goldman, *Women*, 11 and Elizabeth Waters “The Bolsheviks and the Family,” *Contemporary European History* 3, no.4 (1995): 282-3. As Vera Dunham explains, *meshchanstvo* is a “middle class mentality that is vulgar, imitative, greedy, and ridden with prejudice,” *In Stalin’s Time: Middle Class Values in Soviet*

housewives, that group most closely identified with the private sphere. Zhenotdel's self-perception as an organization designed to help "backward working women and peasant masses,"<sup>15</sup> then it is not too surprising that a concerted effort to organize housewives only occurred in 1925, six years after the creation of Zhenotdel.

Consequently, in March 1925, when the 4th Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel Conference convened, housewives were marginalised at the conference, both in terms of speeches given, and in the number of delegates attending. From the full 526 page stenographic archival record, with hundreds of speeches, only one housewife addressed the conference to talk about her experiences.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, out of the 949 urban delegates, only fifty-three were housewives.<sup>17</sup> For example in 1923/1924 throughout all of Leningrad's districts there were only forty-two housewife delegates, but the following year 1924/1925 the number of housewife delegates rose an astonishing level in a single year to 602 women.<sup>18</sup> Zhenotdel had begun a concerted campaign to canvass this group, and this was reflected in the aforementioned yearly summaries.

Nevertheless, throughout 1925, reports from Leningrad districts indicate that work among housewives was in its initial stages: in the Krasnaia Znamia textile mill, "work has only

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*Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 19.

<sup>15</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 June, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.46.

<sup>16</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.157. One other delegate, Kharlashova, a housewife from Leningrad district, addressed the conference but she spoke strictly about peasant women, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, ll.52, 53. The full 526-page stenographic record of this three-day, province-wide Conference is found in three dela, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, dd.13046, 13047 and 13048.

<sup>17</sup> TsGAIPD SPb f. 16, op.13, d.13048, l.199.

<sup>18</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12988, l.35. For more on housewives see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12988, l.37.

just begun, there has been one organizational meeting,”<sup>19</sup> in the Provincial Financial Department (Gubfinotdel), “this month we held the first organizational meeting, around forty housewives attended,”<sup>20</sup> in the Karl Marx Railroad Club there were 1,040 housewives but there were no excursions nor housewife correspondents at Zhenotdel’s journal *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, at no point in the 1920s were there systemic campaigns to make prostitutes Zhenotdel delegates, only isolated “conversions” occurred.<sup>22</sup>

There is ample evidence that women worker delegates were over-stretched and overworked compared to housewives. Overall, according to time-budget studies, in the 1920s women workers spent approximately an average of almost five hours daily on housework, while men workers spent only one and a half hours.<sup>23</sup> More specifically, Zhenotdel delegates and organizers were overburdened. Workers were compelled to use their lunch breaks to motivate women, as one noted dryly, we “have five minutes to create a communist.”<sup>24</sup> She goes on to explain that “organizers are overworked, and there

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<sup>19</sup> From the protocols of the Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium, in TsGAIPD SPb, (19 August, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.150.

<sup>20</sup> From the protocols of the Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium, (16 September, 1925), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.201. There were a total of 121 women, both white and blue-collar wives.

<sup>21</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.253.

<sup>22</sup> Frances Bernstein, “Prostitutes and Proletarians: The Soviet Labor Clinic as Revolutionary Laboratory,” in *The Human Tradition in Modern Russia*, ed. William B. Husband (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 123.

<sup>23</sup> More precisely, “in 1922, for example, male workers spent an average of 1 hour and 29 minutes on housework, but women workers spent 4 hours and 58 minutes,” in Chirkov, *Reshenie*, 217.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes from Meeting on 17 January, 1928 of Zhenotdel Organizer and party cell organizers in Leningrad, TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.14, l.3. Zhenotdel Head of Moskovsko Narvskii district explains in her report that “basic work is conducted during lunch breaks.” TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.14, l.19. It was also difficult to lead mass work during lunch breaks because of noisy machinery, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.14, l.20.

is insufficient individual instruction of women workers.<sup>25</sup> Many complained about the poor quality of organizers who found it difficult to combine work, school and family responsibilities. The organizer “does not have any time for schooling, because besides her work, she still has to take care of her children and her drunk husband.”<sup>26</sup> At the Khalturin mill, “most work up to six o’clock and...many workers have their children in day care which closes at five o’clock. Overall this impedes the activity of women workers.”<sup>27</sup> As Iakovleva, an organizer from Vasil’evskii Ostrov district, described her work: “[S]imply, you run about like a dog, to one section, then to another, and I do piece-work. If I leave my work I will lose my earnings....”<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, one Zhenotdel organizer, urged more understanding. The organizer “is not a machine who spins all the year round.”<sup>29</sup> This pattern of multiple responsibilities for women and girls in the 1920s is a prominent theme in the historical literature.<sup>30</sup>

The reduced responsibilities of housewives could make them more active delegates than women workers. As mentioned earlier, the delegate Diukova, from Vasil’evskii Ostrov,

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<sup>25</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.14, l.3.

<sup>26</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.14, l.7, “If you want the organizer to study, give her free time,” f.24, op.8, d.14, l.19.

<sup>27</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.161.

<sup>28</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.14, l.13, “[I]n our workplace, 600-900 people in the cell the zhen organizer does not have a free hour in order to convene a meeting, if she does not produce her work quota, then her wages will suffer,” TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.14, l.11. A similar situation was described in Proletarskaia Pobeda textile mill, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.14, l.21.

<sup>29</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.14, l.14.

<sup>30</sup> According to Koenker’s discussion of women printers in the 1920s, she sees women’s “reluctance to take on more demanding work or extra work activities because of their double burden [work and family]” in “Men Against Women,” 1454. Anne Gorsuch argues that “Young women’s responsibilities at home made it more difficult for them to join political and cultural organizations such as the Komsomol,” in “A Woman Is Not a Man: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928,” *Slavic Review* 55, no.3 (Fall 1996): 640. Elizabeth A. Wood discusses women’s trade union and zhenotdel responsibilities in “Class and Gender at Loggerheads in the Early Soviet State: Who Should Organize the Female Proletariat and How?” *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 306.

emphasized that housewives had more free time than women workers.<sup>31</sup> In late 1924 a summary report on Leningrad workplaces was submitted to the Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium: “workers’ wives/housewives are involved sufficiently in work and display great activity in their practical work, as well as in their studies, overall 5,000 are involved in work. [D]elegates from workers’ wives fulfil thoroughly their obligations and practical work, [ because] they have more free time than women workers.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1925, the Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel sent directives to districts to organize housewives so as “to oppose the intensification of NEP influences on this stratum.”<sup>33</sup> Officially, therefore, “NEP influences” signalled a policy change. Directives throughout 1925 further clarified the relationship between workers’ wives/housewives and women workers. In particular, Zhenotdel emphasized that work among housewives cannot detract from work with women workers and, secondly, one has an opportunity to use the strengths and influences of organized women workers in our work among workers’ wives.<sup>34</sup>

The directive emphasizes further that it is necessary to use a “special method of approach” with workers’ wives but “co-ordinate them with methods of work among women workers.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, “workers’ wives [were to] secure the proletarian influence of women workers.”<sup>36</sup> This points to a fear that workers’ wives/housewives might compromise the organization of

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<sup>31</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.157.

<sup>32</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12988, l.94.

<sup>33</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.145.

<sup>34</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.145.

<sup>35</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.145.

<sup>36</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.145.

women workers and raises the issue of contaminating the working-class state.<sup>37</sup> It is this fear that motivates the provincial Zhenotdel leaders to spell out the nature of the relationship:

... the politically developed woman worker will help her [worker's wife] to raise her own level of consciousness, a woman worker needs to be explained that a housewife may help a woman worker construct institutions, improve the *byt'* of the working class, but to disassociate themselves from work among workers' wives, from general work among women workers, that view is erroneous.<sup>38</sup>

Zhenotdel organizers in subsequent directives were instructed to distinguish between:

“white-collar groups, in particular Red Army wives, [and] work among them needs to be led, in form and method, like among workers' wives, but, highly literate white-collar wives need to be attracted to arranging cultural-enlightenment work among the backward mass of workers' wives.”<sup>39</sup> It is clear from these directives that women workers occupied a higher status than housewives and among housewives themselves, notably the white-collar highly literate ones were to arrange “cultural enlightenment [for] the backward mass of workers' wives.”

Significantly, although official directives ranked the capabilities of housewives and women workers, district-wide Zhenotdel reports, even in 1925, seemed to contradict many of these assumptions. In Tsentral'nii “a district with 38,324 housewives... we observe that housewives' participation is very high,”<sup>40</sup> and in Moskovsko Narvskii district, “with about 50,000 housewives...their attitude towards women workers is

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<sup>37</sup> Orlovsky, “The Hidden Class,” 46. He makes this point vis-à-vis white-collar workers but I argue it is equally valid for workers' wives/ housewives.

<sup>38</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.146. According to Wood, “the women's section always felt that women workers were their first priority...” in “Class and Gender,” 298.

<sup>39</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.148.

<sup>40</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.143.

good.”<sup>41</sup> In 1925, district reports describe housewives’ mood in the Vyborg district as “good,” and, in an astonishing admission, by 1926 “work with housewives was better than with women workers in one respect because housewives were more free and active....”<sup>42</sup> Consequently, in unpublished reports Zhenotdel leaders could admit that housewives made fine, even better delegates than women workers.

The relationships between these varying groups of urban women were possibly uneasy or strained because the Party was urged to overcome “some antagonism between women workers and workers’ wives.”<sup>43</sup> Although the official directives emphasized “joint meetings,”<sup>44</sup> in Leningrad’s Moskovsko Narvskii district a report that “the attitudes of housewives towards women workers is good, and the housewives want to meet together with women workers, but this has not happened,” suggests that women workers were reluctant. Workers’ wives were also discouraged from participating in factory clubs, ostensibly from a lack of funding.<sup>45</sup> In 1926, one Zhenotdel organizer submitted a report that “work among housewives was incorrect because they were entirely isolated from workplaces and institutions where their husbands work. For example the *fabkom* (factory

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<sup>41</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.252. In district-wide reports in Moskovsko Narvskii conducted in 1926, housewives were described as “very active and participating greatly in club work and social organizations,” TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.92.

<sup>42</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.248 the second quotation is from TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, ll.116-117. During the Industrialization Day campaign of 1929, housewives apparently were employed extensively and described in Vyborg as “working willingly”; in Vasil’evskii Ostrov district as “wishing to work;” in Moskovsko Narvskii district “600 worked well;” in Petrogradskii district “the housewives’ mood was very good” and in Volodarskii district “404 people worked [and] wanted to continue to work.” TsGAIPD SPb, (18 July, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.53.

<sup>43</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.146. The source is not clarified but a subsequent Collegium meeting documents “economic” antagonism and the need to lower prices, see TsGAIPD SPb, (5 May, 1924), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.85.

<sup>44</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.147.

<sup>45</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.244. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether these clubs were exclusively for men, women or both. See John Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers: State, Class and Culture



committee) does not permit workers' wives to join any factory organization or club whatsoever."<sup>46</sup> As noted, the Zhenotdel's primary nexus for housewives was through their husbands' workplace and if housewives were not permitted to fully participate in "any factory organization or club whatsoever" this would severely limit organizational efforts. The report goes on to explain that, "in the delegates' meetings held in the factories only women workers attend, but no workers' wives."<sup>47</sup>

Ironically, in 1926 there is some evidence that housewives were subject to discrimination from Zhenotdel delegates and the very organization that promised them equality. In Moskovsko Narvskii district housewives were, according to the report, "exclusively" receiving instruction on the topics of "health and maternity and child welfare."<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the Zhenotdel organizer deduced that the housewives were receiving a "very narrow education" because they did not "consider general political topics" and dramatically, this could end in a "breaking off (*otria*) work with housewives from work among women workers."<sup>49</sup>

In February 1927, the Zhenotdel organizers re-evaluated their tactic of holding joint study circles and delegates' meetings of women workers and housewives. As one Zhenotdel Collegium member explained, "I am now against last year's policy of joint groups. [of political literacy circles] The most backward stratum of housewives, workers' wives,

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in Moscow's Workers' Clubs Movement, 1925-1928," *The Russian Review* 53, (January 1994): 97-117.

<sup>46</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.83.

<sup>47</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.83.

<sup>48</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.92.

<sup>49</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.92.

finds it difficult to sort out and understand immediately serious political issues.”<sup>50</sup>

Housewives of all ilk were often described as “passive” and “backward” reflecting the fact that female activists, whether in trade unions, Komsomol or Zhenotdel, could be equally as disparaging as their male colleagues.<sup>51</sup>

A month later, in March 1927, a Zhenotdel Leningrad Provincial Collegium meeting discussed district-wide reports on Leningrad city and the issue of housewives and women workers. In Moskovsko Narvskii district “it is necessary to lead work around clubs, because this form of work helps overcome antagonism between women workers and housewives.”<sup>52</sup> In Vasil’evskii Ostrov district, there were housewives who volunteered in factory organizations, but none were in leadership positions.<sup>53</sup> In Volodarskii district the “basic cause of antagonism between women workers and housewives is the economic situation, and that is why implementing only political measures will not eliminate this [antagonism].”<sup>54</sup> A persistent problem was the difficulty of coordinating free time between women workers and housewives for delegates’ meetings.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, these reports identify antagonisms among women workers and housewives, but do not delve into details. The upshot of the meeting was that the Leningrad Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium agreed to form a commission to explore the relationship of women workers

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<sup>50</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.14. Vinzberg concurred with her colleague, like the “joint political literacy study circles are not working: we need a different programme for housewives this year,” in TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.14.

<sup>51</sup> See Gorsuch, “A Woman is not a Man,” 656; Koenker, “Men Against Women,” 1443; and Wood, “Class and Gender,” 302.

<sup>52</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.63.

<sup>53</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.63.

<sup>54</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.63.

<sup>55</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.14, l.63.

and housewives.<sup>56</sup>

It was the relationship between housewives and husbands which often shaped both Zhenotdel's organizational strategies and housewives' participation in the organization. Although, some housewives were reached in their homes, and encouraged to join in volunteer work, with severe funding cutbacks during NEP, this time-intensive method was curtailed.<sup>57</sup> Significantly, by 1925 housewives were usually identified through their husband's workplace.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, housewives were more dependent than women workers on the co-operation or acquiescence of their husbands. The literature is replete with husbands objecting to their wives' participation in volunteer work. The following is a smattering of quotes from Leningrad Zhenotdel organizers: "in isolated cases, the husband sends his wife to meetings, allowing her to fulfil her work, but frequently husbands are highly indignant about wives doing public work."<sup>59</sup> One delegate reported that "one wife went into public work and her husband left her for another woman."<sup>60</sup> There is some indication that men, even Communists, were reticent about their wives participating in social work: as Zhenotdel delegates put it "we need to educate men, even communists, concerning their attitude towards the family"<sup>61</sup> Another added "we need to work among communist men, so that they will encourage their wives to participate in public work."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, according to historian Mark von Hagen, the Red Army was

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<sup>56</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.63.

<sup>57</sup> Hayden, "Feminism and Bolshevism," 146.

<sup>58</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.243.

<sup>59</sup> Sofia Smidovich's Leningrad report found at RGASPI, (1923) f.17, op.10, d.92, l.57. Similarly, "family relations are a sore subject, especially among conservative men," RGASPI, f.17, op.10, d.92, l.57.

<sup>60</sup> RGASPI, f.17, op.10, d.92, l.58.

<sup>61</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.92, l.59.

<sup>62</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.92, l.58.

dismayed to learn that many senior staff members and officers discouraged their wives from doing paid or volunteer work because “you want to come home to a nice domestic setting where you can relax. A Communist wife could not provide such a setting because she would be working no less than you.”<sup>63</sup> Communist women, whether they were Zhenotdel delegates or Komsomol members, had multiple responsibilities that could potentially upset the “nice domestic setting.” Without an independent income, Zhenotdel officials lamented housewives were also more economically vulnerable<sup>64</sup> than women workers. Most housewives were contacted through their husband’s workplace and organizational work with housewives, as with women workers, was better in workplaces that had factory housing, day cares, and communal cafeterias.<sup>65</sup>

#### Reaching Housewives Through the Printed Word

Housewives were also contacted increasingly through print. The main theoretical Zhenotdel journal was *Kommunistka*, but other publications included *Rabotnitsa*, *Krest’ianka* and *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*.<sup>66</sup> It was through these journals that housewives would be exposed to changes affecting their legal status and campaigns for the rationalized housewife. Theoretically at least, the 1926 family Code indicated a new perception of women’s housework. Under the original Bolshevik Family Code what one earned while married remained his or her property; a wife did not contribute to the

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<sup>63</sup> As quoted in Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship.: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 193.

<sup>64</sup> “Housewife delegates are poorly paid and cannot do their work,” Protocols of Zhenotdel Petrograd Collegium, TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d. 12567, l.14.

<sup>65</sup> “But where we have workers’ housing, attached to the factory, workers’ wives are drawn into the factory club work.” TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12998, l.94. See 1925 questionnaire handed out at the Provincial Leningrad Conference “very many, especially housewives, volunteered in their answer to this question a request to expand public dining facilities.” TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1.

“family” income by her labour in the home.<sup>67</sup> The new legislation, however, enacted in 1927, amended this ruling, and tacitly acknowledged the value of housework. As the subscribers of *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* learned:

If the wife is busy only with serving the family, caring for the children etc., then because her work is without a doubt helpful and necessary, she has the full right to her part, even if during the time of married life she did not personally have any income.<sup>68</sup>

As one Soviet historian optimistically noted, the 1926 legislation “placed women’s labour in the house and childcare on an equal footing with the labour of man in production.”<sup>69</sup>

Housework was not on an equal footing with the labour of man in production but its value was being augmented throughout the 1920s with campaigns to improve its efficiency. In 1923 the journal *Rabotnitsa* introduced “The Housewife’s Page” which included the column entitled “What and How to Cook” and throughout the 1920s “devote[d] more and more space to advice on housekeeping and child care.”<sup>70</sup> While addressing a Zhenotdel conference in 1925, a leading Bolshevik, Evdokimov, called for more written material because, as he explained patronizingly, “almost all mothers know nothing about child care....”<sup>71</sup> In 1926 regular articles appeared in *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* extolling the virtues of “introducing the regime of economy in housework.”<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of the aforementioned journals see Chirkov, *Reshenie*, 83-85.

<sup>67</sup> See Beatrice Farnsworth, “Bolshevik Alternatives and the Soviet Family: the 1926 Marriage Law Debate” in *Women in Russia* and Wendy Goldman, “Freedom and its Consequences: the debate on the Soviet Family Code of 1926.” *Russian History* 11, no.4. (1984): 362-88.

<sup>68</sup> F.M. Nakhminson, “Obsuzhdaem. Novyi zakon o brake i sem’e,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* 12 (30) (December 1925): 22.

<sup>69</sup> Chirkov, *Reshenie*, 192.

<sup>70</sup> Halina Rothstein and Robert A. Rothstein, “The Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts,” *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 179.

<sup>71</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.97.

<sup>72</sup> “Stranitsa domokhoziaiki,” *Rabotnitsa* 23 (December 1926): 26.

Part of a Western drive for efficiency which paralleled efforts in industry, the Soviet housewife was admonished for wasting time because “she does not know how to correctly organize her housework.”<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, this rationalized housewife received instructions and “advice on housework, on correct nutrition, on cookery, on sewing and needlework.”<sup>74</sup> More specifically, a “true revolution was taking place in the feeding of children, and mothers, not fathers, were encouraged to spend enormous energy and financial resources to feed the children properly.”<sup>75</sup> Overall, this was a clear attempt by the Party to erase the distinction between the private and the public sphere and to create a single social sphere.

The difficulty lies in ascertaining to what extent Zhenotdel was successful in propagating the Party message of a single social sphere. Some archival evidence reveals how women viewed the journal *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* and its departments. In 1925, 1,192 women answered detailed questionnaires from this journal while attending a Provincial Zhenotdel conference.<sup>76</sup> In general, the journal was popular and widely read; only twenty-one women from 953 respondents felt that several departments within the journal were completely unnecessary and should be abolished.<sup>77</sup> The housework column was described as a “popular” department because it offered women recipes for nutritious

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<sup>73</sup> “Pomoshch' domokhoziaike,” *Rabotnitsa* 23 (December 1926): 22. See Mary Nolan, “Housework made Easy,” 549-78; Robert L. Frost, “Machine Liberation,” 109-130. Rationalization was also promoted in North America, for Canada see Hobbs and Sangster ed, *The Woman Worker*, 37-38. For the United States and situated in a much broader context, see Sylvie Murray, *The Progressive Housewife: Community Activism in Suburban Queens, 1945-1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> N. Kaptel'tseva, “Chto pishut chital'nitsi o zhurnale,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.7 (April 1927): 28.

<sup>75</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein, “The Beginnings,” 179.

<sup>76</sup> In total, 1,192 women answered the questionnaire and from this number 722 were workers (out of which 382 were unskilled and 340 skilled workers); 261 peasant women; 118 white-collar workers and ninety-one housewives, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16; op.13, d.13122, l.1.

meals and tips on maintaining a hygienic home; but, this advice was not always followed because “very many, especially housewives, in answering this question volunteered a request [to] expand public dining-halls.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, not surprisingly, women were not fully committed to learning new domestic tasks because they expected an expansion of public eating facilities. The “Mother and Child” department was also very popular, with only four negative responses from 842 responses and the editors described the readers as being “extremely interested” in this section.<sup>79</sup> Readers wanted more patterns and sewing instructions included in the journal as well as this aforementioned department expanded; they wanted information about abortions, childhood infectious diseases, and the construction of more health care facilities in the countryside.<sup>80</sup> The question of how much influence women had on *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* is more problematic. Only fifty-eight of over a thousand politically active Zhenotdel women responded that they had direct contact with *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*'s editors.<sup>81</sup> In other words, these findings suggest by the mid-1920s rank and file Zhenotdel activists were contributing minimally to the journal's policy choices and direction.

By the late 1920s Zhenotdel, like many other party departments, operated with reduced personnel and funding and therefore, became particularly reliant on the print medium to reach many women. Nonetheless, from published letters and articles, housewives were reading *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* and apparently responding favourably to its contents.

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<sup>77</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1.

<sup>78</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1. Regrettably, there is no statistical breakdown.

<sup>79</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1.

<sup>80</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1. More patterns were included. By February 1926, Praskoviia Frantsevna Kudelli, an experienced party member, was the new editor, f.1728, d.338948, l.1.

<sup>81</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1.

With campaigns to create the rationalized Soviet housewife, there is some evidence that the constituency of Zhenotdel journals shifted. One housewife correspondent, Arkhipova, wrote that "women workers and white-collar workers relate passively to journal subscriptions while housewives eagerly subscribe."<sup>82</sup> Fully adhering to Soviet efficiency, another woman wrote that when she read the journal she passed it on to her neighbours who were especially interested in the sections, "Mother and Child" and "Housekeeping" and "[I]t would not be bad to increase these sections."<sup>83</sup> Groups of peasant women and a housewife also requested more sewing patterns and the housewife noted that she "received a lot of helpful information from the physicians' column, the housekeeping section, and the patterns."<sup>84</sup> Zhenotdel leaders appealed to women's traditional interests to encourage them to subscribe to their journals. Women were informed as late as 1929 that patterns, children's games, and designs for needlework would be free in 1929 if they subscribed to *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*.<sup>85</sup> In short, women were not urged to subscribe to Zhenotdel journals to learn about trade unionism, international socialism or the co-op movement!

In balance, the messages in these journals were decidedly ambiguous and were part of a general pattern of "two contradictory tendencies"<sup>86</sup> noted by other observers of the 1920s. As elaborated by the Rothsteins, "[O]n the one hand there was a continuation of revolutionary rhetoric about radicalizing the masses of women and about liberating

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<sup>82</sup> N. Kaptel'tseva, "Chto pishut chital'nisti o zhurnale," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.7 (April 1927): 28.

<sup>83</sup> N. Kaptel'tseva, "Chto pishut chital'nisti o zhurnale," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.7 (April 1927): 28-29.

<sup>84</sup> N. Kaptel'tseva, "Chto pishut chital'nisti o zhurnale," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.7 (April 1927): 29.

<sup>85</sup> *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.1 (January 1929) n.p. and *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.11 (June 1929): n.p. Sewing patterns and "latest fashions," were also advertised in *Rabotnitsa* no.2 (January 1927): 18.

<sup>86</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein, "The Beginnings," 178.



women from domestic chores, while on the other hand there was pressure for women to be defined by their gender and to be tied even more closely to their traditional functions as mothers and wives, even when they were entering the work force.<sup>87</sup>

Women were encouraged to frequent public canteens but given recipes clearly designed for individual households. Women were instructed on how to make their clothes cleaner, but continually told to make use of public laundries. For the historian a central dilemma remains: to what extent were Zhenotdel leaders truly committed to building a communal society when so much space in their journals was devoted to individual homes? Were the homemaking articles and patterns simply a lure to increase readership by appealing to women's traditional interests? A generous interpretation would be that the homemaking articles dealt with the immediate needs of women while financial restrictions made constructing a communal society a future endeavour. Conversely, so much space was devoted to childcare, maintaining a hygienic home, and preparing nutritious meals for the nuclear family because Zhenotdel leaders themselves clearly believed that these were natural and intrinsic female tasks. What was imagined as unnatural, but still fundamentally female in Soviet Russia, was the prostitute.

#### Prostitution Framed as an Economic Issue

In the mid-1920s, Ekaterina Mikhailovna Alekseeva, an 18 year-old prostitute, sent a handwritten letter to the Leningrad Zhenotdel requesting help to study.<sup>88</sup> Ekaterina Mikhailovna was born in 1907 in Tver province and had been placed in a children's

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<sup>87</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein, "The Beginnings," 178.

<sup>88</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13242, l.56.

home in 1914 where she had resided until 15 March 1925.<sup>89</sup> She was literate, unemployed and had swiftly become a prostitute because her letter arrived at Zhenotdel on 10 May 1926. Thus, although only a teenager, her life had already followed a trajectory of abandonment, unemployment and prostitution. She summarized how “urgent conditions forced [her] to practice prostitution,” but “I do not have the strength to exist for that [prostitution]” and she now appealed to Zhenotdel because she had “lost [her] documents on the streets.”<sup>90</sup> Clearly, this moving letter employed the language of victimization but it would end on a curious blend of soviet patriotism and the essential humanism of prostitutes. Arguably, Ekaterina Mikhailovna utilized her collectivist upbringing in the children’s home when she pressed for immediate help: “because prostitutes are people who struggle for soviet rule.”<sup>91</sup> Without a forwarding address, it is unlikely Zhenotdel officials helped Ekaterina Mikhailovna, but the remainder of this chapter will evaluate largely how Zhenotdel dealt with prostitution as opposed to individual prostitutes.

Zhenotdel’s broad approaches to prostitution were based on assumptions about Tsarist experiences and the prevailing Soviet political climate. Briefly, in late Imperial Russia urban women who were arrested for prostitution surrendered their internal passport and were issued a document called a “yellow ticket.”<sup>92</sup> This form of “regulation” drastically

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<sup>89</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13242, l.56. She had a rank one of twelve possible work ranks.

<sup>90</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13242, l.56.

<sup>91</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13242, l.56.

<sup>92</sup> The most comprehensive treatment is: Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Of course, not all prostitutes registered with the police. Also see Julie A. Cassidy and Leyla Rouhi, “From Nevskii Prospekt to Zoia’s Apartment: Trials of the Russian Procuress,” *Russian Review* 58, no.3 (July 1999): 413-31; Barbara Alpern Engel, “St.Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century: a Personal and Social

reduced personal mobility: the passport was required when looking for work or renting a room. In short, the “yellow ticket” made it extremely difficult for the woman to pursue legitimate interests and reintegrate back into mainstream society. Arguably, in the 1920s, Zhenotdel leaders often resisted more “regulation” than Soviet militia officials because this harkened back to the repressive Tsarist era. During the era of the civil war and so-called war communism, prostitutes were arrested and detained in camps as labour deserters.<sup>93</sup> With the introduction of the NEP in March 1921, there was massive unemployment and it was unworkable to prosecute people under the guise of labour desertion, so the authorities became more flexible adopting both repressive and tolerant treatments for prostitutes.<sup>94</sup> The implementation of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928 saw authorities reintroduce more repressive measures against prostitutes who were seen as dangerous work shirkers when the state felt compelled to re-impose control over the economy and society.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, overall in the 1920s there was a broad consensus among Soviet officials

Profile,” *Russian Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1989): 21-44 and Richard Stites, “Prostitute and Society in Pre-Revolutionary Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 31, no.3 (1983): 348-64.

<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Waters, “Victim or Villain: Prostitution in Post-Revolutionary Russia,” in *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Linda Edmondson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 163 and Elizabeth Wood, “Prostitution Unbound: Representations of Sexual and Political Anxieties in Post-revolutionary Russia,” in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, ed. Jane T. Costlow, Stephanie Sandler, Judith Vowles (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 131.

<sup>94</sup> There is not a single English language monograph on prostitution in the 1920s. However, see Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*; Cassidy and Rouhi, “From Nevski Prospekt to Zoia’s Apartment,” 413-431; Waters, “Victim or Villain;” Wood, “Prostitution Unbound,” N. B. Leбина and M. V. Shkarovskii *Prostitutsii v Peterburge* (Moscow, Progress Academy: 1994), 90-93 and I.A. Golosenko and S.I. Golod, *Sotsiologicheskie issledovanie prostitutsii v Rossii (Istoriia i sovremennoe sostoianie voprosa)* (St.Petersburg, 1998), 58-88. For males see Dan Healey, “Masculine Purity, Sexual Exchange and Prostitution between Russian Men, 1861-1941,” *Slavic Review* 60, no.2 (Summer 2001): 233-265 and his *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>95</sup> Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 126-127 and Waters, “Victim or Villain,” 170-171.

that prostitution was an urban scourge. Leningrad Zhenotdel provincial leaders first discussed the topic of prostitution in a Collegium meeting on the 17 November, 1920.<sup>96</sup> However, throughout the entire year of 1921 the topic of prostitution was never broached in its Collegium meetings<sup>97</sup> despite this being the year the NEP was implemented with the resultant widespread socio-economic dislocations discussed in chapter two. It was in the summer of 1922 that the issue of prostitution was next raised in the Collegium meetings, and this meant it took almost two years before a commission of experts created during the civil war met on a regular basis.<sup>98</sup> This commission was the Provincial Executive Committee's "Interdepartmental Commission on the Struggle Against Prostitution." It was composed of high-ranking officials from the Commissariats of Health, Justice, Social Security, Labour, Internal Affairs (NKVD), Education (ONO) and Zhenotdel. Hereafter, it will simply be known as the "Interdepartmental Commission." Its members concurred that prostitution was "intolerable in a Soviet republic and was incompatible with the communist world outlook,"<sup>99</sup> but were not unanimous on the best methods to reduce this phenomenon. The official line adopted was the familiar Marxist refrain that we are, "against prostitution, not prostitutes."<sup>100</sup> Here, the Interdepartmental Commission members were following a long-standing socialist tradition that, in theory, viewed female prostitutes as victims of both capitalist and male exploitation:

Prostitution in the Soviet republic is a survival of capitalism... Basically,

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<sup>96</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (17 November, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.21.

<sup>97</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12670.

<sup>98</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 July, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.53. There is only one meeting listed in the file for the Interdepartmental Commission on the Struggle Against Prostitution before 1922, it is dated 18 August, 1920, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12894, ll.1-2.

<sup>99</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.21.

<sup>100</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.24. Similarly, according to Waters in the 1920s, "Repeatedly...doctors made the point that the struggle was not against prostitutes but against prostitution," in "Victim and Villain," 167.

prostitution lies on the one side of women's parasitism, on the other exploitation of male individuals and women's economic dependence.<sup>101</sup>

Soviet authorities in the 1920s never fully reconciled whether or not prostitutes were complete victims because of the "parasitism" of their work and the danger the spread of diseases posed to the health of their citizens. The archival debates will reveal this spurious distinction between being against prostitution as opposed to prostitutes as the Interdepartmental Commission members willingly discussed isolating or quarantining prostitutes and severely limiting their civil liberties. The archival Zhenotdel record reveals that more attention was focussed on the issue of prostitution in Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium meetings in 1922 than any other single year in the 1920s.<sup>102</sup> Presumably, this is because in 1922 the Russian criminal code deliberately rejected criminalizing the prostitute herself, but this still left the issue of prostitution unresolved. In the fall of 1922 the Interdepartmental Commission convened numerous times to discuss the causes of prostitution, methods of reforming prostitutes and educating the general public. What was Zhenotdel's role in these debates? How can we evaluate Zhenotdel's role in organizing prostitutes? What is the broader significance of these debates about prostitution in the early Soviet state?

On balance, there was a broad consensus among the Interdepartmental Commission members that economic factors primarily unemployment, caused prostitution. While

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<sup>101</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.21.

<sup>102</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 July, 1922), f.16, op.13, d. 12791, l.50; TsGAIPD SPb, (29 July, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791,l.53; TsGAIPD SPb, (12 August, 1922), f.16, op.13, d. 12791, l.55; TsGAIPD SPb, ( 8 September, 1922), f.16, op.13, d. 12791,l.60; TsGAIPD SPb, (29 September, 1922), f.16, op.13, d. 12791, l.62; TsGAIPD SPb, (7 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d. 12791,l.85. The Collegium debated prostitution once in 1923 and 1928 and not at all in 1925, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1 February, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.18; TsGAIPD SPb, (1925),f.16, op.13, d.13036 and TsGAIPD SPb, (9 February, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.3.

Western scholars have debated more extensively the causes of prostitution, Soviet officials were fixated on economic need. Goffert, the Interdepartmental Commission's chairperson, reflected the general consensus that the issue of prostitution rested with the "struggle against unemployment."<sup>103</sup> Consequently, the archival debates in this Interdepartmental Commission dealt extensively with ways to reduce the female unemployment rate and protect vulnerable groups of women, namely single, young women with children.

While the Interdepartmental Committee members broadly concurred that unemployment was the primary cause of prostitution, devising strategies to give some women preferential employment treatment was controversial because it was tantamount to discrimination against other groups. On 1 October, 1922 Zhenotdel's Shitkina spoke out generally that "layoffs be less from single women" and proposed "that economic planners be obligated to leave a certain percentage of women [employed] even if it would result in a loss of production."<sup>104</sup> Evidently, Shitkina adopted a more humanitarian approach that a loss of profits was a necessary compromise because it prevented an unemployed woman from engaging in prostitution. Nevertheless, Shitkina's proposals were not accepted because Interdepartmental Commission members "found these measures irreconcilable."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.10. All concurred: Shitkina, TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1927) f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12; Val'ter, (1 December, 1922) f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15; and Perkal' TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>104</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.10.

<sup>105</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.10.

Despite the irreconcilability, Shitkina at the end of October 1922, in new meetings, continued to press for employment privileges for women workers to prevent layoffs and forestall prostitution, and forwarded a series of innovative and provocative measures.<sup>106</sup> Shitkina wanted it imposed as a duty that economic planners or managers be particularly careful when dismissing women workers. In all cases where male and female workers had identical productivity records, managers retain female workers.<sup>107</sup> Fascinatingly, despite an overall Bolshevik ethos which promoted urban work, Shitkina also proposed that Labour Exchanges select single, unemployed women and transfer them out of the city to obtain farm “work from peasants!”<sup>108</sup> Similarly, other unemployed women would be given a free ticket to return them to their hometown and thus remove them from Petrograd’s general vicinity.<sup>109</sup> Although presumably voluntary in nature, the impression gathered is that societal problems could be solved by simply removing problem women! Shitkina’s proposals were rejected but this meeting clarified that women could register at the Labour Exchange even if they did not have a labour book or the right credentials to register.<sup>110</sup> Another Interdepartmental Commission member proposed the staging of private charity events in the form of concerts and plays. It was vetoed as under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat of Social Security.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12.

<sup>107</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12.

<sup>108</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12. How precisely the women would be selected or how exactly the program would be administered was not clarified.

<sup>109</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12. This last point was passed into an official resolution from Semashko, [Health] Beloborodova [NKVD], Secretary VTsSPS Dorodova and Zhenotdel “Struggle Against Prostitution,” (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.24.

<sup>110</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12. Similar to the late Imperial period when some prostitutes were issued “yellow tickets” this Interdepartmental Commission proposed that unemployed women without a labour book would be issued a “special certificate”; nevertheless the crucial difference is that in the 1920s the “special certificate” was to keep women from becoming prostitutes, see TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12.

<sup>111</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12.

“Public” and “Private” Sphere

It was, however, the Commission’s jurisdiction to debate Shitkina’s last proposal that dealt with the construction of dormitories for unemployed women.<sup>112</sup> The construction of dormitories raised a series of important issues concerning the isolation of prostitutes, unemployed women, civil liberties and gender in the new Soviet regime. In these archival debates Soviet officials representing Health, Education, Zhenotdel and the Militia give us a rare, unpublished view of women, gender and society.

The entire issue of isolating prostitutes in dormitories was problematic for these Soviet officials. On 1 December, 1922, Zhenotdel’s Shitkina argued that “I have no objection in general against implementing isolation centres, but conducting such measures in such conditions of existing unemployment would be extraordinarily difficult.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, Shitkina agreed with the principle of isolation but it was impractical to implement. Okunev, an Education official, concurred with the policy but favoured dormitories because they mirrored the “United State’s reformatory path.”<sup>114</sup>

Interestingly, advocates of constructing the dormitories were ambivalent on whether they should “reform” or “punish” the prostitute. For example, Litvinskii, a Provincial Militia Commission member, noted that “Prostitution is not only the result of unemployment - we have a cadre of professional prostitutes, cultural measures among them are not

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<sup>112</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12.

<sup>113</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15. Shitkina would change her opinion.

<sup>114</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15.



effective, it is necessary to implement compulsory measures.”<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, Litvinskii, along with his colleague Rudnev, supported isolating prostitutes in dormitories as one of these “compulsory measures.” In a similar vein, another Militia Commission member, Serov, supported “measures to isolate professional and adult prostitutes, to construct workshops and thus to turn to methods of physical medical treatment and not lectures.”<sup>116</sup> The simple goal was that living in a dormitory with a workshop would “isolate” the prostitute and teach her new work skills and make her a productive worker through “physical medical treatment.” Overall, in these debates, the militia adopted a binary approach dividing prostitutes into “cadre” or professional category whom were difficult to reform and virtually immune to cultural measures and all other women who were “reformable.” As Elizabeth Waters explains, the “two views of the prostitute, as victim and villain coexisted for a while, the contradictions of subscribing to both, partially resolved by the division of prostitutes into the good and the bad, into those who could be returned to the fold and those who were beyond rescue.”<sup>117</sup>

Other Interdepartmental Commission members were not unanimous that isolationism would rescue prostitutes. Iaroshevskaiia, of the Commissariat of Health, spoke out against isolating prostitutes. She argued that while the dormitories were designed as voluntary in nature “forced isolation was inevitable,” and would eventually lead to the “regulation of prostitutes.”<sup>118</sup> Professor Val’ter, also of the Commissariat of Health, indicated that “isolationist measures were not new,... but the results can be negative, even

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<sup>115</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>116</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15.

<sup>117</sup> Waters, “Victim or Villain,” 172.

in several cases harmful [because] the isolation centres hit girls not yet attracted to prostitution.”<sup>119</sup> Paradoxically, if unemployed women and girls were housed alongside “professional” prostitutes they could be influenced towards beginning a life of prostitution in the very places designed to thwart this activity.

Consequently, the Interdepartmental Commission members now had to discuss the issue of who should be housed in the dormitories. As Rudnev put it, should they be earmarked for “unemployed women not practising prostitution” or “for prostitutes”?<sup>120</sup> In this new society, should unemployed women be given the priority of access to work skills and lodging, or prostitutes? Determining who precisely was a prostitute was compounded by the fact some urban women practised prostitution on a “casual” basis to supplement their incomes.<sup>121</sup> Presumably, this is why Professor Val’ter argued that “according to statistics there are more than 32,000 prostitutes and to take measures to isolate them is completely impossible.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, for this Health official the only pragmatic approach was to construct dorms and therefore employ “isolationist measures for juvenile prostitutes.”<sup>123</sup> Secondly, should admission to the dormitories be compulsory or voluntary in nature? The Interdepartmental Commission ultimately deferred this decision to the Provincial Party Committee.<sup>124</sup> The 1922 Criminal Code only made provision for the prosecution of individuals who forced women into prostitution or lived off “immoral” earnings and

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<sup>118</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>119</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18.

<sup>120</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>121</sup> See Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 126; Lebina and Shkarovskii, *Prostitutsii v Peterburge*, 90-93; and Waters, “Victim or Villain,” 166.

<sup>122</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18. Val’ter did not specify the geographic region. Waters cited reportedly 3,000 prostitutes in Moscow in 1929, in “Victim or Villain,” 173.

<sup>123</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18.

therefore devising compulsory measures against prostitutes themselves appeared illegal. Ultimately, these dormitories were organized voluntarily and were established as labour clinics (*trudovoi profilatorii*). In 1924, these labour clinics opened across the Soviet Union and some had a capacity to accommodate as many as 1,000 women at a time.<sup>125</sup> Bolshevik ideology invested a great deal in the transformative power of labour. Operating the labour clinics served the dual purpose of “reforming” prostitutes through work and removing at least some of them from the street or public sphere.

According to the Chairperson, Goffert, the militia were concerned with prostitution in the public not private sphere. As he put it, the “militia struggles against only external displays of prostitution - pestering in the street, hooliganism, etc....”<sup>126</sup> Goffert went on to explain rather colourfully that militia surveillance was needed for the “‘little flowers’ [prostitutes] in hotels and ‘dens of vice’.”<sup>127</sup> Arguably, Goffert had deliberately selected the word “little flowers” rather than simply prostitutes because in the late Imperial period another botanical word, “‘camellias’ [were] “secret prostitutes” [who] concealed their activities in private flats.”<sup>128</sup> Here the distinction is between the “private” call girl and the “public” streetwalker. Zhenotdel’s Shitkina supported this separation and argued that the militia should not arrest all the prostitutes but arrest only those women “displaying hooliganism, foul-language and other offences or improprieties on the street.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>125</sup> Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 115. Nationally, labour clinics peaked at forty four.

<sup>126</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>127</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>128</sup> Healey, “Masculine Purity,” 235.

<sup>129</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

For a regime ostensibly dedicated to building a communal society there was considerable anxiety about public places and acceptable female and juvenile behaviour. Goffert himself suggested that the Interdepartmental Commission needed to pay attention to “so-called ‘dancers’ who spread debauchery.”<sup>130</sup> Val’ter discussed the “corrupting influence of cinematographic pictures”<sup>131</sup> and several resolutions were passed to keep juveniles out of “entertainment places...races, clubs, restaurants, cabarets and musical comedies.”<sup>132</sup> Juveniles were also to be apprehended “from streets and public places in cases of begging, pestering and practising prostitution....”<sup>133</sup>

The broader societal significance of these resolutions was immense. More specifically, resolutions were passed “to prohibit juveniles attending cafes and restaurants, except canteens, even if accompanied by adults.”<sup>134</sup> Consequently, a binary distinction was drawn between the “safe” state-run canteen and the “corrupt” NEP private restaurant/café. The civil liberties of many adults and juveniles were compromised because, technically not only could a parent not accompany his/her juvenile child to a café, juveniles did not have freedom of association. Of course, it is unlikely the militia had either the willpower or the resources to enforce these resolutions. In general, these resolutions highlight the general anxiety about the public sphere, and a contaminated public space, which has been well documented in the 1920s.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18.

<sup>131</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 October, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.12.

<sup>132</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15. For an introduction to the topic of clubs, “hooliganism,” cinema, and youths see Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” esp. 114-115.

<sup>133</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (18 August, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.1.

<sup>134</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.24. Also see TsGAIPD SPb, (18 August, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.1.

<sup>135</sup> As Mauricio Borrero argues, “[P]rivate restaurants served as a foil for state cafeterias,” in “Communal

Gendered Isolationism, Disease and Commodified Pleasure

Significantly, it was only Zhenotdel officials in these debates who argued that to remove prostitutes from the public sphere and isolate them was morally wrong because the isolationism applied strictly to women. Zhenotdel's Shitkina requested, and received, an amendment to the minutes of the Interdepartmental Commission meetings to reflect that she was "against the isolation of prostitutes and taking measures against prostitutes."<sup>136</sup> During a 7 December 1922 Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium meeting, leaders passed a resolution which urged that prostitution remain an open form of regulation and not deviate into the realm of a "moral militia."<sup>137</sup> At this same meeting, the Zhenotdel Provincial leaders argued passionately in a feminist critique that isolationism "is punishment that only applies to women, not to men, who are more responsible for spreading prostitution...."<sup>138</sup> As noted, none of the other officials from health, education, the militia, and so on noted the inherent gender inequity of only isolating prostitutes and not customers. In this debate one gets a rare glimpse of Zhenotdel advocating on behalf of women as women, as opposed to women as workers or peasants. Moreover, these Zhenotdel officials are revealing their biases about the nature of prostitution and contributing to a stereotype of passive females by arguing that men are "more responsible for spreading prostitution." For these Zhenotdel officials, a clear sense of gender

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Dining and State Cafeterias in Moscow and Petrograd, 1917-1920," *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997): 163. Healey argues that the "male sex-trade continued to exploit the repertoire of nonverbal cues, hierarchies of age, and affluence, and concealed use of public space during NEP," in "Masculine Purity," 255. As Wood puts it, "Anxiety within the Communist Party manifested itself in the pervasiveness of rhetoric concerning the bourgeois threat and the fears of a resurgence of the old order. These anxieties,... came to be presented in sexual terms, with particular emphasis on the prostitute as a danger to the new order," in "Prostitution Unbound," 125; Gorsuch, "Moscow Chic," 75 and Naiman, *Sex in Public*.

<sup>136</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>137</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.85. Resolution repeated 15 December, 1922

inequality and indignation was manifested. They also made the argument that isolation was “materially impractical” and “realistic measures” were required to combat female unemployment and venereal diseases.<sup>139</sup>

Most Interdepartmental Commission members were keen to isolate prostitutes in order to reduce the spread of venereal disease. Considerable space was devoted in the 1920s to hygiene and the dangers of venereal diseases.<sup>140</sup> The Interdepartmental Commission members debated the utility of sexual education to discourage prostitution and the spread of disease. In general, the militia was more likely to dismiss the role of sexual education in discouraging prostitution; as one official noted dismissively, “the absolute uselessness of public lectures on the harms of venereal diseases.”<sup>141</sup> Not only were “public lectures” deemed absolutely futile, but so were lectures for the prostitutes themselves.<sup>142</sup> Yet another militia official concurred that “cultural measures” were ineffective with the “cadre” prostitutes.<sup>143</sup>

In contrast, many Commissariat of Health officials operated on the assumption that sexual education was a viable policy. Therefore Iaroshevskaja listed her Commissariat’s priorities at a Commission meeting: lectures in Komsomol; factories and plants; designing displays against venereal disease; having plays; giving unpaid treatment of

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Interdepartmental Commission on the Struggle Against Prostitution Meeting, f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18.

<sup>138</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.85.

<sup>139</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.85.

<sup>140</sup> See *Trud* 14 XII. 1922. no.282 “The Provincial Executive Committee’s Measures in About Measures in the Struggle Against Prostitution;” Naiman, *Sex in Public*, ch.7, 108, 219, 262, 272; Wood, “Prostitution Unbound,” 131-2; Waters, “Victim or Villain,” 170; and Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 116-117.

<sup>141</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15.

<sup>142</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15.

venereal disease and distributing brochures and posters.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, Zhenotdel officials lauded sexual education in the schools, staging plays and sponsoring unpaid treatment of venereal disease.<sup>145</sup> Individual responsibility to pay for treatments was considered secondary when this was a societal problem that needed to be eradicated promptly. In 1925, according to Commissariat of Health statistics, in Leningrad alone 90,900 cases of venereal disease were treated in its consultations.<sup>146</sup> In short, the authorities were attempting to manage a serious health crisis. In the broader public and Soviet imagination prostitutes were linked with spreading sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>147</sup>

Prostitutes were also associated with spreading pleasure, in a regime that was “mistrustful of pleasure and consumption.”<sup>148</sup> Prostitutes were associated with the NEPmen who operated the establishments devoted to food, alcohol, dancing and jazz music and “this despised Soviet bourgeoisie tempted customers to think about sex as a commodified pleasure, an outlook abhorrent to the Bolsheviks.”<sup>149</sup> Prostitutes were, naturally, also linked in the public imagination with pimps. Moreover, pimps were a double parasite because “selling women is incompatible with communist ideology.”<sup>150</sup>

<sup>143</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>144</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15. See Frances L. Bernstein on how sexual enlightenment was constructed, “Envisioning Health in Revolutionary Russia: The Politics of Gender in Sexual Enlightenment Posters of the 1920s,” *The Russian Review* 57 (April 1998): 191-217.

<sup>145</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.15.

<sup>146</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (17 April, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13243, l.47. Document from Bramson, Head of Sanitarno-Profilakticheskii P/otdel, sent to Provincial Zhenotdel covering 1925.

<sup>147</sup> See opening sentence of the Meeting of the Leningrad Provincial Soviet Struggle Against Prostitution TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2; Wood, “Prostitution Unbound,” 131-2; Waters, “Victim or Villain,” 170; and Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 116-117.

<sup>148</sup> Healey, “Masculine Purity,” 254.

<sup>149</sup> Healey, “Masculine Purity,” 254.

<sup>150</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.21. See attempts of the labour clinics’ authorities to stop

There was a consensus among Interdepartmental Commission members that pimping needed to be curtailed and this involved passing resolutions to increase surveillance of ‘dens of vice’ and controlling leases for hotels and restaurants and cafes with private rooms. For example, one meeting entrusted the newspaper editor, Perkal,’ and Health’s Val’ter “to draft a series of legal articles about punishing pimping and the maintenance of ‘dens of vice’.”<sup>151</sup> As noted, under the auspices of Article 171 of the 1922 Criminal Code, the militia could prosecute individuals who lived off the earnings of prostitution. Nevertheless, increased surveillance of the pimps moved prostitution into the arena of greater regulation. Greater regulation, however, increased the power of the militia and increased the regulation of prostitutes and some members were reluctant to condone especially the former. According to Iaroshevskaiia the greater “regulation of prostitutes [would lead] towards a ‘moral militia’.”<sup>152</sup>

Although it was in mid-1922 that the Commissariat of Internal Affairs, canvassed for the reintroduction of more regulations, a so-called ‘moral militia’, a special task force which would arrest brothel owners, fine clients, and under certain circumstances, publish their names, initially met with considerable resistance. Although technically *Izvestiia* reported that this ‘moral militia’ proposal had been put to one side because a heavy-handed approach might make fighting prostitution more difficult,<sup>153</sup> these closed debates in the fall of 1922 show continuing support for a ‘moral militia’ among some officials. More

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women from seeing former pimps, Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 120.

<sup>151</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18.

<sup>152</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>153</sup> Klara Zetkin, “Protiv militsii nravov,” *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1922 reprinted in V. M. Bonner, “Bor’ba s prostitutsei v RSFSR,” in *Prostitutsiia v Rossii* (Moscow, 1927), 90-94. Also see discussion in Leбина and Shkarovskii, *Prostitutsii v Peterburge*, 167-168.



specifically, Zhenotdel's Shitkina emphasized that "in the struggle against prostitution it is necessary to pay attention to pimping..."<sup>154</sup> but she was consistently opposed to increasing the powers of the militia.<sup>155</sup> In some respects, the Interdepartmental Commission members had unrealistic expectations. They wanted the militia to curtail prostitution by targeting pimps without any increase in the militia's regulatory powers. To reduce the possibility of the militia abusing these new powers, Iaroshevskaiia, a health official, proposed improving the militia's education level. Thus, members passed her proposal that "cultural enlightenment work among the militia [be] adopted" to ensure the "correct course in the struggle against prostitution"<sup>156</sup> be followed.

The Interdepartmental Commission members were also struggling against the inherent capitalist nature of prostitution and drew the following provocative analogy, "to derive material profit from intercourse with men should be condemned like strike-breakers or black-legging in capitalist countries."<sup>157</sup> Here we go beyond the familiar Bolshevik condemnation of a prostitute as a work shirker: she was a strike-breaker or "scab" and it was all conducted for "material profit." According to the members "to use a prostitute or to prostitute, one or the other form, is contrary to the interests of the working class and consequently is intolerable from the point of view of party ethics."<sup>158</sup> A good Communist, in other words, should not facilitate any part of prostitution, because it was "contrary to the interests of the working class." In balance, the Interdepartmental

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<sup>154</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>155</sup> See Shitkina's comments in the following meetings: TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16; TsGAIPD SPb, (7 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.85; and TsGAIPD SPb, (15 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.18.

<sup>156</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 December, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.16.

<sup>157</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.21.

Commission considered that eradicating prostitution would “strengthen solidarity and comradeship in the working class...”<sup>159</sup> Prostitution threatened the entire social fabric of early Soviet society because it brought into question proper sexual, commercial, class, and party relations.

### Discussing Prostitution in Collegium Meetings

To this end, what was Zhenotdel’s record in organizing prostitutes in the Petrograd/Leningrad region for the remainder of the 1920s? As noted, grand pronouncements were made about how prostitution was “intolerable.” It was against “party ethics” and “contrary to the interests of the working class.” However, at the highest levels, in the closed Collegium meetings of Zhenotdel provincial leaders the issue of prostitution was barely discussed after 1922.<sup>160</sup> When interdepartmental meetings were convened, Zhenotdel also provided no leadership whatsoever. In 1927, two meetings of the Provincial Leningrad Soviet’s Struggle Against Prostitution discussed the general efficacy of labour clinics and whether or not more should be created in the city. In these detailed and interesting debates from health, judicial, agitprop, soviet and militia authorities, the Zhenotdel representative, Drozdova, does not contribute a single word to the debate in either meeting! Consequently, it is impossible to deduce Zhenotdel’s position on any given issue; nor can one piece together a policy position because, as

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<sup>158</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.21.

<sup>159</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12894, l.21.

<sup>160</sup> In 1923, the topic of prostitution was only discussed a single time. For four years, 1924, 1925, 1926 and 1927 the topic of prostitution was never discussed in Collegium meetings and in 1928 and 1929 the topic surfaced only once! TsGAIPD SPb, (1 February, 1923) f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.18. See TsGAIPD SPb, (1924), f.16, op.13, d.12969; TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13 d.13036; TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13152; and TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246 and TsGAIPD SPb, (9 February, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.3. In 1925 there were over five hundred topics presented to the Collegium.

noted, in 1927 there were no references in Zhenotdel Collegium meetings to the issue of prostitution either.<sup>161</sup> One commentator refers briefly to Zhenotdel,<sup>162</sup> and when the chairperson, Bramson, suggests certain departments join a special commission to facilitate better communication he fails to include Zhenotdel.<sup>163</sup>

In these meetings, the central goal of the labour clinics was to reform the women by giving them simultaneously an “opportunity to get work and ...medical help.”<sup>164</sup> Moreover, the labour clinics were to have “close links with the Labour exchange.”<sup>165</sup> According to Professor Val’ter, the only Committee member present in 1922 and in 1927, the prostitutes needed to be introduced to their work regime “gradually” and he was “against overworking her” because the woman is “not in the habit of working” and might be “alienated from the labour clinic.”<sup>166</sup> More labour clinics were needed according to the chairperson Bramson because they would help in the “struggle against prostitution” and in the “supervision of venereal disease.”<sup>167</sup> Most of the discussion revolved around which agencies should pay for the labour clinics and some debate also existed on where the labour clinics should be built. Gorbovitskii considered that one labour clinic should be constructed in Moskovsko Narvskii “because it was the district with the most workers.”<sup>168</sup> Nevertheless, it was ultimately decided in June 1927 to construct two labour

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<sup>161</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.2-3. TsGAIPD SPb, (21 June, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.7.

<sup>162</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2.

<sup>163</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2.

<sup>164</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2.

<sup>165</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2.

<sup>166</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2.

<sup>167</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.3. The opening of a second labour clinic in Moscow was deemed evidence of their success.

<sup>168</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 February, 1927) f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.2.

clinics in Vyborg and Volodarskii districts.<sup>169</sup>

Soviet officials were still primarily concerned with “reforming” prostitutes through employment, controlling disease, and managing costs. In balance, the contours of the debates have changed little since 1922 with the noticeable absence of Zhenotdel participation. Despite the fact that these officials endorsed the labour clinics, “by the early 1930s the clinics gradually began to shut down...[which] reflects a much broader shift away from the voluntary methods and approaches pursued in the 1920s....”<sup>170</sup> By the end of the 1920s more Soviet officials were calling for forced correctional colonies to deal with prostitutes who could not be transformed through the labour clinic and many were eventually consigned to the rapidly expanding prison system.<sup>171</sup>

In summation, Soviet and Zhenotdel authorities were most flexible with prostitutes in conditions of high unemployment like NEP, but adopted more repressive measures during war-communism and the First Five-Year Plan. In 1922, Zhenotdel leaders were the only party officials in interdepartmental meetings who discussed the fact that isolating prostitutes in dormitories was morally wrong because only women, not men, were being punished. Reflecting broader societal trends, by 1927, Zhenotdel officials were

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<sup>169</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 June, 1927) f.16, op.13, d.13293, l.7. Ultimately, however, a labour clinic was opened in Tsentralnyi district on 18 November 1928, see headline “Pervyi zhenskii trudovoi profilaktorii” in Gordon, “Na borbu s prostitutsiei,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.1 (January 1929): 13.

<sup>170</sup> Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 126-127.

<sup>171</sup> Bernstein, *Prostitutes and Proletarians*, 126-127 and Waters, “Victim or Villain,” 170-171. Sheila Fitzpatrick also argues that former or known prostitutes were targeted for arrest during the Purges, in *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 126 and Melanie Ilič, ““The Great Terror in Leningrad: A Quantitative Analysis.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no.8 (December 2000): 1531. Similarly, see Healey’s discussion of male prostitutes in *Homosexual Desire*, 231-235.

completely silent in similar interdepartmental meetings of the successor to these dormitories, the labour clinics. Zhenotdel and Soviet officials alike viewed the issue of prostitution through the prism of unemployment. Here, success was elusive. Women made up virtually the same percentage of the unemployed in 1922 as in 1927 and in round numbers, female unemployment had increased 6.66 times.<sup>172</sup> Based on Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium Meetings, Zhenotdel's specific role in organizing prostitutes peaked in 1922, but waned completely in the mid 1920s because the issue was not raised for four straight years and forwarded a single time respectively in 1928 and 1929. Archival material proves unequivocally that the issue of prostitution was not a high priority.

In the 1920s, in Collegium meetings, prostitutes were discussed fleetingly and housewives frequently. Around 1925, a concerted organizational campaign began with housewives. Rationales paralleled broader strategies with women, to mitigate fears of "petty bourgeois" influences and to tap into an under-utilized resource. Paradoxically, Zhenotdel with limited funds had little incentive to encourage housewives to leave the "private sphere" en masse. Women workers were often overburdened while housewives had more time and frequently made excellent delegates. In addition, housewives' terms were unpaid and losing their "labour" from the home was deemed less valuable than a factory worker. Significantly, housewives were also often recast linguistically by Zhenotdel as workers' wives. This was part of a larger enterprise in the 1920s, where

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<sup>172</sup> However, in April 1922 there were 15,000 women registered at the Petrograd Labour Exchange comprising 72 per cent of the total, and five and a half years later there were almost 100,000 unemployed women comprising 71.4 per cent of the total, see respectively TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.19 and TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13297, l.86. The latter source is from the Leningrad Labour Exchange on 13 October, 1927 and presented to a 21 October, 1927 plenum of the Commission for the Improvement and Study of Female Labour in Industry.

“NEP brought unemployment, increasing marginality, uncertainty, and out of this uncertainty a constant pressure to prove one’s loyalty to the proletariat and its agendas.”<sup>173</sup> Widespread unemployment also compelled a re-evaluation of the nature of work. Mimicking efforts in industry, Zhenotdel promoted a rationalized housewife; she was instructed on how to cook, clean and care for the family more efficiently in its publications. The rationalized housewife campaigns and the success of the housewife delegate proved that housewives as a group were improving their status, but it also reflects the Party’s, and Zhenotdel’s, willingness to promote unpaid, female labour.<sup>174</sup> These policies would resurface in the mid to late 1930s, as unpaid white-collar housewives would “efficiently” help with cultural enlightenment activities in the *obshchestvennitsa* movement.

Kollontai’s fictional work considered housewives and prostitutes “sisters” because both were reliant on males for their economic livelihood. In fact, prostitutes and housewives were “unequal” sisters because the latter was sometimes willing to conform to the Bolshevik project of performing socially useful labour. The following chapter will discuss the multilayered interaction between Zhenotdel and peasant women.

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<sup>173</sup> Orlovsky, “Hidden Class,” 246. This was a substitute for full employment because “[I]f women were to be liberated economically and psychologically, they needed to become more like men, or more specifically, more like male workers,” Goldman, *Women*, 11.

<sup>174</sup> Housewife delegates increased their percentage from 1.4 per cent in 1923/24 to 15.7 per cent in 1928/1929 see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.57.

## Chapter 4

### “Why is the Hammer Above the Sickle?”: The Baba and the Bolshevik

The 1925 Leningrad Zhenotdel Provincial conference was a highly stylized mixture of stirring speeches, letter reading, gift giving, and singing the Internationale. Klavdiia Nikolaeva, director of Central Zhenotdel, was showcased at the conference.<sup>1</sup> Grigorii Zinoviev, head of the Leningrad party, however, was the conference’s keynote speaker. His participation was vital in three respects: it typified the trend of allowing party leaders to dominate the proceedings by opening each session and speaking the longest; it would be his last opportunity to address a major Zhenotdel event; and it showcased the policy of *smychka* (the union between town and country).<sup>2</sup> Interspersed between the speakers, party functionaries read telegrams and letters from such revolutionary luminaries as Klara Zetkin and Nadezhda Krupskaja.<sup>3</sup> The exchange of gifts was also highly orchestrated to reflect broader politics or goals. Women workers of the Rabochii textile factory, lauding the coveted *smychka*, symbolically offered their “labour” as a gift to peasants, while one

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<sup>1</sup> Zhenotdel’s course was often tied to broader party politics. By the end of the year Nikolaeva, due to her involvement in Zinoviev’s so-called United Opposition, would be demoted from both Zhenotdel and full member of the Central Committee and dropped entirely from the Orgbiuro, see Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 210.

<sup>2</sup> By the end of 1925, Zinoviev was embroiled in the so-called United Opposition. In contrast to Trotsky’s emphasis on heavy industry, the triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev based their political program on strengthening the *smychka*. For an introduction to party politics see Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 136-143. Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel’s work plan for October 1923 to March 1924 in its opening item discussed the goal of “realizing the *smychka*,” see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12900, l.61. Also see the role of the *smychka* in Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 85,91,102; *Making Workers Soviet* 203, 225, 236; and Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 244-247, 282.

<sup>3</sup> Krupskaja proclaimed that she could not attend due to “ill-health,” see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.174.

pioneer brigade received an actual gift, Lenin's portrait.<sup>4</sup> Crucially for historians, the conference provided a rare look at "ordinary" people because, of 1,411 delegates, hundreds of peasant women and women workers also gave speeches.<sup>5</sup>

The 1925 conference typified some of this chapter's main themes and reveals another source of tension between Bolshevik ideals and realities on the ground. Zhenotdel followed broader political trends. It made concerted efforts to attract peasant women into its organization from 1923 onwards. Overall these speeches in 1925, like throughout the 1920s, revealed a disconnect between the party leaders and the rank and file conference attendees. Urban party leaders often constructed a narrative about peasant women which emphasized their "darkness," "unconsciousness" and "backwardness." Paradoxically, despite the stereotyping, rank and file peasant women delegates not only wanted access to full party membership, they desired more funding for schools, hospitals and summer day cares. This suggests some peasant women did find the broader Bolshevik project appealing. Field reports in Trotsk county (*uezd*) and Dolozhsk township (*volost'*), southwest of Leningrad, further examine how far peasant women's organizing matched the ideals. In Trotsk county peasant women barely joined any party, state or soviet body and the least popular organizations were of mixed urban-rural composition.<sup>6</sup> An examination of the male out-migration Dolozhsk township showed that the absence of

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<sup>4</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.50 and TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.97. Red kerchiefs were also distributed, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.148; 150-151 and TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.76.

<sup>5</sup> Of these 1,411 delegates, 462 were peasant women and 949 were women workers, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.200 and l.199.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, *shestva* (patronage societies) were unpopular; and the rural *Krest'ianka* outsold the more urban *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*.



males allowed women the space to participate in rural soviets in far greater numbers than the provincial average. Greater political clout did not improve relations with either the Party or strengthen Zhenotdel. Access to full transcripts of conferences and field reports ground this chapter and will add to a historiography that, despite greater archival access, continues to show a limited interest in Russian peasant women during the New Economic Policy.<sup>7</sup>

### Official Assumptions and Messages about Peasant Women

According to Zinoviev in his speech at the 1925 provincial conference, women in general were admonished for having a “reactionary influence,” but they had a “huge role to play in the revolutionary movement.”<sup>8</sup> Zinoviev compared peasant men to peasant women and found the latter to be “less literate, less organized, more full of religious prejudice, more family oriented and more [intellectually] scattered.”<sup>9</sup> Zinoviev expanded his stereotypes to include a discussion of the “dark side” of country life, “drunkenness,

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<sup>7</sup> There are few articles, chapters and monographs on peasant women in the Soviet Union during NEP. Neither, *Russia in the Era of NEP* nor *Gender in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Linda Edmonson (New York: Palgrave, 2001) have a chapter on peasant women during NEP, but do on working-class women. *Russia's Women* devotes two of its fourteen articles to the 1920s. Similarly, *Russian Peasant Women*, ed. Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) concentrates two of its fourteen articles on peasant women during NEP. V. P. Danilov *Rural Russia Under the New Regime*. Trans. and Introd. Orlando Figes (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), Beatrice Farnsworth, “The Rural Batrachka (Hired Agricultural Laborer) and the Soviet Campaign to Unionize Her,” *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 64-93 and Tracey McDonald's “Face to Face with the Peasant: Village and State in Riazan, 1921-30,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2003). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, issues of race, nationality and gender have often shifted the focus away from the Russian Republic, see the archivally-based studies of Kemp, “Pilgrimage and Performance,” Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, Penner, “Pride, Power and Pitchforks,” and Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.57. Curiously, Zinoviev was the keynote speaker when he had opposed the 1918 Women's Congress, see Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 341.

<sup>9</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, ll.63-64. For Bogdanova the countryside was “our unconsciousness, our darkness,” see TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.97.

anarchy, and the humiliation of women.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, according to Zinoviev’s Bolshevik colleague, Grigorii Eremeyevich Evdokimov, organizing in the countryside was “ten times more difficult than in the towns because there was more backwardness, darkness, ignorance and prejudice.”<sup>11</sup> In Evdokimov’s opinion, this ten-fold difficulty was reserved explicitly for peasant women. In a tidy hierarchical pyramidal summation he explained, “If it is difficult to organize [male] workers, even more difficult to organize women workers, then it is still the most difficult to organize peasant women.”<sup>12</sup> Peasant women were susceptible to the influence at “every step” of kulaks, priests and consequently “a peasant woman was easier to deceive than a woman worker.”<sup>13</sup>

Evdokimov took great care to clarify that it was not simply a matter of a peasant women’s illiteracy, or her family life: “women workers have a different situation, many work in plants and factories, and it is a great school.”<sup>14</sup> In short, the implication was that peasant women were unlikely to measure up to women workers because they did not do

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<sup>10</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.77.

<sup>11</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.92. Briefly, Evdokimov was a voting member of the Central Committee at the 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (1920) and he was a leading member of the “United Opposition” in 1926-27 with Zinoviev and Kamenev, which denounced kulaks and bureaucratism. In 1925 he was Leningrad’s Regional First Secretary, see Blair A. Ruble, *Leningrad: Shaping a Soviet City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 223. He was executed with his aforementioned colleagues in the 1936 Moscow Show trial, see respectively *The Blackwell*, ed. Shukman, 169; and Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 162 and 344.

<sup>12</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.91. Similarly, Stalin discussed “a great usefulness if she [peasant woman] is liberated from ignorance and darkness [but] she can be a brake on the whole cause if henceforth she remains a captive of ignorance.” I. Stalin, “K piatoi godovshchine pervogo s”ezda rabotnits i krest’ianok,” in *Kommunistka* no.11 (November 1923): 1. According to the Stalin biographer Robert McNeal, “Unlike Lenin, who relied on a number of important female secretaries, apart from one male executive secretary, Stalin seems to have wanted only men as his responsible assistants, perhaps even as stenographers and clerks. His senior staff members were expected to hold important appointments outside that agency, either while they were his assistants or subsequently, and Stalin never appointed women to senior political positions.” *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 82.

<sup>13</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.93.

the same type of work. Notwithstanding rampant urban unemployment, if women workers were going to learn partly about the new Soviet way of life in the “great school” of the factories, how were peasant women going to adopt Soviet mores?

Zhenotdel was only one of a myriad of party and state institutions designed to help peasant women adopt Soviet mores. Operating under the assumption that it was up to urban centres “to help struggle against all rural prejudices,”<sup>15</sup> Zhenotdel was largely an urban project to change the so-called darkness, ignorance and backwardness of the countryside in the 1920s. Two key assumptions were that “work among peasant women would be conducted as it was among working-class women,” and all campaigns were to be filtered through the politically safe protective umbrella of “general party work.”<sup>16</sup> However, Zhenotdel belied the notion that peasant women and working-class women could be treated equally because it clarified that “insufficient party and material resources [existed] in the countryside.”<sup>17</sup> In brief, given the party’s own poor estimation of peasant women’s abilities, this suggested that peasant women required more attention, not the same treatment as working women. Moreover, there was a certain degree of ambiguity about whether devising special campaigns that targeted a specific audience, namely peasant women, could be faithful to “general party work.” It was an ambiguity that Zhenotdel failed to resolve.

Linked to this ambiguity was Zhenotdel’s message to peasant women in its nascent

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<sup>14</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.94.

<sup>15</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.75.

<sup>16</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Petrograd Party Provincial Conference, (September 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.7.

phase. A clear delineation was drawn between the potential level of political consciousness of women workers and peasant women. In late 1919 the two goals of the Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel were: “to awaken the political education of women workers in their communist proletarian class consciousness and to attract women workers and peasant women to the practical construction of a new communist life.”<sup>18</sup>

Significantly, the peasant women’s role was confined to “practical construction” while women workers were also to “awaken their communist proletarian class consciousness.” To what extent was class consciousness based on a proletarian experience? Echoing Evdokimov’s earlier reservations, could peasant women gain class consciousness based on their rural experience?

Zhenotdel, like the Party, divided hierarchally peasant women into three, loosely defined groups, the well-off, the middle peasant, and the poor peasant. Accordingly, some groups therefore deserved “special” campaigns and were Zhenotdel’s natural constituency. In particular, Zhenotdel was keen to increase its cohort of middle and poor peasant women.<sup>19</sup> Zhenotdel also felt a natural affinity to agricultural labourers or *batrachkas* given their proletarian credentials.<sup>20</sup>

The experience of the civil war and war communism as well as the ensuing deprivations,

<sup>17</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> Petrograd Party Provincial Conference, (September 1922), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12789, l.7.

<sup>18</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1919), f.16, op.13, d.12533, l.12.

<sup>19</sup> Hayden argues, “The Party was having little success in its efforts to win over the middle peasants, because the [1925] 14<sup>th</sup> Congress launched a new drive to undercut the influence of the “kulaks” on the middle peasants, and Artiukhina [said] this campaign would be one of the Zhenotdel’s most important activities,” in “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 280.

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the “majority of *batrachkas* remained tied to the village,” see Farnsworth, “The Rural *Batrachka*,” 78-79.

did not modify Zhenotdel's preoccupation with women workers. Although peasant women were needed both to keep working to ensure a military victory, and in a broader sense to build the "new communist life", they were neglected during the early soviet years. For instance, in 1920, when responding to questionnaires distributed at a Zhenotdel conference, the majority of peasant women complained that they knew party programs poorly because there were so few township representatives, a limited number of orators, and among these groups, no interest in country issues.<sup>21</sup> When party representatives or speakers did arrive in the countryside to speak, the topics that generated the most "uncertainty" among women were party attitudes towards religion and the abolition of private property.<sup>22</sup> At the highest levels, the Collegium meetings of Petrograd Provincial Zhenotdel, peasant women were discussed fleetingly.<sup>23</sup> Based on the meetings, only 14.3 per cent of topics involved peasant women in 1920 and a year later, 9.8 per cent of topics concerned peasant women. Presumably, during the height of the civil war, peasant women were considered more indispensable than at its conclusion,

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<sup>21</sup> Amazingly these responses were garnered from seventy delegates who were asked pointedly "What are you not satisfied about with the Communist party?" see TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12660, l.2.

<sup>22</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12660, ll.2-3.

<sup>23</sup> The following are Provincial Petrograd Zhenotdel Collegium meetings (TsGAIPD SPb) where I tabulated how often topics concerning peasant women occurred. In 1920, 12 of the 84 topics discussed involved peasant women while in 1921, 17 of 173 topics discussed, concerned peasant women, see topic #1, (15 July, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.1; topics #3 & #5, (9 August, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.3; topics #1 & #2, (16 August, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.5; topic #2, (20 August, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.6; topic #2, (23 August, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.7; topic #1, (12 November, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.19; topic #3, (17 November, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.21; topics #2 & #3, (22 November, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.22; topic #1, (18 December, 1920), f.16, op.13, d.12570, l.28; topic #1, (24 January, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.1; topic #3, (6 February, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.3; topics #8 & #10, (19 February, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.12; topics #1 & #2, (10 March, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.15; topic #4, (8 July, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.24; topic #2, (13 July, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.26; topic #1, (23 July, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.28; topic #5, (4 August, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.30; topics #1 & #3, (16 August, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.32; topic #4, (11 August, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.37; topic #7, (12 November, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.46; topics #1 & #3, (12 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.58; topic #1, (23 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.63.

and this accounts for the relative neglect of peasant women in 1921. Similarly, Central Zhenotdel's main theoretical journal *Kommunistka* had a "localities" section dealing ostensibly with women workers and peasant women; nevertheless, in its first two years of circulation, topics devoted specifically to peasant women were few.<sup>24</sup> Zhenotdel gradually became more inclusive, and began to discuss the peasant woman as a "citizen" and valuable worker.<sup>25</sup> In general, this more inclusive era began with the New Economic Policy, not war communism, and a pivotal year was 1923.

### Zhenotdel Organizing and Campaigns During the Early NEP Years

At the start of NEP, however, Zhenotdel's archival reports on peasant women and their organizers were almost all uniformly negative. Fully two years after Zhenotdel had started, in December 1921, the first local reports on peasant women were submitted to the Collegium's Petrograd Zhenotdel Meetings.<sup>26</sup> Thus, a joint field report on Detskoe Selo and Petergof counties, southeast of Petrograd, praises the Zhenotdel's head as energetic but considers overall work with peasant women "weak" because "the county committee does not understand the importance of work among women and does not give her any

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<sup>24</sup> *Kommunistka* began in 1920, see its localities or "In Soviet Russia" section. See B. Sadovskaya, "Rabota s delegatkami v Pitere," *Kommunistka* no. 1-2, (1920): n. p.; Comrade Lelia "Rezul'taty bespartiinoi gubernskoi konferentsii zhenshchin rabotnits gor. Vladimira," *Kommunistka* no.3-4 (1920); P. Rovnator, "Rabota sredi zhenshchin v profsoiuzak g. Moskve." *Kommunistka* nos.8-9 (1921): 48-49; Otdel pab., "Proizvodstvennie konferentsii rabotn. Petrograda i Petrogr. gub." *Kommunistka* nos.10-11, (1921): 36-37. As was the general trend, all previously listed articles' content ignored peasant women. An exception was Samoilova's "Rukovodstvo volostnim organizatoram rabote sredi zhenshchin," *Kommunistka* no.6 (1920): 28-30. *Krest'ianka gazeta* began in 1923, but *Krest'ianka* in 1922, in Jeffrey Brooks, "The Press and Its Message: Images of America in the 1920s and 1930s," *Russia in the Era of NEP*, 232.

<sup>25</sup> A 1922 Central Zhenotdel Circular discussed peasant women as "citizens of our toiling Republic," TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.16, d.12785, l.12, and a letter from KKOv's head (peasants' mutual aid society) addressed them as "Dear Comrades," TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13035, l.22.

<sup>26</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (24 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.64.

help.”<sup>27</sup> Signalling, a clear breakdown in the command structure, the Provincial Committee was instructed to convey the importance of Zhenotdel work to Detskoe Selo and Petergof counties. Similarly, in Cherepovets, far to the east of Petrograd, Zhenotdel was politically isolated because it had “no ties whatsoever with the county committee” and against accepted protocol its head was not a member of the Provincial Committee because she was purportedly deficient in “political literacy.”<sup>28</sup> Northeast of Petrograd in Lodeinoe Pole county there was a request for a new organizer because the current one was “illiterate and did not know how to approach the masses.”<sup>29</sup> However, she did reflect its inhabitants who were described in a subsequent report as being in the “majority illiterate” and who were further maligned as “having a religious soul and [their] whole purpose is found with their husbands.”<sup>30</sup> In Trotsk county “outside of delegates’ meetings, no work is being done with the delegates.”<sup>31</sup> One organizer left Kingisepp Zhenotdel, southwest of Petrograd, because of a lack of resources<sup>32</sup> while the Karelia Zhenotdel implored the Provincial Petrograd Zhenotdel to send “experienced” people because in two counties they had neither a Zhenotdel head, nor instructors.<sup>33</sup> According to Zhenotdel’s standards, it was a composite picture of disorganized, illiterate, underfunded and understaffed women who were integrated poorly with other party and state bodies. This dire situation needed to be rectified.

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<sup>27</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (24 December, 1921), f.16, op.13, d.12670, l.64.

<sup>28</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (6 April, 1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.20. The head was described as “semi-literate.”

<sup>29</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (14 July, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.59.

<sup>30</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (31 July, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.72.

<sup>31</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 July, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.67. Pskov had counties with “no zhenotdels and work was led only in the provincial town,” TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.33.

<sup>32</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (21 February, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.14.

Nationally, dramatic increases in the number of peasant women delegates organized through Zhenotdel delegates' meetings occurred from 1923 onwards; from March 1923 to July 1924 the number of peasant delegates increased from 23,000 to 121,000, and by July 1925 this figure had risen to 246,000.<sup>34</sup> In March 1923, women workers were about 32 per cent of the delegates and women peasants about 40 per cent, while only two years later, in July 1925, women workers were 18 per cent of delegates and women peasants were 63 per cent.<sup>35</sup> Most significantly, the statistics indicate that during this two-year period Zhenotdel increased its cohort among women workers a little less than four times (from 18,000 to 67,000) and among women peasants more than ten times (from 23,000 to 246,000).<sup>36</sup> The 1924 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and the Party Central Committee had also increased the number of paid township Zhenotdel organizers from three to five hundred women.<sup>37</sup> These dramatic numerical increases provide striking evidence both of the relative neglect of peasant women before 1923 and the increase in resources that the Party was devoting to draw peasant women into its sphere of influence during the NEP.

Zhenotdel's numerical increases of rural organizers and delegates complemented broader societal changes. Agit-Prop officials in late 1923 would publish a new national peasant

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<sup>33</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 November, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12965, l.119.

<sup>34</sup> *Izvestiia Ts.K.*, no.3 (51) (March 1923), 95,101; nos.5-6 (10-11) (November 10,1924), 8; no.28 (103) (July 27, 1925), 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Izvestiia Ts.K.*, no.3 (51) (March 1923), 95,101; nos.5-6 (10-11) (November 10,1924), 8; no.28 (103) (July 27, 1925), 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Izvestiia Ts.K.*, no.3 (51) (March 1923), 95,101; nos.5-6 (10-11) (November 10,1924), 8; no.28 (103) (July 27, 1925), 2. According to Isabel Tirado, profound tensions existed in Komsomol as peasants were encouraged to join and its original working-class credentials were considered to be jeopardized, see "The Komsomol and the Young Peasants: The Dilemma of Rural Expansion, 1921-1925," *Slavic Review* 25, no.3 (Autumn 1993): 460-476.

<sup>37</sup> KPSS, *Trinadstatyi s"ezd RKP (b). Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gosurdarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 812.



newspaper *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* and the “newspaper’s primary task would be to sell the *smychka*.”<sup>38</sup> In 1923, *likbez*, the Commission to Abolish Illiteracy, was created; it particularly targeted peasant women who had high rates of illiteracy.<sup>39</sup> In 1923, at the highest level, the collegium meetings of the Provincial Petrograd Zhenotdel, eighteen of the 106 topics (16.9 per cent) concerned peasant women and, in 1921, the figure was 9.8 per cent.<sup>40</sup> In 1924, as a follow-up, Zinoviev’s slogan “Face to the Countryside” signalled that the party hierarchy was considering extending a more positive relationship with the peasantry which had already been ushered in with the start of NEP.

On the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, the state signalled its interest in its citizens by studying how worker and peasant women lived in Leningrad Province. This report revealed that peasant women worked longer, slept less, and had less time for

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew Lenoe, “NEP Newspapers and the Origins of Soviet Information Rationing,” *The Russian Review* 62 (October 2003): 619-620. According to Choi Chatterjee, “Internal Zhenotdel reports frankly admitted that very few attempts were made by local cells to propagandize peasant women until 1923,” *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival Culture, and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910-1939* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 64.

<sup>39</sup> According to the Chairman of GubGramCheka, a Literacy Commission, attached to *Glavpolitprosvet* (The Main Committee on Political Education was *Narkompros* (The People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment’s political education arm) in Petrograd Province there were 160,000 illiterates and from this number 70 per cent were women, findings presented to Zhenotdel Petrograd Provincial Collegium Meeting, TsGAIPD SPb, (24 March, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.26. Also see Charles E. Clark, “Uprooting Otherness: Bolshevik Attempts to Refashion Rural Russia via the Reading Rooms of the 1920s,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 47, nos.3-4 (September-December 1996): 305-329 and Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> For figures on the Collegium meetings in 1921, it was 17 topics out of 173, see footnote #23. For a statistical breakdown on topics in 1923, see TsGAIPD SPb, topic #2 (18 January, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.1; topic #2 (25 January, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.6; topics #2 & #3, (1 February, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.17; topics #1 & #5 (8 February, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.21; topic #1 (15 February, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.23; topic #1, (24 March, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.26; topic #1 (3 May, 1923); f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.29; topics #1 & #2, f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.31; topic #2 (31 May, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.34; topic #2, (29 June, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.37; topics # 2,#3, & #5 (5 July, 1921), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.38; topic #1, (7 August, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.45; topic #2 (24/25 September, 1923), f.13, op.13, d.12902, l.56.

leisure than peasant men.<sup>41</sup> The solution emphasized continually that both the state's and peasant women's welfare would improve if they built a collectivist life. Consequently, it was particularly important to join the co-operative movement, mutual aid societies, credit unions and, of course, the collective farm.<sup>42</sup> Peasant women were also expected to join the Communist party and the soviet, although what percentage of women (or men for that matter) the Party could actually absorb, and still function effectively, was deliberately left unanswered. Zhenotdel officials published a plethora of directives urging peasant women to join the long list of party and state organizations. Moving along a linear continuum of improved literacy, then political literacy, and party membership, all in a bid to acquire "consciousness," an underlying assumption was that leadership opportunities would then almost automatically open up in the boards of the co-op, the presidium of the soviet, or the township executive committee.<sup>43</sup> Overall, ironically, as these time-budget studies proved, with less time available than men, women were expected to join even more organizations than men because they were deemed to be more "backward" and needed more enlightenment activities to catch up to men.

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<sup>41</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (October 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13296, l.35. The official breakdown was as follows:

<u>Peasant Women</u>		<u>Peasant Men</u>	
Work	4.342	Work	3.234
Sleep	2.781	Sleep	2.936
Rest/Leisure	1.637	Leisure	2.590

For a very good discussion of time-budget studies in the 1920s, see Gijs Kessler, "Work and the household in the inter-war Soviet-Union," *Continuity and Change* 20, no.3 (2005): 409-442.

<sup>42</sup> For co-ops, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.129.

<sup>43</sup> See especially Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light, Chaos, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2000). For literacy, see n.39. For repeated calls to join the Party see TsGAIPD SPb, (1921), f.16, op. 13, d.12666, l.14; TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.129; TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, 13035, l.22; TsGAIPD SPb, (19 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13155, l.6. In 1924, specifically to "instil communist consciousness" and a "cultural *smychka*," peasant women, for example, were encouraged to take tours to the Museums of Revolution, Agriculture and Health, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12969, l.38.

Zhenotdel activists were encouraged to appeal peasant women's role as mothers to catch their attention. Irrespective of the historical era, the goal remained consistent. During the era of ideological war communism, women were encouraged to "destroy the old family [and] old housework."<sup>44</sup> During NEP, on International Women's Day, Prokov'ev, Provincial Head of the K KOV (peasants' mutual aid society) appealed to the maternal instincts of his rural constituents as "peasant-mothers" who will be "liberated from family slavery."<sup>45</sup> This was largely political rhetoric. By the mid-1920s, the destruction of the nuclear family did not resonate with peasant women or with many party members.<sup>46</sup> The family and "soviet" housework was lauded in Zhenotdel periodicals. Moreover, despite temporarily flattering them as "peasant-mothers," as the historian David Ransel explains in *Village Mothers*, most soviet and party officials viewed peasant women as "wholly incompetent in their mothering roles."<sup>47</sup> A Central Committee Orgbiuro directive sent to all provincial Zhenotdels specified that "to help raise their cultural level, preschool institutions often liberate peasant women from looking after their children."<sup>48</sup> Thus, the idea was to take women temporarily away from their children to facilitate political education, literacy, consciousness and so on. The

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<sup>44</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1919), f.16, op.13, d.12533, l.12. See Kollontai's interesting discussion of the role of family in a proletarian Soviet republic, "Sem'ia i kommunizm," *Kommunistka* no.7 (1920): 16-18.

<sup>45</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13035, l.22. Padraic Kenney discusses how the Polish Communist regime employed the "laborious term 'Mother-Pole'" to get support from women, see "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland," *American Historical Review* 104, no.2 (April 1999): 422.

<sup>46</sup> In general, most women wanted a nuclear family structure, see Beatrice Farnsworth, "Bolshevik Alternatives and the Soviet Family: the 1926 Marriage Law Debate," in *Women in Russia*, 139-65 and Wendy Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences: the debate on the Soviet Family Code of 1926," *Russian History* 11, no.4 (1984): 362-88.

<sup>47</sup> David Ransel, *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tatari* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>48</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 June, 1925), f.16, op.13, 13035, l.51. Erofimov, Head of the Leningrad Pioneers, said "seventy five per cent of peasant women do not want to send their children into our ranks because they say we corrupt them, and train them badly." TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.2.

underlying assumption was that raising children in the home exclusively was not conducive to producing political consciousness.

If domesticity was employed to “lure” peasant women to Zhenotdel through appeals to their role as “peasant-mother,” so too was their role in agriculture. Zhenotdel organizers were specifically instructed not to launch immediately into esoteric discussions about theory at meetings, but to talk to peasant women about their livestock. In September 1919, Kollontai, at the first national meeting of women organizers, declared that the “only correct approach is to approach her by asking her about her sick cow. Then from the cow you can go further and lead her to the idea of world revolution.”<sup>49</sup> If Kollontai herself suggested that it was essentially just one short step from the bovine to world revolution, it is not surprising that confusion should arise about the exact role of Zhenotdel for peasant women. Some peasant women mistook interest in agricultural matters and assumed Zhenotdel would literally provide them with animals.

#### 1925 Zhenotdel Provincial Leningrad Conference

One such woman was Oskina, a Zhenotdel delegate, and presumably she should have known the organization’s mandate. Oskina was self-described as poor, illiterate, estranged from her family and with two children. She was clearly nervous about speaking because she tells her audience that it is the “first time I have been to such a large meeting;”<sup>50</sup> and rather unceremoniously she is told to speak up! Then, Oskina makes her

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<sup>49</sup> RGASPI, f.17, op.1, d.1, l.7.

<sup>50</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.175. This woman’s plight is also described in the dissertation’s introduction.

pitch, “therefore, I ask you, to grant me a favour, could you give me a horse...?”<sup>51</sup>

An “uproar” follows her request and her speech abruptly ends.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, despite being a Zhenotdel delegate herself, Oskina had imagined Zhenotdel’s role in vastly different terms than its leadership and her fellow proletarian workers. Immediately following Oskina’s equine request, Chushaeva, a women worker from the Krasnaia Znamia mill, urged women to join co-operatives and unlike the peasant woman her speech was met with applause.<sup>53</sup> Both delegates imagined a different role for Zhenotdel; for Oskina, the peasant woman, the conference presented an opportunity to ask for practical help while for Chushaeva, the woman worker, the conference presented an opportunity to agitate for Soviet programs. Oskina simply reflected more than a third of all Russian peasant households in the Russian Republic who lacked a draft animal of any kind.<sup>54</sup> In general, what were peasant women’s knowledge of both the Communist party and Zhenotdel, which in turn informed their expectations of Zhenotdel by the mid 1920s? Vasil’eva, a Zhenotdel delegate from Pskov, recounted a 1925 trip to Tver, which in her opinion, was “not that far from “Red Leningrad” [and a peasant woman asked her] ‘What is a delegate?’ And she is sluggish about Komsomol. Pioneers, the same thing.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.175. Livestock were critical. See Ransel’s account of the “choices” peasant women made between caring for an infant child in hospital and tending to their animals, because in the end, “How was I going to manage without the cow? What was I going to feed the [other] children?” *Village Mothers*, 186. According to Wood, “Sometimes peasant women demanded sugar, manufactured goods, and grain as payment for going to provincial meetings.” *The Baba and the Comrade*,” 84.

<sup>52</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.175.

<sup>53</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, ll.175-76. No doubt Oskina was indirectly being chided that joining a co-op was the best way to have access to a horse.

<sup>54</sup> As quoted in Fitzpatrick, in 1922 thirty seven per cent lacked a draft animal, and the number of horses in the territory that became the Soviet Union dropped from 34 million in 1916 to a low point of 23 million in 1923, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.49. Long before the official “smychka”, Zhenotdel sent representatives to “help” the countryside. On October 15, 1920 Vasil’evskii Ostrov district

Vasil'eva expanded that peasant women's lack of knowledge could be "solved" by encouraging Leningrad "women workers of the bench" to help them. Here, peasant women were not deemed capable of self-improvement but reliant on urban workers' instructions. Nevertheless, throughout the 1920s peasant women would challenge both this urban model and stereotypes of backwardness.

Peasant women were cognisant of how the early Soviet regime ascribed a higher value to urban work, and hence access to food rations, during the deprivations of war communism. This was a contentious issue.<sup>56</sup> At a Gatchina Zhenotdel district conference in 1920, the seventy delegates of which nearly a third were peasants, were given questionnaires and asked 'What are the shortcomings of soviet construction?'<sup>57</sup> Apparently, "nearly half of the delegates replied that the ration provision [was] in all its varieties [because there was] no bread, vegetables, or kerosene."<sup>58</sup> Also in 1920, peasant women at a Petrograd Zhenotdel Conference posed a very simple question, "Why do [industrial] workers receive a larger food ration, and we do not?"<sup>59</sup> Zhenotdel officials

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sent Bikovskaia to lead elections to the forthcoming 3 November, 1920 Provincial Zhenotdel Conference, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12658, l.9. Ninety-five women had mandates to do preparatory electoral work in the counties or to attend the conference, see f.16, op.13, d.12658.ll.1-95.

<sup>56</sup> Figes argues in the Volga countryside that the "story of the Bolshevik food procurement campaigns is one of the most gruesome episodes in the history of the civil war." *Peasant Russia*, 248. For a detailed discussion of peasant attitudes, food and state policies, during war communism see Figes, *Peasant Russia*, 248-284. In an urban context, see Borrero, "Communal Dining," 162-176.

<sup>57</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1920), f.16, op.13, d.12660, l.2. According to Zhenotdel, the delegate breakdown was: nineteen peasant women, fifteen women workers, fourteen housewives and twenty-two representatives of intelligentsia labour. I did not have individual questionnaires.

<sup>58</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12660, l.2. In order, the next biggest complaints were transportation, then the war and insufficient school construction, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12660, l.2.

<sup>59</sup> RGASPI, (16-19 January, 1920), f.17, op.10, d.202, l.142. Similarly, one Syzran' county soviet assembly delegate complained "Also, it is said that the workers in the factories are given jam and sausage, while the peasants see none of these." *Stenograficheskii otchet 7-go syranskogo uezdnogo soveta s 4-go po 5-e iuli 1920g*, Syzran', 1920, p.44 as quoted in Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution 1917-1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 266.

were unapologetic; it was simply that workers were an “important category.”<sup>60</sup> The contours of broader politics altered when war communism was replaced with the limited market economy of the New Economic Policy in March of 1921, but peasant women continued to feel discriminated against by both urban men and women.

Four years later, at the 1925 Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel Conference, the singular message was that peasant women still wanted recognition as an “important category” in Soviet Russia. Consequently, at the conference, Konstantinova, from the village of Liushchik in Luzhsk county exclaimed indignantly, “I heard from town women workers that some think that the peasant woman still knows absolutely nothing. Comrades, but no, the peasant woman is already fairly educated.”<sup>61</sup> Party comrades considered peasant women uneducated because they themselves were ignorant about peasant women’s lives. As she put it “Indeed, I tell you there are rural party comrades, but they have very few peasant women. That is why, comrades, women workers do not examine peasant women and therefore [believe] she knows nothing.”<sup>62</sup> Konstantinova also informed the conference that she lodged a formal complaint over a year ago because the Party in her township, like many townships, did not promote peasant women beyond candidate status.<sup>63</sup> According to Konstantinova, the party men are “are afraid if I come into the party it means they will be pushed out of their seats.”<sup>64</sup> Her critique of the Communist

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<sup>60</sup> RGASPI, (16-19 January, 1920), f.17, op.10, d.202, l.142.

<sup>61</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.30.

<sup>62</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.30.

<sup>63</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32.

<sup>64</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.30. Similarly, see the correspondent barred from the Party entitled, “Why I Knock at the Door of the Leninist Family,” as quoted in Jeffrey Brooks, “Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921-1928,” *Slavic Review* 48, no.1 (Spring 1989): 27. See

party that it was ignorant of peasant women because it deliberately kept them in its lower echelons finds archival support. Official Zhenotdel records for 1923/1924 revealed that of 2,560 peasant women delegates in Leningrad province only nine were full members of the Communist party.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, despite the fact that Zhenotdel was a party organization, and Konstantinova was highly critical of the Communists at a party conference, her speech received "stormy applause."<sup>66</sup>

Silence, and no applause, followed the conclusion of the next peasant delegate's speech. Bogdanova, also from Luzhsk county, echoed her colleague when she discussed how peasant women were the "forgotten element in the countryside."<sup>67</sup> Bogdanova lamented that a peasant woman's role was a "plaything;" she is viewed as neither a "real citizen...[nor] a human being at meetings," and her husband says "you need to stay by the stove, and fuss over the children, nothing more."<sup>68</sup> She laid the blame squarely for a multitude of problems in the countryside on the Soviet Executive Committee. It failed to give peasant women the necessary funds for their schools and thus their children sat on the floor, not on benches, and the schools had no firewood in the wintertime.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, it gave the hospitals "nothing [because patients even] need a slice of black bread and a pot of cabbage soup...."<sup>70</sup> Bogdanova also discussed *samogon* (moonshine) and the

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Hayden for further examples, "Feminism and Bolshevism," 257-258.

<sup>65</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12988, l.46. The report revealed thirty-four women were candidate members and twenty-three belonged to Komsomol, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12988, l.46.

<sup>66</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32.

<sup>67</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32.

<sup>68</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32.

<sup>69</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32. As early as 1920, peasant women were complaining about a lack of attention to schools, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12660, l.2.

<sup>70</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32. In Butkovsk township a peasant woman complained that there were no midwives and the hospital had no sheets, TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925),



dangers of Soviet children becoming infected with hooliganism and drunkenness. She went a step further, however, and mentioned that even young children who could “barely hold a glass [were] learning to drink.”<sup>71</sup> This portrait of country life was bleak and was again one of soviet indifference and mismanagement. Arguably, however, Bogdanova had transgressed the boundaries of acceptable criticism of the regime, even in 1925, and that is why her speech received stony silence.

Peasant women were not silent about their lives in the countryside and the inadequacies of the Bolshevik party and its representatives. Challenging notions of passivity, in balance peasant women were more critical of the Bolshevik party, and its representatives, than workers at this Zhenotdel conference. Orekhova, a peasant from the Chernoslobousk township, complained of the following: “we have no roads, children have to travel far to school, we have insufficient land, no seasonal labour, no fel’dsher [doctor’s assistant], Red Army wives and their children do not know how to access funds, and we have to travel 70 versts [74.2 kilometres] to buy sugar and other items.”<sup>72</sup>

In contrast, party officials passionately defended Zhenotdel’s programs and soviet

f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.81. Ransel discusses how many Moscow factories “established birthing facilities, women did not like to use them because most lacked adequate food and linens,” in *Village Mothers*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.32. Other peasant women delegates discussed men and children drinking samogon, see TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, ll.145, 147. Other archival reports discuss “moonshine,” see, TsGAIPD SPb, (1924), f.16, op.13, d.12998, l.87. The government attempted to curtail the production of moonshine through fines, expulsion from the commune, loss of livestock and property, see Figes, *Peasant Russia*, 97-98 and Helmut Altrichter, “Insoluble Conflicts: Village Life between Revolution and Collectivization,” in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, 197-199.

<sup>72</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.37. City dwellers also had great difficulty procuring basic items, including sugar, see Majorie Hilton’s illuminating discussion, “Retailing the Revolution: The State Department Store (GUM) And Soviet Society in the 1920s,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 939-966, esp.957.

progress. In March 1925, Klavdiia Nikolaeva, Head of Central Zhenotdel, responded to the multitude of shortcomings with the terse and familiar rebuttal that “the state is still poor, it cannot give everything, but it wants to.”<sup>73</sup> More specifically, Nikolaeva explained how women remained candidate members of the Party: “the *muzhiki* displays their conservatism.”<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, she employed the word “*muzhiki*” which for Bolsheviks conveyed the sense of “backward” male peasants, she did not employ the more arguably accurate word “comrades” or “men in the Party” because it was, after all, male party members who obstructed peasant women’s mobility in the Party. Nikolaeva attempted to shift the blame away from party members and declared that “we are not guilty, it is our poverty, our unculturedness (*nekul’turnost’*) and our lack of consciousness.”<sup>75</sup> Zlata Lilina, head of the Leningrad Department of Education, in response to the lack of firewood in schools, countered that she visited thirty-six schools and the “majority were warm.”<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Lilina took her acerbic criticism to a new, almost vitriolic level. She countered in a pugilistic vein, “if some schools are cold, then

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<sup>73</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.129. By the end of 1925 Nikolaeva would lose her job as Zhenotdel director because of her association with the Leningrad Opposition. For a brief introduction to Nikolaeva, see Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 28-29; 287 and Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 34-35.

<sup>74</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.129. As Viola explains when used by outsiders the terms *muzhiki* and *baby* assumed a “derogatory, pejorative aspect...[and they] were most often dark, uncultured, ignorant, and ignoble...Finally, *muzhiki* and *baby* represented the face of Russian backwardness, an enemy of Soviet power.” *Peasant Rebels*, 32.

<sup>75</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.129. See Svetlana Boym’s discussion of *meshchanstvo*, *poshlost’* and *kul’turnost’* in *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 34 and Vadim Volkov’s “The concept of kul’turnost’: notes on the stalinist civilizing process,” in *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 210-230.

<sup>76</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.71. Lilina and Zinoviev were married. Other problems included “no supplies - no pencils, no exercise books,” in TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.57; no facilities or schools, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.42 and attitudes towards learning, “the peasantry believe that once they can do a signature well, why do the children need to study more” in TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.52.

it is because in the countryside they do not love schools, they do not love children.”<sup>77</sup>

Some peasant women criticised the fundamentals of Bolshevik ideology. Evdokimov told those assembled at this 1925 Zhenotdel conference, “I overhead peasant women say, you have the hammer and the sickle, why is the hammer on top and the sickle below?”<sup>78</sup>

He elaborated that one often hears the following “gossip” from peasant women:

Why they [peasant women] say is there a working class and a peasantry and not a peasant and a working class; why they say is it a dictatorship of the proletariat, why they say is it the peasantry which leans on the working class and [says] it helps them.<sup>79</sup>

Evdokimov displayed clear contempt for these views allegedly expressed by peasant women. He did not address the content of their criticisms that focussed on the alleged superiority of the worker, the narrow Bolshevik definition of class, and the imbalance of the relationship between urban and rural Russia. He maligned them as “gossipers” and called the women “not friends of soviet rule, but enemies of soviet rule.”<sup>80</sup> Peasant women fully recognized that in the new Soviet Russia, workers were the regime’s ideological foundation. In 1928, Zhenotdel delegates were warned about harping upon “the idea that life is better in the city, than in the countryside” because it leads to “antagonism” and “peasant women were set against urban women workers.”<sup>81</sup> In particular, peasant women complained that women workers received “unemployment

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<sup>77</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.71.

<sup>78</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.124. Figes argues that peasants “sometimes referred to themselves as ‘workers’, in the sense that ‘peasants work’,” *Peasant Russia*, 208n.83.

<sup>79</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.124.

<sup>80</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.124.

<sup>81</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.74.

insurance, maternity leave, and we have nothing.”<sup>82</sup> Overall, this confirms peasant dissatisfaction during NEP over, in the words of one author, the “Bolsheviks’ favoritism towards urban workers.”<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, peasant delegates at this 1925 conference repeatedly called for land reform and a more equitable distribution of land.<sup>84</sup> Again, some Bolshevik officials countered not with a serious discussion, but with ideological rhetoric. For example, Evdokimov singled out by name the two peasant women and the “mistakes” in their reports on land reform, but gave agency to the kulaks as the real culprits of land reform who were “better organized than middle and poor peasants who are poorly organized.”<sup>85</sup> Kulaks were allegedly in the advantageous position of having traditionally “ruled the roost in the countryside [and] kulaks appeared friendly, but poor and middle peasants appeared scattered.”<sup>86</sup> Although official Bolshevik policy technically supported poor and middle peasants in the 1920s, a party member maligned this very group as being “scattered.”<sup>87</sup>

This Bolshevik official further deflected questions about land reform by promising to

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<sup>82</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.74. Zhenotdel officials shot back that this was “demagoguery” and the “opinion of the most conservative part of the peasantry;” and “that *bedniaki* (poor peasants) are guilty themselves that they have nothing, *bedniaki* no, but we have loafers,” see TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, ll.74-75.

<sup>83</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 27. Overall, although this chapter is a work of synthesis, there are few gendered comparisons. As Ransel explains, “Women of the oldest generation [peasants born before 1912 in his study] did not receive the government mandated maternity introduced in connection with the pronatalist legislation of the late 1930s,” *Village Mothers*, 159.

<sup>84</sup> See Kalinina, TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.89 and Matsenko TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.100. Also see Maletskii, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, ll.76-84; Orekhova, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.37; and Saar, TsGAIPD SPb (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, ll.90-91.

<sup>85</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.116.

<sup>86</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.117.

<sup>87</sup> For campaigns targeting poor and middle peasant women to join the Party, see the Protocols of Leningrad Zhenotdel Collegium Meeting TsGAIPD SPb, (14 October, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.206. For general campaigns in the 1920s over agriculture, the peasantry, and the Party see Lewin, *Russian*

answer questions in Zhenotdel's *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*.<sup>88</sup> Echoing future conflicts over collectivization, other Bolshevik officials blamed kulaks for manipulating peasant women by colluding with priests and distorting issues around land reform and taxes.<sup>89</sup> NEP certainly did not have the same ideological intensity of the 1930s, but the baiting and blaming of kulaks and priests certainly began during the era of war communism and persisted through this era. Not surprisingly, it has been argued that during "NEP, the peasants' main complaint against the Bolsheviks had to do with taxation."<sup>90</sup> Based on the available archival evidence, peasant women, however, although generally quite critical of all levels of Soviet government, do not spend a disproportionate amount of time discussing taxation in its direct form. Peasant women, criticized the Soviet regime for insufficient funding of a wide variety of services, and thus, this was a criticism of how their tax funds were managed and distributed.

Peasant women were not simply complaining about the gap between what the Bolshevik party promised and what it delivered, but offered many solutions. To increase the attendance of peasant girls in school, one peasant woman suggested that the start of the academic year be changed from October to December because during this time young

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*Peasants*, ch.5 and Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 141-149.

<sup>88</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.117.

<sup>89</sup> See Glebov-Avilov, TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.106; Kharlashova, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.52; Dushenkova, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.64; Saar, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.90; and Nikolaeva, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.125. In terms of collectivization and peasant women, see Lynne Viola, "Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest During Collectivization," *Russian Review* 45 (1986): 23-42.

<sup>90</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 27. Of course peasant women did complain about taxes, see TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, ll.42; 44; 64. One Bolshevik official correctly countered, "If you do not want to send your taxes, then there will not be any schools." TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.72.

girls “take care of petty agriculture and children.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, one peasant delegate suggested that the summer day cares for peasant women’s children be open for four, not the usual three months, because two weeks is lost in preparatory work and this leaves “two and a half months for the peasant woman, which is unsatisfactory.”<sup>92</sup> These women were suggesting that the Bolshevik state should change its policies to reflect the rhythms of peasant life in an overwhelmingly rural state. Neither the academic school year, nor the day care parameters were altered, and funding for day cares decreased in 1927-1928. Naturally, of course, the Bolsheviks were intent on rural Russia conforming to the parameters of urban Russia, not the reverse.

### Trotsky County

In order to facilitate the transformation of rural Russia to the parameters of urban Russia, Zhenotdel representatives conducted reports and then submitted them to the Leningrad Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium. Interestingly, archival data shows that organizers were submitting not only more, but more detailed field reports to this Collegium in the mid-1920s than in the late 1920s.<sup>93</sup> Two broad conclusions can be drawn from this

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<sup>91</sup> Bogdanova, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.41. Girls’ poor school attendance was also discussed by Kevleeva, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.47 and Popchina, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.60. Overall, peasant women complained of a lack of schools and the distance to schools but were keen to educate their children. See other handwritten letters sent into Zhenotdel by peasant women in 1925: Podporzh township, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13049, l.31; Vyskot township, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13049, l.33, and Tolmachev township, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13049, l.35. In the imperial era, see Susan Smith-Peter, “Educating Peasant Girls for Motherhood: Religion and Primary Education in Mid-Nineteenth Century Russia,” *Russian Review* 66, no.3 (July 2007): 391-405.

<sup>92</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.74. See Hayden, “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 201-202.

<sup>93</sup> For a sampling of Zhenotdel’s organizers reports in 1925 in the countryside, see the following five field reports in TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13017, ll.100-109; Gdov county, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13017, ll.119-129; Lezvin township, Leningrad county, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13017, ll.129-137; Lodeinoe Pole county, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13017, ll.139-143 and Volkhov county, TsGAIPD

information. In 1928, in the wake of a Rationalization Commission from the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Zhenotdel faced severe staffing shortages and local zhenotdels were disbanded throughout Russia.<sup>94</sup> This pattern of a peak of activity and resources in the mid-1920s tapering off due to an emphasis of industrialization is echoed by historian David Ransel whose discussion of summer nurseries in Leningrad province revealed that “the first big campaign of 1924-1925 more than tripled the number in Russia, [but] the lack of resources and personnel in the late 1920s stunted the earlier, rapid growth of village nurseries.”<sup>95</sup> Not surprisingly therefore, more Zhenotdel field reports were also conducted in the mid-1920s than in the late 1920s. Drozdova, a Leningrad Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium member, conducted a field report of Trotsk county in two trips in 1925; the first trip covered Oranienbaum township and the second Vengisarovsk and Koporsk townships.<sup>96</sup> The Oranienbaum examination occurred in early August and was four days long while the Vengisarovsk and Koporsk reports were conducted in late September and in early October for almost ten days.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, with less than two weeks of work, Drozdova concludes modestly that she came to know this county “a little.”<sup>98</sup>

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SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13017, ll.144-152. The reports are lengthy with double-sided pages. In contrast, by 1928-1929, detailed and lengthy reports submitted to the Collegiums were much rarer.

<sup>94</sup> Artiukhina discusses how local zhenotdels had been dissolved by this Rationalization Commission in Vladimir, Ural, Briansk, Saratov, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Kostroma and even in Leningrad itself; and she reminded party officials that only the Party Congress or Central Committee had the authority to liquidate zhenotdels, see A. Artiukhina, “Likvidatsionnyi zud nuzhno uniat’,” *Kommunistka* no.6 (June 1928): 3-4. A Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium meeting discussed the lack of paid staff due to the Rationalization Commission, see TsGAIPD SPb, (4 October, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, ll.46-48.

<sup>95</sup> Ransel, *Village Mothers*, 62.

<sup>96</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. Trotsk county is currently Gatchina, 45 kilometres southwest of St. Petersburg city. Trotsk was named after Leon Trotskii between 1923-1929, then renamed Red Guard City until 1944 when it reverted to Gatchina. Overall, a detailed double-sided ten-page report was submitted to the Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium on Trotsk county.

<sup>97</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209.

<sup>98</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. See Iakoleva’s report on Trotsk county submitted to the

In balance, all three townships crossed the 1917 divide, and continued Imperial patterns of work in St.Petersburg province. Compared to the Central Industrial region, the climate was “harsher, the land stingier, and the population was sparse.”<sup>99</sup> Not surprisingly, it was remote Korporsk, which had no *kustar* (handicrafts) nor industry, because “Factories were almost entirely concentrated in and near St.Petersburg city, and only peasants who lived close to the city worked in factories” and “*kustar* production, so prominent in the Central Industrial Region, played a negligible role here....”<sup>100</sup> Not only were Oranienbaum and Vengisarovsk townships dominated by dairying and market gardening, these occupations were still almost “exclusively women’s work.”<sup>101</sup> Little had altered for peasant women’s work by the 1920s, and Zhenotdel delegates were attempting to organize in areas where peasant women were typically in their first milking session at 3 a.m.<sup>102</sup>

Nonetheless, despite conforming to general patterns in Leningrad province, Trotsk was an atypical county demographically. The population of European Russia declined in absolute numbers from seventy-two million in 1914 to sixty-six million in 1920, and the total population deficit for the Soviet Union between 1915 and 1923 has been set at an estimated twenty-five to twenty-nine million.<sup>103</sup> Predictably, young men were especially in short supply in the villages in the 1920s. In 1926 in the age group twenty-five to

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Zhenotdel Provincial Collegium Meeting, TsGAIPD SPb, (15 February, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.23.

<sup>99</sup> Rose Glickman, “Peasant Women and Their Work,” in *The World of the Russian Peasant: Post-Emancipation Culture and Society*, ed. Ben Eklof and Stephen Frank (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 53.

<sup>100</sup> Glickman, “Peasant Women,” 53-54.

<sup>101</sup> Glickman, “Peasant Women,” 54.

<sup>102</sup> Susan Bridger, “Soviet Rural Women,” in *Russian Peasant Women*, ed. Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 275.

<sup>103</sup> Figures quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 25.



thirty-five, there were still 129 women for every 100 men in the villages of European Russia.<sup>104</sup> However, in all the townships there was a remarkable demographic balance: Vengisarovsk, 46.7 per cent males and 53.3 per cent females; Koporsk, 46.2 per cent males and 53.8 per cent females and Oranienbaum, 48.9 per cent males and 51.1 per cent females. These statistics belied general European Russian norms.<sup>105</sup>

More specifically, Oranienbaum, which means Orange-tree in German, did not fulfil the promise of its Imperial name, and practice siviculture. Excluding the town of Oranienbaum, there were 9,039 people, of which 4,617 were women.<sup>106</sup> Finns dominated the countryside because they were up to 65 per cent of the rural population, while in the town of Oranienbaum it was exclusively Russian and numbered 7,000.<sup>107</sup> Some indications that the area was poor was the fact that in the township there were 2,102 households of which 173 were tax-exempt and 294 received partial tax exemptions.<sup>108</sup>

In balance, how did the composite conditions of a poor, dairy producing, market gardening area with Finns in the countryside, and Russians in its major town, affect Zhenotdel organizing peasant women? Co-ops in the township were characterized as

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<sup>104</sup> Figures quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 25.

<sup>105</sup> The population's breakdown in whole numbers was: Vengisarovsk, 11,222: 5,247 males and 5,975 females; Koporsk, 8,360: 3,860 males and 4,500 females; Oranienbaum, 9,039: 4,422 males and 4,617 females; see respectively TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211; TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214 and TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209.

<sup>106</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. The town is currently called Lomonosov and is situated on the Gulf of Finland.

<sup>107</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209.

<sup>108</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. In 1929, some 35 per cent of all peasants were classified by the Ministry of Finance as *bednyaks* and received tax exemptions, as quoted in Lewin, *Russian Peasants*,

“very weak.”<sup>109</sup> For example, the consumers’ cooperative was closed, although up to its closure women numbered 146 of 698 members.<sup>110</sup> Although certainly a familiar story, Drozdova’s report punctuated peasant women’s lack of influence in decision-making bodies. In the Oranienbaum’s credit union, women only comprised twenty of the 573 members (3.5 per cent).<sup>111</sup> In the mutual aid society of just over 600 members, 12.5 per cent were women.<sup>112</sup> In “active” work among women there were four women working in the districts and only one in the township - an organizer.<sup>113</sup> Although Drozdova did not explicitly make the connection, women’s lack of representation in financial bodies often translated into a lack of decision making or participation in their communities. For example, the mutual aid society had three transportation artels but women, who were marginally represented in the overall society participated only “a little” in these artels once developed.<sup>114</sup> In other words, marginal female decision making in financial bodies possibly led to the creation of transportation artels which often did not meet the needs of peasant women.

Peasant women’s representation in Communist party bodies was also not conducive to

30. These figures from 1925 have 22.2 per cent of the peasant households having a tax exemption.

<sup>109</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. Interestingly, in the agricultural debates of the 1920s, Nikolai Bukharin’s “program, as he pointed out regularly from 1924 onward, was also ““a wager on the cooperatives”” as quoted in Stephen F. Cohen’s *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 195.

<sup>110</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. According to Lewin in “1929, the co-operative movement embraced only one third of the agricultural population (households).” *Russian Peasants*, 99.

<sup>111</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209.

<sup>112</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. For a general discussion of low rates of peasant women participating in higher levels of decision making bodies see Farnsworth, “Rural Women,” 180; Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 406-407 and Wood, *The Baba and Comrade*, 101.

<sup>113</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209.

<sup>114</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. Typical transportation artels were timber or stone loading artels. See mutual aid societies in the imperial era, Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics: Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1998).

effective decision making in their communities. Although Drozdova attempts to inflate the importance and role of the Communist party, the numbers of peasant women party members and problems chronicled in the main body of the report suggests that Oranienbaum township was indifferent to the needs of peasant women. Drozdova discusses how peasant women's attendance at party conferences was "good," but there was only one village cell. In Oranienbaum township there were 335 Communist party members, full and candidate members, of which four were women or 1.2 per cent of the total.<sup>115</sup> Having such a small percentage of Communist women in the township, well below the national average, naturally made it more difficult from Zhenotdel's perspective to organize women in the area. For example, Lebiashinsk district Zhenotdel was reprimanded that it had led a delegates' meeting with a non-party instructor on political themes.<sup>116</sup> Now, there was a "correction" and all such meetings were to be conducted with a member of the Communist party present.<sup>117</sup> The subtext was clear, only Communist party members could guarantee that correct ideology was being inculcated; but in practical terms, how exactly could four women monitor even a fraction of delegates' meetings?

Monitoring was also problematic in the local township soviet because although peasant women constituted seventeen of ninety-two members, not a single woman served in the

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<sup>115</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. Similarly, in Kingisepp county southwest of Leningrad in Kotel'sk township there were 6 peasant women in the Party, see f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.42. Party membership figures are considered unreliable in these years, but a survey conducted in 1922 estimated that Communist women were 8 per cent of the party, see E. Smitten, "Zhenshchiny v RKP," *Kommunistka* no.4 (1924): 9. By 1927 women were 12.1 per cent of Communist party members overall, see T.H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 361.

<sup>116</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.210.

<sup>117</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.210.

highest decision-making body, the Soviet Executive Committee.<sup>118</sup> Peasant women constituted such a small percentage of party and soviet bodies and were entirely absent from their apex. This profound lack of representation made it exceedingly challenging to promote general Zhenotdel goals such as the advancement of women at the grassroots level. If male intransigence in the workplace contributed to female unemployment, then similarly, in the countryside attitudes towards interns were “not fully correct [because] delegates complain they are mocked by men.”<sup>119</sup> Likewise, Mikhailova, a peasant woman from the southwestern county of Gdov, addressed a Zhenotdel conference and explained that she attended agricultural circles and their meetings twice a week: “When I go to the meeting near me, all laugh, I feel hurt. [men say] ‘You do nothing, why does she come?’”<sup>120</sup> Simply put, women were not given, or did not avail themselves of opportunities in the Soviet state; when these opportunities did arise, some men displayed antipathy towards women.

Interestingly, however, a marked generational gender difference was manifested. Young girls were participating in party institutions by the mid-1920s. The Komsomol had 171 members in total and thirty-seven girls, while the Pioneers had 365 boys and 126 girls

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<sup>118</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, ll.210-11. This was the VIK - *Volost'* Executive Committee. For an excellent introduction into its role and importance, see Figes, *Peasant Russia*, 199-201. In this soviet eleven were full members and six were candidate members.

<sup>119</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.210. Drozdova does not elaborate. Gorsuch details how young women's “contributions in meetings and classes were frequently criticised or simply dismissed as stupid,” in “A Woman is Not a Man,” 652. Hayden chronicles how women were assaulted by their husbands for attending delegates' meetings, see “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 202.

<sup>120</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925,) f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.84. Ransel also discusses introducing summer nurseries and challenging the three-generational pattern of child-care culture in Gdov, *Village Mothers*, 54-57. Similarly, in Volkhov county, a Zhenotdel intern delegate working at the co-op was barred from the board meetings by the all-male co-operative board; this contravened the board's own regulations to allow interns to attend, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.181.

and from this number eighteen were leaders of which six were girls.<sup>121</sup> Zhenotdel delegates were described as being attracted to work with the Pioneers, working “gladly” in this area; moreover delegates apparently both frequently asked questions and enjoyed listening to issues pertaining to the children’s movement in their meetings.<sup>122</sup> This suggests that peasant women were comfortable with some party institutions and were possibly encouraging their girls to join the Pioneers or Komsomol despite their own reticence or barriers to party membership. Furthermore, although as outlined peasant women had extremely low participation rates in Soviet executive bodies in this township, with girls constituting 34.5 per cent of the Pioneers and 21.6 per cent of Komsomol, these percentages could point to three broad conclusions. First, the percentages were well above the national average of participation in Komsomol and the Pioneers.<sup>123</sup> Second, a higher percentage of girls participated in the Pioneers than Komsomol, so the Party was unable to retain the girl as she became older; the general consensus in the literature is that older girls were more likely to be have childcare and household responsibilities and reduce outside activities.<sup>124</sup> Third, despite all these obstacles, the girls who remained in Komsomol were probably more likely to become full party members, and from

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<sup>121</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211.

<sup>122</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211.

<sup>123</sup> According to Sobol’s 1925 speech at the Provincial Leningrad Komsomol, replayed at a Zhenotdel conference he stated that “20 per cent of the entire Komsomol organization [was] female.” However, this included working-class girls and Sobol’ quickly added that the Komsomol was “especially weak in attracting peasant girls,” which suggests that their numbers were lower in the countryside, see TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, l.108. Tirado, based on N. Shastin, the head of the Central Committee’s Information’s Information Department, “women made up 9 percent of all rural cell bureaus as of January 1925,” in “The Komsomol and the Krest’ianka,” 360. Gorsuch adds that “In 1925, peasants represented 46.3 percent of the Komsomol membership as a whole as compared to just 31.7 percent of Komosomol girls,” in “A Woman is Not a Man,” 642n23.

<sup>124</sup> See Bogdanova, TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.41. According to M. Sigal peasant girls had to “help the family, perform domestic chores, do agricultural tasks and were fully materially dependent on the family. [We have] cells, in which there are thirty members and one girl,” in “Devushka i kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezh,” *Rabotitsa i Krest’ianka* no.8 (1923): 20; Gorsuch, “A

Zhenotdel's perspective organizing women over the long term looked more promising in this township.

Vengisarovsk was a less promising township for Zhenotdel. This township of 11,222 people with 5,975 women was made up of Finns, followed by Estonians and then Russians.<sup>125</sup> The economic profile of this township was "poor"; it relied on agriculture; the milk-cattle industry but had no *kustar* industry.<sup>126</sup> The profile of party and state institutions was mixed. There was no consumers' co-op, but a peasant woman headed the mutual aid society. However, in the hierarchy of state organizations, having a mutual aid society could not substitute for a vibrant co-operative movement because as Moshe Lewin explains the Party believed the co-op "together with industrialization, was the road which would lead the peasantry to socialism...."<sup>127</sup> Moreover, this aforementioned peasant woman was also young because she was in the Komsomol and this institution was described as "insufficiently strong."<sup>128</sup> There were 630 members in the mutual aid society of which 13 per cent overall were women.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, despite a female leader, no women participated in the timber transportation artel, although some did in the stone loading artel.<sup>130</sup>

The society organized a summer day care to help peasant women work in the fields but

Woman is Not a Man," 637 and Tirado, "The Komsomol and the Krest'ianka," 352.

<sup>125</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211. Finns constituted 62 per cent of this township but Estonian and Russian percentages were not recorded.

<sup>126</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211.

<sup>127</sup> Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 93.

<sup>128</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212.

<sup>129</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212. In the imperial era, see Burds', *Peasant Dreams*.

this was criticized by Drozdova as being “still very weak and essentially nothing is being done.”<sup>131</sup> In two other summer day cares in the township, peasant women were described initially as being distrustful of these new institutions, but now manifested a “very good attitude.”<sup>132</sup> It is unlikely that this “very good attitude” was sustained because funding between 1927 and 1928 was curtailed province wide and a multiplicity of complaints ensued: medical personnel at day cares did not submit their reports on the children; day care personnel were only sixteen or seventeen years old; peasant women did not send their children because it lacked authority; and the day care personnel (urban workers) did not know the countryside.<sup>133</sup>

In general, peasant women in Vengisarovsk had few contacts with the Communist party. Although there were 5,975 women in the township only four managed to join the Communist party by the mid 1920s.<sup>134</sup> The field report chronicled how peasant women and delegates rarely attended party conferences and connections between themselves and the Party were “almost nothing and especially on behalf of peasant women.”<sup>135</sup> The Party was also particularly guilty of a flurry of activity around International Women’s Day (8<sup>th</sup> of March) that was not sustained throughout the year. It is noteworthy that the

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<sup>130</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212.

<sup>131</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212.

<sup>132</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212.

<sup>133</sup> The local budgets allocated 1,000 rubles in 1927 for summer day cares but in 1928 it had dropped to 700 rubles, see TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.46. According to Petrova, “our summer day cares are starting to earn authority, but the leadership sends sixteen and seventeen year olds which do not know the countryside...doctors go on holiday or somewhere, but they are not at the summer day care.” TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, ll.46 and 47. Similarly, Ransel argues that “Virtually all the nurseries, however, faced familiar problems: inadequate financial support from official bodies, an inability or unwillingness on the part of peasant families to themselves pay for the programs, and, linked to this lack of financing, difficulty in recruiting trained personnel to staff facilities.” *Village Mothers*, 61.

<sup>134</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212.

report details how in the township three of the Party's four women entered the organization on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, but only one of the three was a peasant woman!<sup>135</sup> Similarly, the only paid organizer, Kolosova, a local peasant woman, was remunerated for one month only, March, presumably to coincide partly with the festivities of International Women's Day.<sup>137</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, with few financial resources devoted to them, peasant women responded selectively to party and soviet institutions. At one large delegates' meeting, all twelve delegates reported that the "population had a negative attitude toward them."<sup>138</sup> Ironically, although poorly supported by the Communist party, Zhenotdel delegates, as party representatives, were burdened by general party attitudes held by the local population. In Vengisarovsk a recent scandal which had involved drunkenness and embezzlement in the township party committee had led to a purge of party ranks. In brief, the inhabitants considered "the party [had] no authority."<sup>139</sup> Zhenotdel was only a party organization. It was not a Commissariat with a separate institutional framework, and consequently, its whole edifice rested on party authority. If the party's reputation wavered or plummeted, then so too did Zhenotdel.

How did peasant women respond to the organizational efforts of Zhenotdel in Vengisarovsk? There were no newspapers, nor local peasant correspondents (*sel'kory*) in

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<sup>135</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212.

<sup>136</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212. In the 1930s: "Women, when they were quoted in the newspaper, rarely spoke as anything other than loyal wives. One exception was March 8, International Women's Day, when women were spotlighted as workers," in Kotkin "Coercion and Identity," in *Making Workers Soviet*, 303. Presumably, women were to "Speak Bolshevik" only one day in the year.

<sup>137</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.212. In Kopersk township the organizer was only paid for March, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.215. Delegates were also elected in March and it was the beginning of the sowing season. For more on March 8 see Chatterjee, *Celebrating Women*.

<sup>138</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213.

<sup>139</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213.



the township but residents did read the Zhenotdel journal *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*; nevertheless, peasant women apparently were indifferent to it and the issues did not entirely sell out.<sup>140</sup> That local peasant correspondents were in short supply is not surprising, because according to an official Zhenotdel report in 1924, *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* had worker correspondents in “every district” but throughout the entire province the journal only had a hundred village correspondents.<sup>141</sup> Zhenotdel’s hierarchy was convinced that the most serious issue concerning *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* was “distribution,” not indifference; a 1925 survey of Zhenotdel delegates revealed that 596 urban women out of 753 sent their *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* to the countryside.<sup>142</sup> This reveals the urban commitment among activists to promote ties with the countryside, (*smychka*) but the peasant women in this township preferred to read the journal *Krest'ianka*,<sup>143</sup> possibly because its contents concentrated on rural matters. Similarly, in

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<sup>140</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. Why *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* was unpopular is unclear. See Régine Robin, “Popular Literature of the 1920s. Russian Peasants as Readers,” in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, 253-267. For a discussion of *rab'kory* and *sel'kory*, see Jennifer Clibbon, “The Soviet Press and Grass-Roots Organization: The Rabkor Movement, NEP to the First Five Year Plan,” (Ph.D diss., University of Toronto, 1993) and Steven Robert Coe, “Peasants, the State and the Languages of NEP: the Rural Correspondents Movement in the Soviet Union,” (Ph.D diss., University of Michigan, 1993). For Zhenotdel’s efforts see Collegium Meeting TsGAIPD SPb, (19 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.16.

<sup>141</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12998, l.13. This same report explained that “periodically” issues among worker and peasant women were sent to the “general press” TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12998, l.13. That these female correspondents were highlighted is doubtful because, according to Steven Coe, “females made up only about 6% of all *sel'kory*” in “Struggles for Authority in the NEP Village: The Early Rural Correspondents Movement, 1923-1927,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no.7 (1996): 1153. For *rab'kory* see, Jeremy Hicks, “Worker Correspondents: Between Journalism and Literature,” *Russian Review* 66, no.4 (October 2007): 568-585 and for journalists see Julie Kay Mueller “Staffing Newspapers and Training Journalists in Early Soviet Russia,” *Journal of Social History* 31, no.4 (Summer 1998): 851-873.

<sup>142</sup> From questionnaires handed out at the 1925 Leningrad Zhenotdel provincial conference on its flagship journal, *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1.

<sup>143</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. Why *Krest'ianka* was more popular is unknown. Significantly, it had a rural focus and made efforts to boost circulation by including more clothing patterns and reducing the cost of its journal for increased subscription lengths, see TsGAIPD SPb, (September 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13035, l.72. Robin argues that based on surveys in the 1920s “some peasants [men] requested translations [of newspapers], ‘so that everything may be explained in our language, on a special page.’ Others asked that more be written about country life,” in “Popular Literature” 257. Lynne Attwood examines *Krest'ianka* but, overall is more interested in the message, than how it was received, see *Creating*

the 1920s the most popular newspaper in the countryside was *Krest'ianskaia gazeta*<sup>144</sup> and, according to Jeffrey Brooks, as this newspaper developed, editors increased the number of column inches devoted to “peasant” issues.<sup>145</sup>

If joint urban-rural ventures like *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* were supposedly unpopular in this township, so too were other joint ventures. For example, there was no *shefstvo* (patronage society) in Vengisarovsk, and interestingly, one had existed but had been cancelled.<sup>146</sup> In other words, this township was not fully participating in the larger project of the 1920s to inculcate urban values through promoting links between town and country (the *smychka*).<sup>147</sup> Ideally, how did the Bolshevik authorities want the *smychka* to function? In a 1923 *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* letter to the editor, an unidentified man from Kolchanov township in Volkhov county [due east of Petrograd] explained that they had four reading rooms but “no literature for peasant women”; moreover they wanted to organize “peasant women circles” and were “very interested in ‘baba journals’” but could “the *shefstvo* send the journal and other literature for peasant women?”<sup>148</sup> Zelikson, also

*the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922–53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

<sup>144</sup> Lenoe noted, *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* “maintained probably the highest proportion of individual subscribers of any mass-circulation central Soviet paper...” in “NEP Newspapers,” 630.

<sup>145</sup> Brooks contends in 1923 that the percentage of column inches of each issue in 1923 peasant issues were 16 inches and worker issues were 4 inches in 1929 peasant issues were 23 inches and worker issues were 8 inches, in “Public and Private Values,” 32.

<sup>146</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. Why the *shefstvo* was cancelled is unknown. Kenez argues that “there is a great deal of evidence that in most instances little was achieved [in *shefstva*]. At times the haughty behavior of the [urban] visitors, who knew little about village life and customs, alienated people,” in *The Birth*, 144. For other *shefstva* see, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13049, l.36 and TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13035, l.101.

<sup>147</sup> Hilton discussed as part of the “*smychka*” how GUM “portrayed a male worker and male peasant gazing at GUM’s logo, presumably the more conscious worker pointing out to the peasant the store’s logo... Women do not appear in this ad at all...” in “Retailing the Revolution,” 951.

<sup>148</sup> B. Luchin, “Daite zhurnal krest'iankam,” *Rabotnitsa i Krest'ianka* no.7 (1923): 27. He is unidentified in the sense that his job title is unrecorded. Ransel has argued that letters in “*Krest'ianka* and *Krest'ianka*

a man, and the Head of the Leningrad's Vasil'evskii Ostrov party district, the readers learned, had sent copies of the journal from the "Pil'mitika" factory to many townships.<sup>149</sup> Readers were presumably inspired on multiple levels. Here the *smychka* was working because there were engaged peasant women, a functioning *sheftsvo*, an appeal and a timely response. Fascinatingly, in a women's journal like *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*, men act as authority figures and intermediaries in facilitating the *smychka*. In this respect they illustrate what Elizabeth Wood described as the early Soviet regime's "mixed messages" – "a combination of explicit, official ideological representations of women as equals...[but] as still locked in older behaviours that put them in need of special tutelage and restraint."<sup>150</sup> Expanding upon her argument, peasant women required an extra degree of "special tutelage" due to their "femaleness" and "peasantness." This official Soviet discourse dovetailed nicely with the *smychka* itself which also on the surface level purported equality but emphasized "special tutelage." As one Zhenotdel report summarized neatly, although the goal was "to strengthen the union between town and country...the worker helps the peasant struggle against darkness and the difficulties in her life."<sup>151</sup> Disregarding the paternalism, not all urbanites were particularly helpful, and some certainly alienated peasants. In 1928, one urban doctor who was supposed to be leading an educational circle for peasant women conducted the whole discussion in Latin! When pressed for an explanation he simply replied, "I do not want to lead

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*gazeta* were edited before they were published," and there is no reason to doubt a similar process occurred at *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*, see *Village Mothers*, 49.

<sup>149</sup> Zelikson, "Daite zhurnal krest'iankam," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.7 (1923): 27.

<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth A. Wood, "The Trial of the New Woman: Citizens-in-Training in the New Soviet Republic," *Gender and History* 13, no.3 (November 2001): 526.

<sup>151</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13034, l.28.

circles.”<sup>152</sup> Overall, however, despite the formulaic exchange between town and country in the “public” forum of the journal, peasants in the real world responded selectively to soviet and party institutions and often seemed to prefer ones which were more exclusively peasant based in their membership.

Peasant women preferred reading in small groups or circles rather than attending reading rooms or “Red Corners.” The Vengisarovsk township had three reading rooms and ten Red Corners to facilitate literacy, and of these, five were exclusively for women and “all had collapsed.”<sup>153</sup> In 1923, two years earlier, another Zhenotdel organizer, Iakovleva, had already identified that peasant women needed to be encouraged to attend reading rooms.<sup>154</sup> Most reading rooms and Red Corners had very little material specifically for peasant women.<sup>155</sup> In 1925, peasant women in a questionnaire about the *Rabotnitsa i*

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<sup>152</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.2. This was reported in a provincial conference on the OSO AVIOKHIM ROKK – the Soviet Air Propaganda Organization. His precise motives are difficult to discern and, although technically “leading” a circle, he may have been carrying out an act of dissimulation against the regime even in the 1920s. Ransel discusses how it was notoriously difficult to get doctors out to rural areas partly because of “new prevailing ideologies of liberalism and Marxism were urban-centered...” *Village Mothers*, 65. For a discussion on “Air-Mindedness” see Scott W. Palmer, “Peasants into Pilots: Soviet Air-Mindedness as an Ideology of Dominance,” *Technology and Culture* 41, no. 1 (January 2000): 1-26 and Reina Pennington’s *Wings, Women and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2007).

<sup>153</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. See Clark’s discussion of reading rooms and circles in, “Uprooting Otherness,” 305-329. Villages which did not have the financial means to set up reading rooms established so-called Red Corners which were often in the building of the village soviet, in the school house; for a statistical breakdown of village reading rooms in the 1920s, see Kenez, *The Birth*, 137.

<sup>154</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 February, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.23. This archival report also chronicles how 63 per cent of Trotsk county was Finnish and Estonian and it is possible insufficient material was in their mother tongue, TsGAIPD SPb, (15 February, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.23. A year earlier in 1922, the Central Zhenotdel and the National Minorities Sub Section, vowed “to take all measures” to “attract the working masses in non-Russian languages” see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.12785, l.10.

<sup>155</sup> For example, in the section, “Peasant Women’s Lives” one observer noted that in Volkhov county, Kolchanovskoye township, “had four reading rooms but in them I almost never see the journal *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*, and in general there is no literature for peasant women.” B. Luchin. “Daite zhurnal krest’iankam,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.7 (1923): 27. Also see Siegelbaum, *Soviet state*, 49.

*krest'ianka* questioned the necessity of poems and worker memoirs.<sup>156</sup> Peasant dissatisfaction with the *izbach* (reading room director) may also have contributed to the collapse. For example in a large, Russian republic-wide survey of reading room directors in 1925, most were poorly paid, had a significant turnover and were expected to perform tasks like collecting taxes and making inventories, which clearly had nothing to do with their primary responsibilities.<sup>157</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, extrapolating to this study, work with Vengisarovsk peasant women was virtually almost nowhere. Further, there was “no leadership in political cultural enlightenment work in the township.”<sup>158</sup> In contrast, the literacy circles were functioning well and composed of mixed groups of men and women attending, “apparently, gladly.”<sup>159</sup>

Girls and boys were, of course, also mixed in the Komsomol and the Pioneers. This township had twelve Komsomol cells with 135 members of which thirty-two were girls; overall the active portion of this organization was deemed to be fifty-two members of

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<sup>156</sup> See TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1. In total, there were 261 peasant women delegates from Leningrad province answering questions, but not every response was numerically itemized.

<sup>157</sup> This is based on a survey in the RSFSR, out of 1,676 people, 987 were between sixteen and twenty-three and only 47 were between forty and fifty; it was not unusual for four different people to serve in one village in a single year as *izbachi*, see Kenez, *The Birth*, 139-140.

<sup>158</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. This finding does not support Clark’s research based on Smolensk that, “Party and *izbach* were committed to improving the intellectual lot of the peasant women and they responded,” in “Uprooting Otherness,” 317-318. Clark argues, “Evidence from Smolensk province shows that these [circles] were prescriptions for failure,” “Uprooting Otherness,” 316. In contrast, this report clearly found reading rooms to be unpopular, and circles popular.

<sup>159</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. Women predominated with nineteen members and men with eleven. The mixed Vengisarovsk township literacy circles possibly contravened the guidelines set forth by *Glavpolitprosvet*, which called for an “optimum membership of between ten and fifteen people, [and that the] circles were to be ‘homogenous,’ i.e., they should not vary widely in age or interests.” Clark, “Uprooting Otherness,” 316. *Glavpolitprosvet* (The Main Committee on Political Education was Narkompros (The People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment’s political education arm.) Similarly, on December 30, 1924 a Tambov province correspondent wrote in *Pravda*: “Very little attention is paid to the reading room. There is no information desk because no one comes. People prefer to spend their time in the company of women,” as quoted in Kenez, *The Birth*, 141.

which twenty were girls.<sup>160</sup> Five Zhenotdel delegates were Komsomol members and overall, the report emphasized that the “girls’ activity was very high and their influence was everywhere.”<sup>161</sup> Consequently, similar to the aforementioned neighbouring Oranienbaum township, girls manifested a much higher degree of participation in communist organizations than women.

Nevertheless, Drozdova’s overall conclusions seem skewed. Curiously, she ascertained that a “good attitude toward work among peasant women”<sup>162</sup> existed because sound bureaucratic procedures were followed. For instance, the township party committee duly received protocols of delegates’ meetings, two reports from a peasant woman organizer and eleven “women’s questions” in six months.<sup>163</sup> More substantively, however, this party committee only paid for a peasant woman organizer for one month in the year, women constituted 1.3 per cent of the Communist party organization, and every reading room for women had collapsed.

Drozdova then proceeded to Zarech’e, Natal’evka and Koporsk, three very distinctive settlements that provided both interesting challenges and surprising conclusions for Zhenotdel work among peasant women. In the village of Zarech’e the election of delegates was occurring with only sixteen delegates, although technically twenty were supposed to be present.<sup>164</sup> Drozdova emphasized that, in composition, the executive

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<sup>160</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213.

<sup>161</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. The Pioneers are not recorded herein.

<sup>162</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213.

<sup>163</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213.

<sup>164</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

body of the village soviet, the Presidium of the *sel' sovet* (rural soviet), “all seven were men.”<sup>165</sup> Overall, the two groups convened to work out some outstanding issues, but from conversations the Presidium “held a mistrustful attitude toward many measures of soviet rule.”<sup>166</sup> More specifically, the Presidium contributed to a widespread sentiment “in the settlement of a negative male attitude towards women’s work.”<sup>167</sup>

This attitude was reflected in a confrontation at a meeting between Zhenotdel delegates and Soviet leaders. The men from the Presidium started a “row” in the meeting because a so-called kulak-farmer had been sentenced by the people’s court to two months for assault of a peasant-woman delegate who had come forward to be elected at the time of Soviet elections.<sup>168</sup> The male (Presidium) leaders protested that the court decision “was incorrect because it was forbidden for peasant women to judge.”<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, the Soviet leaders sided with the “kulak” farmer rather than challenge traditional views of peasant women’s activity. Clearly, Soviet leaders were supposed to hold more enlightened views of women, and Drozdova notes ruefully that because of these events, the peasant Zhenotdel organizer was burdened with attempting to negotiate between

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<sup>165</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. Although Lewin emphasized that during the NEP period, the *mir* “was an active village institution alongside which *selsovet* was something of a Cinderella” in Zarech’e the “Cinderellas” were unwilling to share power with the real Cinderellas! *Russian Peasants*, 26.

<sup>166</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>167</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. In Leningrad and its surrounding province in 1923 peasant women were 1.2 per cent of soviets and in 1925 they were 14 per cent of soviets; in round numbers 544 and 1,224 people respectively, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13300, l.31.

<sup>168</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. In Tashkent, Keller discusses how Zhenotdel workers pointed out the “manifold incompetence and indifference of many Soviet courts [that] barred women trying to prosecute,” *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, 84.

<sup>169</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. Similarly, Farnsworth argues that, “Village soviets weak and backward and often not reading or understanding instructions about land divisions, kept women, the majority of the rural population, subordinate, mocking them, preventing their political participation, ignoring women’s representatives (*delegatki*) whom they were supposed to include in meetings, and scaring off less aggressive women,” in “Rural Women,” 180.

being indirectly responsible for her Soviet colleagues and peasant women, who were “stirred up.”<sup>170</sup> It was a fractured community: peasant Zhenotdel organizer, Soviet leaders, and peasant women. This scandal also had broader, ideological ramifications beyond how peasant women interacted with party and Soviet officials and provides a tidy case study of how “women’s work” influenced local politics. The residuals from this “scandal” left a bitter legacy between the Zhenotdel delegates and the Soviet Presidium leaders who allegedly almost came to “blows (*draki do dokhodit*)” at several subsequent meetings.<sup>171</sup> Interestingly, and fully consonant with Bolshevik rhetoric, Drozdova concluded that this scandal increased the authority of prosperous peasants and decreased Bolshevik party cell authority in Zarech’e.<sup>172</sup> Drozdova considered the collectivity of the Bolshevik party far more important than the consequences for the individual, and in this respect she mirrors her central Zhenotdel colleagues.<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, this scandal also joins a growing body of literature that documents various forms of male resistance to peasant women participating in the public sphere.<sup>174</sup>

Drozdova departed fractious Zarech’e for a village described as its polar opposite, Natal’evka. Symbols of Natal’evka’s stability were manifested in that illiteracy had, purportedly, been completely eliminated and the “Red Corner” was the only place in the

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<sup>170</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>171</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>172</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>173</sup> According to Oleg Kharkordin, when the student Korenkov locked up his sick and bleeding wife in the dormitory, Sofia Smidovich’s response was “more Bolshevik than feminist in describing the case. She [chose] to focus not so much on the case’s manifest misogyny as on the parlous condition of the *kollektiv* that does not interfere in private lives,” see *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 124-125.

<sup>174</sup> See Farnsworth, “Rural Women,” 180; Gorsuch, “A Woman is Not a Man,” 642; Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 340; Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 84; Figes, *Peasant Russia*, 206-208; Tirado, “The Komsomol and the Krest’ianka,” 351-352 and Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*.



township that regularly conducted “Peasant Women Days.”<sup>175</sup> Under the guidance of a local female schoolteacher, women were attending circles of political literacy.<sup>176</sup> Intriguingly, men did not join these circles.<sup>177</sup> Here, women, not men, were conforming to Bolshevik expectations. Nonetheless, even in this Bolshevik village utopia, only one peasant woman, a middle-aged married woman, had joined the Communist party.<sup>178</sup> Lastly, Drozdova conducted a field report of Koporsk, one of the most remote townships in Trotsk county. It was a peasant county with no industry, no outmigration, and poor soil.<sup>179</sup> Koporsk’s almost exclusively Russian population of 8,360 people included nearly 4,500 women.<sup>180</sup> The township had 1,606 households of which almost a third were either classified as “poor” (*bednyi*) (200) or “weakling” (*malomoshchnyi*) (300) and, although technically, the latter were seredniaks, their classification meant “they could not make ends meet, and were in constant danger of slipping back into the lower category.”<sup>181</sup> For our immediate purposes, this township also recorded that 260 households were headed by women; moreover, of these 260 households fifty were

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<sup>175</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>176</sup> Unsurprisingly, a schoolteacher conducted the circles because according to Danilov, “prior to collectivization the rural teacher was the main, and often the only, representative of the intelligentsia in the village” [and based on the 1926 census] “teachers comprised more than half the rural intelligentsia,” *Rural Russia*, 75-76.

<sup>177</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. No explanation is forwarded as to why men did not join the political literacy circles, although there is a sense of puzzlement in the report at this imbalance. However, female exclusivity may have been beneficial for organizing women because “Smolensk provides examples of reading rooms that were primarily used by women. Furthermore, female attendance seems to have increased especially when women ran the [reading] rooms.” Clark, “Uprooting Otherness,” 318.

<sup>178</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>179</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. Koporsk given its poverty had no outmigration nor seasonal labour to urban centres and would be classified as a sedentary agricultural community. The impact of male outmigration on poor peasant women’s households in the Central Industrial Region in the imperial period is analysed by Barbara Alpern Engel, “The Woman’s Side: Male out-Migration and the Family Economy in Kostroma Province,” *Slavic Review* 45, no.2 (Summer 1986): 257-271.

<sup>180</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. In stark contrast to previously detailed townships, Finns and Estonians comprised of only 2 per cent of this township.

<sup>181</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. The quotation is from Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 30.

poor.<sup>182</sup> Some tentative and, perhaps surprising, statistical conclusions can therefore be reached. Consequently, 16.2 per cent of all households were headed by women and of these, 19.2 per cent were poor, while 33.4 per cent of households headed by men were classified as poor.<sup>183</sup> Put another way, given no gender difference you would expect women to head 80 poor households, not 50.

Discovering why female-headed households were almost twice as likely not to be poor as male-headed households is more problematic. The precise household compositions were not designated. In all likelihood, as was the custom, many of these female-headed householders were peasant widows.<sup>184</sup> Koporsk peasant women were probably not deriving financial benefits from their connections to state institutions. The agricultural credit union had 175 members, but no women, and the mutual aid society had nearly 600 members of which eighty, or only 7.5 per cent were women.<sup>185</sup> The report readily acknowledged that measures to “improve the daily life of peasant women in the co-op movement are not being conducted.”<sup>186</sup> Moreover, peasant women were not receiving

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<sup>182</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. This type of gendered information on households was only available for Koporsk in this report. By 1928, some “three million peasant women headed their own households in the Soviet Union,” see figures cited in Farnsworth, “The Rural *Batrachka*,” 80.

<sup>183</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. As noted, there was virtually no male outmigration because it was a remote township and the numbers are not inflated by this phenomenon.

<sup>184</sup> According to Danilov, “If a woman headed a peasant household it was usually as a widow in the absence of an adult son,” *Rural Russia*, 65. However, in the 1926 census category “householders with hired labour” this “included many non kulak householders, as evidenced by the high proportion of women among them – 25.4 per cent (181,000). It was quite common for a woman, as the head of a large and young family without adult males, to employ wage-labour; she was more exploited than exploiting,” in Danilov, *Rural Russia*, 66.

<sup>185</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. To put this into perspective, the other townships had higher percentages of women participating in the mutual aid society and in the credit union, see Vengisarovsk - mutual aid society 13 per cent - female membership, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211 and Oranienbaum - mutual aid society - 12.5 per cent female membership and credit union - 3.5 per cent female membership.

<sup>186</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214. Again, broad trends point to male outmigration and the

consistent Zhenotdel organizational advice from a peasant woman organizer because, like the neighbouring Vengisarovsk township, she was only paid for the month of March.<sup>187</sup>

A tentative conclusion would suggest, irrespective of party and soviet institutions, that female-headed households were almost twice as likely not to be poor as male-headed households due to their own work ethic. David Ransel's findings of peasant women in European Russia whose central characteristic was "their adherence to religious norms and devotion to hard work, family and pre-collectivization community values of mutual support and charity"<sup>188</sup> offers both collaborative evidence and a reasonable explanation for the relative vibrancy of Koporsk peasant women.<sup>189</sup> More specifically, the single largest item in a peasant's household's budget in the late 1920s was vodka and peasant women were generally considered to drink less than their male counterparts.<sup>190</sup> Overall, belying notions of passivity, ignorance and backwardness, peasant women were able to

remaining women struggling in agriculture, see Norton D. Dodge and Murray Feshbach, "The Role of Women in Soviet Agriculture," 262-263.

<sup>187</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.215.

<sup>188</sup> Ransel, *Village Mothers*, 237. This observation applied to his first generation cohort - those born with the twentieth century and they started their families soon after the 1917 Revolution.

<sup>189</sup> In this entire report, religion was not mentioned in any of the townships. Similarly, the mutual support and charity outside official channels, i.e. soviet bodies, is also not discussed and points to the limits of a party source base.

<sup>190</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 35. To be fair we know very little about the drinking habits of peasant women because, as the foremost expert Laura L. Phillips concedes, a "systematic comparison of rural and urban drinking cultures far exceeds the purposes of this investigation..." in *Bolsheviks and the Bottle: Drink and Culture in St.Petersburg, 1900-1929* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), 38. However, based on a variety of sources, according to Phillips, "90 percent of male workers drank" as quoted in "Message in a Bottle: Working-Class Culture and the Struggle for Revolutionary Legitimacy, 1900-1924," *The Russian Review* 56 (January 1997) 25-43: 30n25. Also see Patricia Herlihy where peasant women were mostly actively involved in bootlegging in *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch.6. Christine Worobec argues that "By far the most common complaint against a delinquent household head was his inability to fulfil communal obligations because of a drinking problem," *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 45-46.

manage their holdings effectively despite lack of access to key decision-making bodies.

### Male Outmigration and Women's Organizing

In the mid-1920s Dolozhsk township, in stark contrast to Koporsk, had significant male outmigration to Leningrad city for work.<sup>191</sup> In total, there were 9,823 people in the township, and 5,354 females.<sup>192</sup> In this field report it was estimated that 80 per cent of the adult male population left in the summer for Leningrad to work predominantly as stone masons, roofers and house painters.<sup>193</sup> For our immediate purpose, what impact did the seasonal absence of males have on women's organizing in Dolozhsk? Naturally, the remaining peasant woman was correctly deemed responsible for "all domestic and agricultural work," but the Zhenotdel organizer emphasized that this "made her more independent and more active."<sup>194</sup> Crossing the 1917 divide, Barbara Alpern Engel's study in a male out-migration province also found "independent, self-reliant and self-assured" peasant women.<sup>195</sup>

This independence also translated into greater political representation in the 1920s in Dolozhsk township. Again, this is a continuation of the late imperial pattern where in

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<sup>191</sup> Dolozhsk was in Gdov county which is currently in Pskov province but in the 1920s was under Zhenotdel Petrograd/Leningrad Gubotdel. See file titled, "Expenses and Composition of Congress of Peasant Women from Petrograd Province," and listed twenty Gdov peasant women expenses for transportation and daily allowances at 1,300,820 rubles, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12890.

<sup>192</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.89.

<sup>193</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.89. The 80 per cent figure was derived from a VIK (*volost'* soviet executive committee) report enclosed as part of Drozdova's field report.

<sup>194</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.89.

<sup>195</sup> Alpern Engel, "The Woman's Side," 267. These were women in Soligalich and Chukhloma - two districts (counties) in Kostroma province and the focus of Alpern Engel's study. The quotation is from

“Kostroma, as in other areas of substantial male out-migration, women assumed their husbands’ places at the village assembly and fulfilled the offices of representative and elder.”<sup>196</sup> In the Soviet era, a greater flexibility either due to a lack of their physical presence or the influence of Leningrad city life meant that “male attitudes to the participation of women in rural soviets and in general to social work had changed for the better.”<sup>197</sup> For instance, purportedly specifically due to male out-migration, there were some soviets where women predominated:

Kitkovsk	district soviet	(1 man and 9 women)
Sorokina	rural soviet	(3 men and 17 women)
Dubok	rural soviet	(7 men and 25 women). <sup>198</sup>

Overall, peasant women participated in rural soviets in this township at a rate of about “30 per cent and in the summer it was significantly higher.”<sup>199</sup> To put this into perspective, the provincial average was 14 per cent in 1925.<sup>200</sup> Curiously, despite emphasizing peasant women’s greater independence and activity, the field report was still highly critical.

In June of 1925 Zhenotdel work among peasant women was characterized as “very weak” and “in a state of sheer chaos” because “no work among delegates and practicants was being conducted.”<sup>201</sup> There was “no instruction” and “only work of a purely

Zhbankov- a nineteenth century physician.

<sup>196</sup> Alpern Engel, “The Woman’s Side,” 268. See 268n.45 for more detailed examples.

<sup>197</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.89.

<sup>198</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, ll.89-90.

<sup>199</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.90.

<sup>200</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13300, l.31.

<sup>201</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.97.

agitational character”<sup>202</sup> was conducted. Leadership at all levels came under attack for mismanagement and a breakdown in communication. The county and township Zhenotdel leaderships failed to submit reports on their work to the “party organization [which consequently] did not know the basic resolutions of Zhenotdel’s work.”<sup>203</sup> Thus, unsurprisingly, the report concluded that work was conducted “without a plan, without the party leadership and that the township organizers had a lax attitude towards their work.”<sup>204</sup>

What all this suggests is the limits of measuring the women’s organizing activity strictly on the basis of quantifiable material, for example, the percentage of women in the rural soviet. On the surface Dolozhsk township had more than double the number of women participating in the rural soviets compared to the provincial average, but curiously this did not improve relations between the Party and Zhenotdel. It is highly possible with an estimated 80 per cent of the adult male population routinely out of the township, peasant women were simply over burdened with their domestic and agricultural responsibilities, and had little remaining time for social work. As Barbara Alpern Engel argues in post-emancipation Russia, “out-migration...provided some women with an unusual opportunity to be their own mistresses, even as it added to their labors.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.97. More specifically, Peasant Women’s Days and Red Corners did not exist.

<sup>203</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.97. Similarly, field reports of neighbouring Tupitsinsk township complained that “party influence was weak [because] organizers’ reports are not sent to the biuro,” and in Gdov township, “even after resolutions on this matter, proper documents are not sent to the township party collective,” TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.97.

<sup>204</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.97. Zhenotdel’s lack of organization and planning was not unique. Danilov discussed how “Of 2,000 kolkhoz reports for 1926, only 144 (7.2 per cent) referred to an organization plan and only 224 (11.2 per cent) to a production plan.” *Rural Russia*, 298.

<sup>205</sup> Engel, “The Woman’s Side,” 270.

The labour of girls, vital in any rural economy, was particularly valuable in areas of heavy male outmigration. Indirectly, the sources verify this, because girls, despite having the role model of “more independent and more active” mothers, had much lower participation rates in the Komsomol than the other townships.<sup>206</sup> Significant adult male outmigration meant that Dolozhsk girls “very often go to work with the women.”<sup>207</sup> In addition, peasant women especially needed the labour of girls because in “regions of heavy male out-migration, peasant women had a lower average of between 5.1 and 5.74 children each.”<sup>208</sup> Women’s economic independence was tempered with an understandable lack of time to be fully engaged in multiple areas of social work. Peasant women were selective, about a third attended rural soviets, but on the whole disinterested in Zhenotdel work.

#### Zhenotdel’s Twilight Years and the End of NEP

Paradoxically, as Zhenotdel increased its cohort of delegates in the late 1920s, the overall quality of its work declined. What accounts for this paradox? The new delegates were

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<sup>206</sup> In thirteen collectives there were eighteen girls and 109 boys - girls comprised of 16.5 per cent of the Komsomol organization in Dolozhsk township, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.91. In Vengisarovsk, the township had 12 Komsomol cells with 135 members of which 32 were girls (23.7 per cent); overall the active portion of this organization was deemed to be fifty-two members of which twenty were girls (38.5 per cent), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. In Oranienbaum the Komsomol had 171 members in total and thirty-seven girls, (21.6 per cent) while the Pioneers had 365 boys and 126 girls and from this number eighteen were leaders of which six were girls, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.211.

<sup>207</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.91. Alpern Engel posed the interesting question, “Did children, like wives, gain greater autonomy because of the absence of a male authority figure?” in “The Woman’s Side,” 270. The quick answer is no because girls’ labour was too valuable to lose in the rural family economy where adult males were periodically absent. Similarly, Elizabeth Bright Jones chronicles how farm children were compelled to work longer hours in the 1920s because many female hired hands left for more appealing factory work, see “A New Stage of Life?” 565-567.

<sup>208</sup> Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 207. Ransel argues that the first generation, the women born before about 1912,” was close to the nineteenth-century practices and outcomes [they] typically gave birth from six to twenty times and lost about one-third of their children before age five,” *Village Mothers*, 103.

surrounded increasingly by fewer paid township organizers. Before the officially sanctioned rationalisation campaign of 1927, the archival record suggests that Zhenotdel was unable to secure funds it was legally entitled to. In March of 1926, Maria Shitkina, Provincial Head of the Leningrad Zhenotdel, beseeched Sergei Mironovich Kirov, Secretary of the Leningrad Communist party, to stop her organization from losing numerous township organizers. The Provincial Party Committee violated its funding regulations by laying off township workers and transferring the money to use “for *shefstvo* pay.”<sup>209</sup> In Gdov, for example, the local party organization had eight township organizers but laid off five and the savings in salary was partly redistributed to pay for two workers in a Moskovsko Narsvskii *shefstvo* society.<sup>210</sup> The remainder of savings in salary, as Shitkina dryly noted, of “192 rubles and 50 kopecks” for work among peasant women was now used “for another necessity.”<sup>211</sup> In 1926, one, two and four township organizers were respectively laid off in Volkhov, Kingisepp and Leningrad counties.<sup>212</sup> Zhenotdel activists operated with diminished resources for the remainder of the decade.

Thus, the late 1920s is replete with examples of collapsed delegates’ meetings. In Volkhov county, in the village of Turmano, “no work was conducted whatsoever [because] in November the single Communist left to do seasonal work and now no one is left.”<sup>213</sup> Similarly, in Luzhsk county “the majority of [delegates’ meetings] have disintegrated” while in Vinnitsk township the party member was “plied with questions

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<sup>209</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (30 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13243, l.36.

<sup>210</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (30 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13243, l.36. Gdov probably needed some assistance, the arable “strips were so narrow that a harrow could not be used on them,” in Danilov, *Rural Russia*, 132.

<sup>211</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (30 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13243, l.36.

<sup>212</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (30 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13243, l.36.



which she did not manage to answer” and after that “party authority was lost and [peasant women] lost the desire to go to delegates’ meetings.”<sup>214</sup> Without the requisite funding for paid township organizers, increased numbers of delegates did not compensate for the increasing strain of implementing unpopular policies associated with the First Five-Year Plan.

In the wake of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of 1927 and ensuing rationalization campaigns, Zhenotdel witnessed severe budget cuts and yet, like all party departments, was responsible for promoting the programs of the First Five-Year Plan.<sup>215</sup> According to Moshe Lewin, the “two most major far-reaching innovations introduced in the autumn of 1929 were the launching of the collectivization drive, and the abolition, de facto, of the whole NEP framework.”<sup>216</sup> The twin goal of forced industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture had a particular resonance for peasant women because according to many party and Zhenotdel officials “it was principally peasant women who object to collectivization....”<sup>217</sup> The First Five-Year Plan trumpeted the collectivization of agriculture, both for ideological reasons and as a means to finance massive industrialization,<sup>218</sup> but peasant women were resisting collectivization through riots

<sup>213</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13299, l.73.

<sup>214</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13299, l.73; TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13299, l.73.

<sup>215</sup> Budget cuts are discussed in Chapter One, “Feminism and the “Second” Liquidationist Wave.”

<sup>216</sup> Lewin, *The Making*, 145.

<sup>217</sup> A. Tikhonova, “Rabotnitsa, gotov’sia k otpuskam!” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.10 (May 1929): 2. See the TsK RKP (b) Resolution on the Tasks of Work Among Women Workers and Women Peasants which “resolves to take measures toward more decisive attraction of women peasants to co-ops and kolkhozy, especially from the poor.” TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.42.

<sup>218</sup> For an introduction to the complex topic of collectivization and industrialization see Lewin, *The Making*, chs.4-6 and Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*.

known as *bab'i bunty*.<sup>219</sup>

As early as 28 March 1928, a Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium meeting passed a resolution that specified that the editors of its journal, *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*, wanted the journal to adopt a “bias (*uklon*)” towards greater promotion of the collectivization of agriculture.<sup>220</sup> Interestingly, this meeting suggests that in the perennial party debates over agricultural and industrial policy in the 1920s, Zhenotdel had already decided as early as March 1928 that NEP's free market compromise was over. An overview of *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* from April 1928 onwards reveals that it did promote extensively the collectivization of agriculture before the official drive in the fall of 1929.<sup>221</sup> In the meantime, there is some archival evidence that Zhenotdel leaders were concerned generally about NEP's agricultural policies and specifically about prosperous peasants influencing middle and poor peasant women. A Zhenotdel report from Cherepovets on 8 March 1929 noted that “in a series of districts...[there is] the extremely strained and embittered mood” of peasant women who were “chiefly incited by prosperous peasants.”<sup>222</sup> At this International Women's Day meeting, a prosperous peasant woman

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<sup>219</sup> See especially Viola's article, “Bab'i Bunty,” 23-42 and how “Peasant women were at the forefront of protest in Pitelinskii [in Riazan]...” in McDonald, “A Peasant Rebellion,” 135.

<sup>220</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (28 March, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.10.

<sup>221</sup> When the First Five-Year Plan was launched the following articles attacked kulaks and explained why agriculture needed fundamental restructuring, see M. Shitkina, “Chto skazal 15<sup>th</sup> partiinii s'ezd o piatiletnem plane khoziaistva SSSR,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.2 (January 1928): 3-4 and A. Karpitskaia, “Kak partiia vedet rabotu v derevne,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.2 (January 1928): 22. The following articles highlighted NEP's agricultural problems and promoted co-ops, collectivization and further demonization of kulaks: see Arafiiia, “Ubrali kulaka,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.6, (March 1928): 25, “Kak obsluzhivaet kooperatsiia derevniu,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.13, (July 1928): 26; Tikhonova, “Kollektivizatsiia derevni i pomosh' bednote,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.15, (July 1928): 1. “Kollektivnii trud v derevne,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.19, (October 1928): 28.

<sup>222</sup> This report was discussed at Zhenotdel's Provincial Leningrad Collegium meeting, see TsGAIPD SPb, (16 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.26.

accused poor peasant women of employing “the language of bawlers, (*iazik krikun’e*)”<sup>223</sup> complaining of their conditions. Nevertheless, the Zhenotdel delegate concluded that the “poor section of peasant women were falling under the influence of anti-soviet and kulak elements....”<sup>224</sup> Naturally, these poor peasant women were not deciding independently to resist collectivization, but were colluding inadvertently with “anti-soviet and kulak elements.” According to the report, all of these problems and tensions manifested themselves because of the general party policy “attempt to unite the poor and middle part of the countryside [*bedniaki/seredniaki* peasants] against anti-soviet influence [kulaks].”<sup>225</sup>

High-ranking Moscow party members were particularly anxious about peasant women resisting collectivization. For example, a Central Committee report of late 1929 noted that peasant women provided the main support of “kulak insurrection.”<sup>226</sup> Stalin, Molotov and other leaders concurred in top secret briefing papers that in “all kulak disturbances [*vystupleniia*] the extraordinary activity of women is evident - a circumstance sufficiently serious to draw to your attention.”<sup>227</sup> From the spring and

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<sup>223</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (16 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.26.

<sup>224</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (16 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.26.

<sup>225</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (16 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.26. See Kaganovich’s decree of 15 June, “The Tasks of the Party in Its Work among Women Workers and Peasants,” which highlights Party anxiety over the peasant women’s opposition, see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 50. This party policy was reiterated by Shaposhnikova in “K itogam 2 Oblastnoi konferentsii VKP (b),” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no. 8, (April 1929): 2. See reports on kulak influence and violence in Demiansk district and resistance to collectivization in Trishekininsk and Cherepovets respectively TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.161 and TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.167. Also see McDonald, “A Peasant Rebellion,” 125-146.

<sup>226</sup> N. A. Ivnikskii, ed., “Dokladnaia zapiska Kolkhoztsentra v TsK VKP (b) o kolkhoznom stroitel’stve v sovetskogo obshchestva,” *Materialy po istorii SSSR: dokumenty po istorii sovetskogo obshchestva* Vol. 7. (Moscow, 1959), 242 as cited in Viola, *Peasant Rebels*, 183.

<sup>227</sup> RGASPI, f.17, op.85, d.355, p.1 as cited in Viola, *Peasant Rebels*, 183.

summer of 1929, Zhenotdel was to be deployed to promote collectivization.<sup>228</sup>

Zhenotdel's promotion of collectivization was received poorly by peasant women.

Especially after 1923, Zhenotdel was keen to increase its support from middle and poor peasant women, as well as *batrachkas*. Archival access demonstrated the limited success of attracting *batrachkas*.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, although peasant Zhenotdel delegates increased throughout the 1920s (surpassing worker delegates), there was a significant thirty per cent dip between 1927/1928 and 1928/1929.<sup>230</sup> This is quantitative evidence that suggests peasant women were dissatisfied with the policies ending NEP or with Zhenotdel and the Party, or perhaps with both.

In summation, across the 1920s, peasant women's satisfaction with Zhenotdel and the Party can best be gleaned from a combination of Zhenotdel conference transcripts and field reports. Despite their highly ritualized nature, conferences were one space where peasant women criticized shortcomings in the Party and state. In contrast, field reports were not designed for public consumption but were strictly for Zhenotdel's edification. Consequently, the field report on Dolozhsk township emphasized that male out-migration

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<sup>228</sup> See the following articles: "Delo podkulachikov," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.6 (March 1929): 21; "Krepche smychky goroda s derevnei," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.6 (March 1929): 22; L. Shaposhnikova, "K itogam 2 Oblastnoi konferentsii VKP (b)," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no. 8, (April 1929): 2-3; A. Tikhonova, "Rabotnitsa, gotov'sia k otpuskam!" *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.10 (May 1929): 2-3; I. Tsil'shtein, "Piatiletanii plan narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR - plan velikikh rabot," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.12 (June 1929): 2-3. N. V. "Puti razvitiia sel'skogo khoziaistva," and "Perekhodim na kollektivnie khoziaistva," *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.13 (June 1929): 1-3.

<sup>229</sup> In a Zhenotdel report of 1927/1928, *batrachkas* were 5.5 per cent of delegates in the countryside, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.57.

<sup>230</sup> According to a report on 8 *Okruzs* (a territorial unit between province and county in size) in Leningrad Province in the countryside, in 1927/1928, there were 17,893 delegates and 920 delegates' meetings; in 1928/29 there were 12,185 delegates and 572 delegates' meetings. Thus, both delegates and delegates' meetings declined 32 and 37.8 per cent respectively, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f. 24, op.8, d.8, l.121.

had a mixed impact on women's organizing because it had more than double the number of peasant women participating in the rural soviet compared to the provincial average. This did not improve relations with the Party or strengthen Zhenotdel, because women and girls were simply overburdened with their domestic and agricultural tasks. In keeping with the tradition of looking at the family economy, girls were particularly valuable to the Dolozhsk economy and consequently participated less in party organizations than in townships which had less male-outmigration.

Incredible diversity was present in the field reports on Trotsk's three townships.<sup>231</sup> The Zarech'e assault scandal indicated how "women's work" influenced broader politics, and that not just women, but men (Soviet leaders) needed to be inculcated in soviet mores. Nevertheless, in neighbouring Natal'evka women participated in political literacy circles in greater numbers than men. Tentatively speaking, a connection between non-Russian nationalities and a lack of receptivity to Soviet and party institutions exists, because the overwhelmingly Finnish Vengisarovsk township had all reading rooms collapse, no co-op, no newspapers, and no *sel'kory*. According to Viktor Danilov, a "levelling" process occurred during NEP whereby the number of rich and poor peasant households declined,

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<sup>231</sup> Religion was not discussed in either Trotsk's or Dolozhsk's field report and suggests one limit to this party source. In contrast see, Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) and her "Trading Icons: Clergy, Laity, and Rural Cooperatives, 1921," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies (Revue canadienne-américaine d'études slaves)* 26, issue 1-4 (1992): 315-334, William B. Husband, "Godless Communists" *Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000). For post-emancipation Russia see Chris Chulos, *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861-1917* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003). In an urban context see Mark D. Steinberg, "Workers on the Cross: Religious Imagination in the Writings of Russian Workers, 1910-1924," *Russian Review* 53, no.2 (April 1994): 213-239 and his, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

“together with a corresponding growth in the number of middle peasant households.”<sup>232</sup> In Koporsk why the “levelling” process benefited female-headed households is allusive. The broader significance is that Zhenotdel, despite the changing economic realities, continued to target a large portion of its resources and material to poor peasant women.<sup>233</sup>

Peasant women usually had far lower participation rates than peasant men in party and soviet bodies.<sup>234</sup> Trotsk county revealed a similar pattern. In no township did peasant women constitute more than two per cent of Communist party, nor did they reside in the powerful township soviet executive committee (VIK), and nor did they constitute more than 15 per cent of any party, state or soviet body (mutual aid society, credit union or co-op).<sup>235</sup>

In all three townships, a Zhenotdel township organizer was only paid by the Communist party to organize delegates’ meetings, conferences, and so forth, for the single month of March to coincide with International Women’s Day.<sup>236</sup> This new practice I termed

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<sup>232</sup> Danilov, *Rural Russia*, 257.

<sup>233</sup> Drozdova described all three as “poor” and they confirm the broader 1920s pattern whereby “poor peasants had very little part in the co-operatives” because, in 1925, neither Koporsk nor Vengisarovsk township had a co-op, and Oranienbaum’s co-op had existed but soon collapsed. Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 99. Only 698 of 9,039 people (12.9 per cent) joined Oranienbaum’s co-op, and it had closed, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.209. In Koporsk, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.214.

<sup>234</sup> In Orlando Figes’ discussion of rural politics he emphasized that, by 1920, “only 12 villages (out of a total of 1,036) contained a female Bolshevik party member. It is significant that the female share of the vote doubled (to 20.7%) in these 12 villages, although it did not increase at all with a Bolshevik party cell...consisting entirely of men.” Figes, *Peasant Russia*, 208.

<sup>235</sup> This report supports Farnsworth’s “Heavy pressure from the Soviet government raised the proportion of women in the rural soviets from 1 percent in 1922 to about 10 percent in 1925, but positions of authority - chairs in soviets and officerships in the commune - remained with men,” in “Rural Women,” 180.

<sup>236</sup> Most major Zhenotdel conferences also took place around International Women’s Day, see provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel conference, TsGAIPD SPb, (7 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13046, TsGAIPD SPb, (8

“Marchism.” Thus, Zhenotdel conformed to a broader pattern in the countryside, whereby the local party cells resorted “to ‘campaign tactics’ (*kampaneishchina*) which meant that their operations were characterized by successive bursts of activity directed toward some end, alternating with periods of calm and inaction.”<sup>237</sup> In contrast, women workers were poorly but more consistently funded in Zhenotdel. As the regime’s ideological paragon, however, urban worker delegates were expected particularly to model exemplary behaviour. Nonetheless, in 1929, urban women delegates still expressed their resentment toward empty campaigns and tokenism that were one-day affairs, “from the 8<sup>th</sup> of March to the 8<sup>th</sup> of March,”<sup>238</sup> and proposed affirmative action programs for women in industry. Thus, the final chapter will discuss how women workers were participating and integrating into the broader Soviet project in both the NEP and early First Five-Year Plan eras.

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March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047. TsGAIPD SPb, (9 March, 1925), and f.16, op.13, d.13048.

<sup>237</sup> Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 125.

<sup>238</sup> M. Arbuzov, “Bol’she vnimaniia zhenrabote,” *Kommunistka*, no. 8 (April 1929): 32-33. In the post-soviet era, International Women’s Day marches continue, see Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27.

## Chapter 5

### “I love my work”: Women Workers

When Maria Vasil’evna Pozdeeva, head of the Zhenotdel in Petrograd province, submitted a handwritten resignation letter to its Collegium, her motives mirrored the challenges facing many women workers. On 29 November 1923, Pozdeeva wrote succinctly, “I have to breastfeed my child every two hours. This does not give me the opportunity to go to meetings at the Provincial Party Committee, to organize district zhenotdel meetings and to do other leadership work....”<sup>1</sup> Pozdeeva requested a transfer to “work at the Zheliabov [textile] mill...as a women’s organizer”<sup>2</sup> because childcare responsibilities had currently “created a very difficult situation at work.”<sup>3</sup> She did not return to Zhenotdel as its Petrograd provincial head. Pozdeeva’s plight highlighted the Zhenotdel’s crises of personnel discussed in the opening chapter and provides a concrete example of how it was difficult to provide a continuity of leadership when qualified members left their posts. Her leadership credentials were lauded in a recent party review; it described Pozdeeva as “energetic,” “attentive” and as someone who “loves her work.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 November, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.77. In contrast, Kollontai, who as chapter one illuminated, first tendered her resignation because the Congress of Eastern Women was not convened.

<sup>2</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.488425, “Autobiography of Maria Vasil’evna Pozdeeva,” (13 April, 1925), l.60.

<sup>3</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 November, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.77.

<sup>4</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.488425, “Character Record of Maria Vasil’evna Pozdeeva,” (18 June, 1923), l.64. This review was conducted by party officials less than six months before her resignation. Pozdeeva was deemed a “fully disciplined” party member, but criticized for “insufficient theoretical preparation”; her organizational administrative abilities were deemed, “not fully satisfactory.” Her autobiography indicated that she was well educated. She completed gymnasium and two years in a medical faculty, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.1728, d.488425, l.55. See Igal Halfin for Communist biographies in the 1920s and 1930s, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).



If someone ostensibly as privileged as Pozdeeva was unable to combine motherhood and “responsible” work, then this speaks volumes about the lack of support given to women.

It was undoubtedly the nexus of work and family, the conditions of daily life or *byt'*, which structured the working environment for Pozdeeva and women workers alike. A brief overview of Leningrad workers' broad employment and living conditions in the 1920s will open this chapter. During NEP, clubs were deemed an important space to inculcate socialist values. This chapter contrasts two groups: politically active Zhenotdel delegates and women workers in Leningrad's clubs. Zhenotdel delegates participated more in workers' clubs, but among women workers, those with access to broad-based social programs, had the highest participation rates. A discussion of brick workers in Leningrad county will address some of the particular challenges of organizing seasonal women workers. Zhenotdel's archival factory reports of Leningrad city during the 1920s, suggest that organizing women workers was more successful in female-dominated factories. Nevertheless, whatever organizational gains Zhenotdel had achieved were eroding by the end of the 1920s with the introduction of new policies. The chapter will chronicle how rationalisation and the First Five-Year Plan introduced tension and labour strife among young and old female workers, male and female workers, unemployed women, and even women worker promotees (*vydvizhentsy*) in Leningrad. Was Zhenotdel still a relevant organization in the lives of women workers? Crucially, in new archival evidence, on the eve of Zhenotdel's dissolution, provincial Zhenotdel leaders overwhelmingly considered the organization necessary, but other Party leaders, Politbiuro members, did not.

The Party delineated peasant women, like their male counterparts, into three groups: kulaks, middle, and poor peasants.<sup>5</sup> Working society was also strictly demarcated into “peasant” and “worker”; this demarcation does, however, remain overdrawn in the 1920s. Who exactly was a worker during NEP? Were workers’ wives workers? In both the archival record and the secondary literature, women workers could be employed in a variety of capacities: as housekeepers and domestics, as artisans or crafts people, and as factory or white-collar workers.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, urban women could work full-time, part-time or seasonally and combine this employment with bouts of unemployment and stints in the countryside. To date, most studies of workers have focussed on male workers and there has been a curious lack of attention to Leningrad city and province during the 1920s.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See especially Shelia Fitzpatrick’s discussion in “The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society,” in *Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) and her *Tear off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Lewin, *The Making*; and Sarah Davies, “‘Us Against Them’: Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934-41,” *Russian Review* 56, no.1 (1997): 70-87.

<sup>6</sup> There is no consensus in the literature over who is a “worker.” As Danilov explains in the 1926 census classification: “workers are those directly occupied in production and transportation of material goods, or employed in the maintenance of productive machines.” On this principle, weighers, inspectors and couriers, for instance, were counted as white-collar workers, while train guards were counted as workers,” see *Rural Russia*, 314n.59. Domestic workers were not employed on “productive machines” and classified as white-collar workers. Overall, this dissertation finds a broader definition of worker more compelling and reflective of women’s lives; for instance, Victoria Bonnell’s albeit Imperial study, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers’ Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). The following monographs all discuss women workers but none have a concentration on Leningrad city or province: Goldman, *Women*, and her *Women at the Gates*, Ilič, *Women Workers*, Koenker, *Republic of Labor: Russian Printers and Soviet Socialism, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*. See Rebecca Spagnolo’s “When Private Home Meets Public Workplace: Service, Space, and the Urban Domestic in the 1920s,” in *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, ed. Eric Naiman and Christina Kiaer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> See the following works which concentrate on male workers or the Moscow area: Chase, *Workers*; David M. Hoffman *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941* (New York: Ithaca Press, 1994); Murphy, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* and Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin’s Russia: The Making of an Industrial Working Class* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1997). Ward’s fine work does cover Leningrad but, despite textiles being a female-dominated industry, his monograph discusses women sparingly, see *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, Black’s “Party Crisis and the Factory Shop Floor,” does not discuss women workers. Rossman discusses female textile workers during primarily the

Due to the war, civil war and revolution, Petrograd experienced massive social dislocation and virtual economic collapse. For instance, its population fluctuated dramatically from approximately two and a half million people during world war one to about 720,000 by the end of the civil war.<sup>8</sup> By the time of the First Five-Year Plan Leningrad's population had made remarkable gains, but had not recovered to world war one levels.<sup>9</sup> On the eve of the world war one, metalworkers (41.5 per cent) were the predominant group followed by textile workers (16.5 per cent).<sup>10</sup> Printing, food, and chemical industries formed respectively 9.5 per cent, 9.3 per cent and 8.9 per cent of workers.<sup>11</sup> Women workers were increasing, drawn into the workforce during world war one, but whatever gains they had made during the war, quickly dissipated. During NEP, a combination of cutbacks, cost-accounting and low skills, often shifted more women workers away from heavy industry and filtered them back into traditional low-paid textile and food production jobs.<sup>12</sup> Across the 1920s, the city's workforce changed dramatically.

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FFYP but his regional monograph is the "calico republic" of Ivanovo, see *Worker Resistance under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). Scholarship has also shifted more to self and subjecthood: see: Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931-39," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000); Halfin, *From Darkness to Light* and his *Terror in My Soul*; Eric Naiman, "On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them," *The Russian Review* 60 (July 2001): 307-15; and Stephen Kotkin's seminal *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). In contrast, Sheila Fitzpatrick's admits to a "low tolerance for totalizing theory, including Marxist and Foucauldian," in *Tear off the Masks*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> *TsSU SSSR, Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR, 1922-1972 gg* (Moscow: Statistika, 1972), 19 and *Malai sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1930) 4: 572. It has also been shaped by its geographic position: on the Gulf of Finland amidst forty-odd islands in the Neva River delta surrounded by fifty rivers, streams, channels, and canals, see Ruble, *Leningrad*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> There were 1,775,000 people in the city in 1929, see *Malai sovetskaia*, 572.

<sup>10</sup> These figures are from 1 January, 1914 see *XV let diktatury proletariata: Ekonomiko-statisticheskii sbornik po gor. Leningrada i Leningradskoi oblasti* (Leningrad, 1932), 74.

<sup>11</sup> *XV let diktatury proletariata*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Nationally, in the metal industry, women's share of the workforce dropped from fifteen per cent in 1920 to eight per cent in 1928, and in machine production from 13.8 per cent in 1923 to 6.8 per cent in 1929, see G. Serebrennikov, "Zhenskii Trud v SSSR za 15 let," *Voprosy truda*, 11-12 (1932): 60-61. In light industry, women workers in Narvit increased from fifty per cent in 1923 to eighty two per cent in 1928, from sixty one to sixty five percent among medical personnel, and fifty eight per cent to sixty one percent in the textile factories," Serebrennikov, "Zhenskii Trud," 60-61.

By 1928, metals was in second place and textiles was the single largest industry accounting for over one quarter of all output.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, unlike many areas in European Russia, in Leningrad province, its industries offered greater employment diversity. Ideally, this diversity meant that the worker had more opportunities to find employment, more leverage in the workplace and was less subject to the vagaries of the boom and bust cycles of one-industry towns.<sup>14</sup> Factory employment was also usually concentrated in and around Leningrad city and not dispersed throughout the countryside. This concentration around the metropolis reduced the feasibility of working the land and workers' ties to the countryside.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, as was the pattern in most of European Russia, workers who lived in areas with dispersed provincial factories could more easily combine factory work with farming. Workers' living conditions varied considerably throughout European Russia during NEP, but Leningrad workers were often a privileged group. On average, not only did Leningrad have more skilled workers, but both its skilled and unskilled workforce, including women, were paid more than other workers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 12. Metals contributed about "18 per cent value to the city's economy. In terms of employment the trend is more striking still. In 1921 the number of metalworkers stood at 26.6 per cent of the 1913 figure, while for textiles the proportion was 8.8 per cent. Four years later metal enterprises employed 60.3 per cent of their pre-war numbers and textiles employed 98.9 per cent," in *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> According to Ward, for example, "Only in Leningrad, perhaps because industrial diversity traditionally offered wider choices for male employment and thus weakened gender demarcation in cotton, is there any evidence of substantial female penetration of male supervisory roles; 'planners' who kept an eye on the frames for doffing were, according to one worker, almost all women in the city's mill, in contrast to the CIR [Central Industrial Region] where this was a man's trade," *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> As Ward explains in a "tiny 4.4 per cent of Rashin's sample, 449 [Leningrad] workers, held land in 1929, and there is no evidence that proportions ever approached those apparent in the CIR," *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 37. According to Ward, "it will be appreciated that in the CIR, although not in Leningrad, field and factory were not sharply differentiated one from the other... *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 37. Similarly, Rossman discusses the "IIR, monoindustrial megaprovince... a merger of four of Russia's oldest textile regions Iaroslavl, Ivanovo-Voznesenk, Kostroma, and Vladimir," where he argues "rural influence on the shop floors was greater than the data in the preceding paragraph imply, for twice as many IIR operatives (39.1 percent) lived in the village as owned land," *Worker Resistance*, 17 and 24.

<sup>16</sup> As summarized by Vladimir Brovkin "Leningrad had a higher than average concentration of skilled labor. In provincial industrial centers unskilled workers were worse off. In Orel textile industry wages were only 24 rubles a month, and in the food-processing industry 34 rubles a month. Women textile

The average living space for working-class families in the RSFSR (Russian Socialist Federative Socialist Republic) excluding Moscow and Leningrad in 1928 was 4.8 square metres; in Moscow it was 4.34, in Leningrad 5.91.<sup>17</sup> Overall, Leningrad workers were not typical Soviet workers. Despite the many challenges workers faced during NEP, Leningrad workers were among the best paid, most skilled, and most “proletarian” in the country.

### Off to the Club and Backed into a Red Corner

Nevertheless, despite the comparatively advantageous “proletarian” working climate, workers’ clubs were deemed necessary to both educate and entertain urban women in acceptable Soviet mores. Clubs organized public lectures, tours, and specialised study circles. Many clubs had reading rooms, libraries, or at the very least, a “Red Corner” to display ideological material. Clubs also conducted amateur drama productions, film nights, family matinees, and sporting activities.<sup>18</sup> All of these activities, as the historian John Hatch argues, were to “construct a ‘proletarian community’” and “break down the barriers of illiteracy, hierarchy, disorientation, gender, and generation.”<sup>19</sup>

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workers in the Vladimir region were paid only 15 rubles a month. In Leningrad they [unskilled] constituted 35 percent of the labor force and their wages were 40 rubles a month...,” *Russia After Lenin: Politics, Culture and Society, 1921-1929* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 181. Comparing all the cotton districts in the mid-1920s, Ward argues “Leningrad [had] the highest levels of remuneration,” *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 162.

<sup>17</sup> Figures as quoted in J. D. Barber and R. W. Davies, “Employment and Industrial Labour,” in *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union 1913-1945*, ed. R. W. Davies, Mark Harrison and S. G. Wheatcroft (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 103.

<sup>18</sup> Preceding activities summarized from Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 100. For the imperial period see Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion*, 328-334. For the Civil War period see Gabriele Grozka, “Proletarian Culture in Practice: Workers’ Clubs, 1917-1921,” in *Essays on Revolutionary Culture and Stalinism*, ed. John W. Strong (Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1990): 29-55. For the 1930s see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “The Shaping of Soviet Workers’ Leisure: Workers’ Clubs and Palaces of Culture in the 1930s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* no.56 (Fall 1999): 78-99.

<sup>19</sup> Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 103.

Petrograd Zhenotdel was interested in its ‘proletarian community’ and devised a comprehensive delegate survey for Central Zhenotdel in Moscow. Included in this 1923 survey were findings collated from 1,683 Petrograd city delegates’ questionnaires (*anketi*), and of this number, 698 delegates (41.4 per cent) participated in club work.<sup>20</sup> Overall, study circles (*kruzhki*) were organized with between fifteen to thirty members instructed by an outside “specialist” and they were the main form of pedagogical activity in clubs. Among politically active women, therefore, this survey does give a statistical breakdown of which circles were popular among three groups of women: working-class women, white-collar worker women and students. Moreover, the questionnaires detail how often the women went on tours or excursions. The women indicated which of the seven study circles they joined and, like women nationally, they often belonged to more than one circle.<sup>21</sup>

Overall, the library circle was the most popular circle among all the women surveyed.<sup>22</sup>

More specifically, working-class women then joined sewing, drama and choir.<sup>23</sup>

Working-class women then opted for literacy circles. At that point there was a precipitous decline of interest in music and sport.<sup>24</sup> Sewing, obviously, was a practical

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<sup>20</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. The women are divided into three categories: working-class women, white-collar worker women and students. The authors do not define their categories. The breadth of the study was impressive because it was sent to delegates in 606 institutions and workplaces.

<sup>21</sup> The seven study circles itemized were: library; literacy; music; choir; drama; sport and sewing, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. Hatch also found many workers joined multiple study circles in factories, see “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 104.

<sup>22</sup> All the students were enrolled in the library circle; white-collar and women workers joined with 149 (87.6 per cent) and 361 (69.1) per cent respectively, RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

<sup>23</sup> There were 72 (13.8 per cent) worker women in sewing, 69 (13.2 per cent) in drama and 64 (12.3 per cent) in choir, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

<sup>24</sup> Working-class women joined the music and sport circles in limited numbers, 18 and 17 respectively out of 522, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. Overall, Bolsheviks eschewed dancehalls and gypsy music; this may account for this circle’s lack of popularity. There was no consensus on what to replace it

skill for women workers and drama's appeal has been documented elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, given efforts to promote literacy, the literacy circle was the third least popular circle with only 7.9 per cent of club members overall.<sup>26</sup> The literature suggests a considerable gap between belonging to a factory organization and actually completing one of its literacy or educational programs. For instance, the questionnaires reveal that only twenty-six of 121 working-class women enrolled in the *Likbez* "school" completed its courses.<sup>27</sup> The questionnaires revealed that all the urban women surveyed were interested in literacy, but they were selective. Overall, library circles offered women two advantages over literacy circles: more control over the reading material and more informality.

White-collar workers sometimes preferred to dress more formally than women workers, but white-collar workers insisted that they wanted "one friendly family."<sup>28</sup> Apparently

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with, see Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004). Nelson argues that the "music circles, especially among the choral groups, were among the clubs' most popular activities. While most choral circles included men and women, the instrumental ensembles were overwhelmingly male," in *Music for the Revolution*, 114. Also see *Soviet Music and Society Under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and Sickle*, ed. Neil Edmunds (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Working-class women joined sewing circles in the following numbers, 72 (13.8 per cent), RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. Almost identical numbers joined choral and drama circles, 64 (12.3 per cent) and 69 (13.2 per cent) respectively, RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. On the appeal of drama in the early Soviet period see especially Elizabeth A. Wood, *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) and Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 100-121.

<sup>26</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. It is possible a low percentage of the women delegates were illiterate. However, according to Hatch, "Adult women were the main constituency of literacy circles in the garment industry," in "Hangouts and Hangovers," 104 and Charles Clark "Literacy and Labour: The Russian Literacy Campaign within the Trade Unions, 1923-27," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no.8 (1992): 1327-1341.

<sup>27</sup> *Likbez* was the Commission to Abolish Illiteracy, for figures see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.127. For a discussion of *Likbez* see ch.4, n.39. Similarly, only 43 of 236 working-class women completed at the party school, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.127. Clark emphasizes how women workers had low completion rates in literacy classes, "Literacy and Labour," 1334-1335.

<sup>28</sup> This is from Gal'perin, Zhenotdel delegate, at a Zhenotdel conference, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, ll.150-151.

because white-collar workers occasionally wore hats, not red kerchiefs, women workers called some white-collar workers “the slur ‘soviet *baryshni* ‘(ladies).”<sup>29</sup> In contrast, sartorial preferences aside, white-collar workers had a different trajectory of popularity in their circles. Again, the most popular circle was the library circle but thereafter, it was the literacy, drama, choral, sewing, music and sport groups.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, women white-collar workers, who generally have been ignored by most NEP scholars, joined library and literacy groups at 87.6 per cent and 17.1 per cent respectively.<sup>31</sup> Scholars have emphasized women’s interest in sewing circles but that has been based on the experience of women workers; only 9.4 per cent of white-collar women were interested in learning sewing skills in a formal setting and even among women workers only 13.8 per cent joined sewing circles.<sup>32</sup> Thus, women’s proclivity towards sewing has perhaps been exaggerated because it was previously based on samples from a few industries, while this questionnaire was distributed to Zhenotdel delegates at 606 workplaces and institutions.<sup>33</sup>

Few student delegates were listed and this was surprising given Bolshevik efforts to recruit youths. Thus, all observations are extremely tentative. Again library was in the

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<sup>29</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13047, ll.150-151.

<sup>30</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. By 1926, there were 36 libraries in Leningrad city with 55,650 readers. Women were forty per cent of the total, see TsGAIPD, f.16, op.13, d.13152, l.8.

<sup>31</sup> In whole numbers, 149 in the library and twenty-nine in the literacy circles, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. Orlovsky, “The Hidden Class,” 220-252 and Chase, *Workers*, 121-129. White-collar workers were discussed in a general sense, but not women white-collar workers directly. Although her emphasis is the 1930s, Amy Randall discusses how by the 1920s women became the majority of salesclerks and were recast as respectable employees mobilizing their “feminine knowledge.” See “Legitimizing Soviet Trade: Gender and the Feminization of the Retail Workforce in the Soviet 1930s.” *Journal of Soviet History* 37, no.4 (Summer 2004): 965-990.

<sup>32</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. It is also possible the women already knew how to sew.

<sup>33</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.126. In contrast, see Hatch’s much higher figures in “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 104.



top spot but tied with choir.<sup>34</sup> Students were heavily enrolled in the literacy circle, much less so in drama and sport and none were in the music or the sewing circles.<sup>35</sup> Students, unlike women workers, perhaps did not feel compelled to improve their sewing skills when they were already engaged in alternative training. Overall, this contrasts with the results of workers' clubs in Moscow, where young people, if not necessarily students, disproportionately joined drama and physical culture circles.<sup>36</sup> The Petrograd students had more opportunity to engage in a sport circle because, on average, they were considerably younger than the other women surveyed.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the students were less likely to be burdened by household and family responsibilities but still preferred not to engage in sports. Sport was uniformly the least popular circle and, simply put, almost all the urban women preferred other activities.<sup>38</sup> In general the promotion of sport was in its infancy, the first Physical Cultural Day was held in Moscow in 1923.<sup>39</sup> There was also some evidence women's roles were proscribed by societal expectations. According to historian Robert Edelman, "Women...were banned from soccer [because] violence became common on the field and in the stands."<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the 1920s

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<sup>34</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

<sup>35</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

<sup>36</sup> Hatch argues, "physical culture circles consisted mainly of young people; in performing-art circles, the proportion of *molodezh* ranged from 60 to 95 percent" in "Hangouts and Hangovers," 104.

<sup>37</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. I cross-referenced the average age of the various groups from another section in the questionnaire. For example, 88.33 per cent of the students were between the ages of 18-23, while only 19.7 per cent of white-collar women and 18 per cent of worker women were between 18 and 23, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.126. See illustration of young women in the circle, "Spartak," at Krasnyi Tkach factory and the emphasis on young people in sports clubs, Zhentsova, "Pod zhamenem 'Spartaka,'" *Rabotnitsa* no.9 (1923): 20.

<sup>38</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. Robert Edelman argues generally that for the entire Soviet era "Women's sports, actively supported by the government as political window dressing, had little public following among women or men," see *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ix.

<sup>39</sup> Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 41

<sup>40</sup> This occurred at Krasnaia Presnia stadium in Moscow, see Robert Edelman, "A Small Way of Saying 'No': Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer and the Communist Party, 1900-1945," *American Historical Review* 107 (December 2002): 1451. It is unknown if this ban was widespread.

Zhenotdel promoted physical culture as a healthy leisure activity, but accelerated these campaigns during the First Five-Year Plan.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, Zhenotdel delegates preferred to go on tours to a local museum or site of interest in their leisure time. As historian Francine Hirsch explains, a typical excursion for factory workers was to Leningrad's Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology where they would have an "evening of tours, movies, performances, and discussions."<sup>42</sup> More specifically, the Zhenotdel delegates were asked to quantify their participation in tours in the survey in the following manner: one tour, two tours, three to five tours, and five or more tours.<sup>43</sup> Across all categories of urban delegates, they responded that they were most likely during their stint as delegates to have participated in from between three and five tours.<sup>44</sup> In the Petrograd Zhenotdel, almost half (755) the delegates went on tours and over forty per cent of them repeated the activity somewhere between three and five times.<sup>45</sup> Both the numbers involved and the high repetition challenges the suggestion that tours were unpopular: that "club members are not interested in excursions to

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<sup>41</sup> A typical protocol in the Collegium meetings during the First Five-Year Plan conflated sports and military matters, see "O voenno-sportivnom smotre," TsGAIPD SPb, (21 March, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.10. A classic study on Soviet sport is: James Riordan, *Sport in Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and U.S.S.R.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Also see Mike O'Mahony, *Sport in the U.S.S.R.: Physical Culture – Visual Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006) and Edelman, "A Small Way of Saying "No": 1441-1474, esp. 1451, 1462, 1464 and 1465. For a fascinating look at how beauty gradually became conflated with physical culture, see Mary Lynn Stewart, *For Health and Beauty: Physical Culture for Frenchwomen, 1880s-1930s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Francine Hirsch, "Getting to Know "The Peoples of the USSR": Ethnographic Exhibits as Soviet Virtual Tourism, 1923-1934," *Slavic Review* 62, no.4 (Winter 2003): 695.

<sup>43</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

<sup>44</sup> For example, with four possible choices, 281 workers (45.1 per cent) and 51 (36.7 per cent) white-collar workers participated from between three and five tours, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. A delegate's term was usually three to six months.

museums.”<sup>46</sup> In balance, almost half of Petrograd Zhenotdel delegates were participating in factory clubs and tours.

Zhenotdel delegate club activism did not translate to the general female factory workforce. Women workers were not overwhelmingly drawn to club work. In balance, my archival Zhenotdel reports in Leningrad support Hatch’s findings on women workers’ participation in Moscow clubs in the mid 1920s.<sup>47</sup> According to an official 1925 Zhenotdel report, encompassing both Leningrad city and province, women workers comprised 42.6 per cent of club members.<sup>48</sup> This figure probably exaggerates female club membership; using figures from the enterprise level is likely more accurate.

At the Skorokhod shoe factory in 1925, the Zhenotdel organizer’s conclusions singled out the “extremely low percentage of women workers’ participation in club work.”<sup>49</sup> Here, out of a total factory-wide club membership of 358 male and female workers, only eighty (22.3 per cent) were women and 278 men (77.7 per cent); more surprisingly, of the 2,463 women who worked at Skorokhod therefore only 3.2 per cent of females, versus 14.2 per

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<sup>46</sup> As quoted in Hatch from an observer, see “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 106. Hatch also argues, based on the metalworkers’ union that “the average number of excursion participants (33), however was little more than the average for circles,” in “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 106. This contrasts with my findings in 1923 and the late 1920s.

<sup>47</sup> Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 97-117. His article is based on two workers’ clubs at the Metalworking factory Sickle and Hammer and the textile combine Trekhgornaia. There were 215 clubs in Moscow city in 1925 and Leningrad had 121 clubs and palaces of culture, see Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 98n.6.

<sup>48</sup> The document is titled “Tsifri po Leningrady i Gubernii” and claims there were 65,625 club members of which 42.6 per cent were women in 1925/26, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13300, l.30. For Moscow, Hatch argues that “a third were women, roughly corresponding to overall industrial employment patterns,” in “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 100.

<sup>49</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.162. See B. Z. “U rabotnits na Skorokhode,” *Rabotnitsa* no.9, (1923): 5.

cent of males, joined a club.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, at the Sovietskaia Zvezda textile factory, although women, (unlike at Skorokhod) predominated in the workforce, they only comprised 25 per cent of club membership; and in total, of 1,451 women only sixty-seven women, or 4.6 per cent of them, (versus 28.1 per cent of males) joined a club.<sup>51</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore the Zhenotdel organizer complained, that the “regular attendance of women workers was rare, no more than twenty to thirty.”<sup>52</sup> The women workers themselves were interested in “legal advice” but “lectures were bad” and “question and answer evenings” never materialised.<sup>53</sup> Women workers at Lor, the privately-owned Leningrad factory, were interested in “health enlightenment,” tours and lectures; nevertheless there was one important caveat, they refused “to attend anti-religious lectures!”<sup>54</sup> Even in a comprehensive survey of over 1,600 politically active Petrograd Zhenotdel delegates, over forty per cent admitted to being religious.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Skorokhod had 2,525 male workers so they joined clubs at a rate of 14.2 per cent, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.164.

<sup>51</sup> In total there were 266 club members. In 1925, at Sovietskaia Zvezda there were 709 male workers, so this meant on average 28.1 per cent joined a club – six times more likely than women. TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.167.

<sup>52</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.167. At the private factory of Lor in Leningrad workers attended at a rate of 15-20 women to the clubs, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.145.

<sup>53</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.167.

<sup>54</sup> Between 10-14 per cent of the overall female labour force attended clubs, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.145. Elsewhere, many Zhenotdel officials lamented in these reports that women workers did not attend the clubs’ anti-religion lectures, see Uritskii factory, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.132 and Skorokhod factory, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.163. Similarly, Hatch reports that anti-religion lectures at Moscow’s Sickle and Hammer factory had the “smallest audiences” see “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 106. Women workers countered, for example, at Leningrad’s Krasnyi Putilovets, ‘Why are the churches being closed?’ see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.253. As late as 12 January 1928, an AgitProp (APO) representative, Nikitin, despaired that “almost nothing is happening with anti-religious work,” TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.8, l.7.

<sup>55</sup> In 1923, a total of 1,683 Petrograd city delegates answered the following question, “Are you a Believer?” see below, RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, 418, l.128.

	<u>Believer</u>		<u>Non-Believer</u>
Worker Women,	591	(43.5 per cent)	767
White-Collar	153	(47.9 per cent)	166
Student			6

Zhenotdel and Soviet officials displayed pride in their nationality policy, which was, in their opinion, quite distinct from those grounded in Western imperialism.<sup>56</sup> A city-wide report in 1927 on minority women (Finns, Estonians, Poles, and Tatars) participating in their workers' clubs concluded that older women, including working mothers, would "gladly attend clubs, if the club's work took into consideration their [women] interests."<sup>57</sup> The report suggested that the women's interests were poorly served in many areas. The clubs' libraries had no literature in their languages on work among women.<sup>58</sup> They complained that Zhenotdel often did not co-ordinate efforts with the assigned club member: that several clubs had only a few occasions for attracting older worker women and workers' wives.<sup>59</sup> Their establishments were almost exclusively for young girls, and there was apparently a misunderstanding on the significance of "corners" for worker women.<sup>60</sup>

During the 1920s, Red or Lenin Corners (rooms or parts of rooms displaying his books and writings) became a ubiquitous feature in Soviet institutions. In what Nina Tumarkin calls "local shrines," the clubroom's Red Corner would usually have a large portrait of Lenin, surrounded by red bunting, and under it a table on which Communist Party

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<sup>56</sup> Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category *Nationality* in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses," *Slavic Review* 56, no.2 (Summer 1997): 251-278, Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) and Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no.2 (Summer 1994): 414-452.

<sup>57</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.36. This echoes the findings in Moscow's clubs where there was a need for "public lectures relevant to the everyday concerns of working women....," See Hatch "Hangouts and Hangovers," 100.

<sup>58</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.36.

<sup>59</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.36.

<sup>60</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.36. Regrettably, there are no figures given for attendance in clubs broken down by nationality and interestingly, the 1923 survey of over 1,300 delegates does not request nationality, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128. Similarly, a Zhenotdel report urged "serious attention on work among national minority women in their native language" see TsGAIPD SPb, (19 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.7. The precise problem with the "Red Corner" was not clarified.

literature was displayed.<sup>61</sup> Red Corners represented not only a fusion of Bolshevik ritual and imperial icon tradition, but they served a pedagogical and ideological function to promote literacy and political literacy.<sup>62</sup> Zhenotdel's specific, and hitherto largely unknown contribution to this Bolshevik institution was its attempt in the 1920s to open specialized women worker Red Corners in factory clubs.

During the NEP, Red Corners in clubs proved to be one of the most challenging areas for Zhenotdel organizers. According to archival reports, many women workers either proved indifferent, lacked access, or experienced inefficiently managed Red Corners. Official explanations follow a familiar, deterministic pattern. In Shlisselburg, east of Leningrad on Lake Ladoga the woman organizer was maligned as “not from the bench” and “delegates worked poorly,” but the importance of “red corners” was highlighted because its absence impeded “work with women.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In Tumarkin's analysis the “central shrine” was Lenin's mausoleum on Red Square, and together [the local and central shrines] contributed to “this formalized veneration of Lenin remained a pervasive part of Soviet culture until the end of the 1920s, when the emerging cult of Stalin began slowly to eclipse it” in “Political Ritual and the Cult of Lenin,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 5, no.2 (May 1983): 204. The word “Red Corner” can be seen in the archival material and secondary literature in a variety of forms such as “Red Corner,” “Red corner,” “red corner,” and “corner.” For consistency, I will use “Red Corner” unless another form is required in a direct quotation.

<sup>62</sup> It should be emphasized that the Red Corner was not an entirely “new” phenomenon. Victoria Bonnell emphasizes icons were central to Russian culture and most Russians had an area in their home devoted to the display of icons and how this evolved into the “Lenin” or “Red” corner, see *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 147-148. Also see Richard Stites, “Bolshevik Ritual Building in the 1920s,” in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, 299.

<sup>63</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (24 June, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.80. Similarly, also in Shlisselburg, worker's wives also had no opportunity but for very different reasons; they were barred from club work and Red Corners to Petra Alekseev factory by the *fabkom* and in a piquant phrase, work was conducted “outside factory walls,” see TsGAIPD SPb, (24 June, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.83. In a Shlisselburg brick factory of seventy women, technically it had a club and a Red Corner for women, but there was no women's organizer, nor party cell for women; moreover one questions the vitality of the Red Corner because “club work has still not begun.” TsGAIPD SPb, (24 June, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.84. In short, Red Corners were very weak in Shlisselburg.

On 24 March 1927 a Provincial Collegium meeting discussed a Leningrad city-wide Zhenotdel report on specialized Red Corners for women workers.<sup>64</sup> Surprisingly, the report chronicled that in Leningrad city “in the majority of enterprises [Red] corners have been closed....”<sup>65</sup> Two key factors in the closures identified “weak work” and a “lack of space.”<sup>66</sup> Red Corners for women workers were usually in common or general clubrooms where they could display some portraits or posters but “only in rare cases did they have instructional material.”<sup>67</sup> For instance, Leningrad’s Pipe works (Trubochnii zavod) was singled out for rebuke because its room, which was also used for delegates’ meetings, was rarely “beautified” with portraits and posters.<sup>68</sup> Presumably, therefore, women workers did not find the physical environment appealing. In contrast, Vyborg women workers were not merely trying to carve out some aesthetically appealingly physical space; they were barely maintaining a separate gendered foothold. This district had only two women worker rooms and “no leadership work on corners.”<sup>69</sup> Their existence was precarious. Even submitting the topic of Red Corners for women workers

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<sup>64</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61.

<sup>65</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61.

<sup>66</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61.

<sup>67</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61. In 1925 questionnaires distributed to 1,192 Zhenotdel delegates, they requested in *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*'s supplements “portraits of Lenin [Il'ich]” and 779 delegates wanted more illustrations in the journal, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, 13, op.13122, l.1.

<sup>68</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61. According to S. A. Smith, *Trubochnii* was one of “31 state-owned or state controlled enterprises in the city ... which provided a large part of the cartridges, revolvers, machine guns and other types of ordnance required by the army and navy. The enterprises were run by the Artillery Administration, the largest of which were the Pipe works (trubochnyi zavod) with a workforce of 18,942 in 1917... in *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983), 7-8. For a discussion of this factory in the imperial era see Smith, “Workers and Supervisors,” 131-177. Stites contends club décor was “uniformly artless, routinized and often inappropriate,” in “Bolshevik Ritual Building,” 299.

<sup>69</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61.

to the district Club Commission “for study,” risked the possibility that with so many problems the Red Corners would simply be “annulled.”<sup>70</sup>

The responsibility for the virtual collapse of specialized Red Corners for Leningrad factory worker women was shared by many organizations. However, curiously, Club Factory Boards and organizers were accused of showing “insufficient attention,” while Zhenotdel and the Trade Union Cultural Department were found lacking in “leadership.”<sup>71</sup> Club Factory Boards admittedly were not generally in control of budgetary matters;<sup>72</sup> it is nonetheless surprising that they were not also reprimanded for showing lack of “leadership.” Chronic neglect by the authorities at multiple levels no doubt contributed to the unpopularity of Red Corners.

Nevertheless, tentative conclusions suggest that worker and peasant women were both largely indifferent to Red Corners.<sup>73</sup> Naturally, Red Corners were designed partly to promote ideological material, but some evidence suggests that urban women simply preferred not to read political material. In a large-scale city survey of over 1,300

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<sup>70</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61. The issue was to be submitted for study before the district Club Commission. Possibly even the very idea of raising the issue, especially when there were many problems with Red Corners for women workers, risked some people opting just to dissolve them.

<sup>71</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.61.

<sup>72</sup> As Hatch explains of workers’ clubs, “Three-fourths were under the immediate authority of the relevant factory committee...” and “After 1924, elected administrators provided the day-to-day direction of workers’ club, however branch – and interunion cultural departments controlled budgetary expenditures,” in “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 98-99.

<sup>73</sup> As discussed in chapter four, the Vengisarovsk township had three reading rooms and ten red corners to facilitate literacy, and of these, five were exclusively for women and “all had collapsed.” TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.213. For more details, refer back to chapter four, section [Trotsky county](#). Similarly, in the male-outmigration Dolozhsk township there were no “Red Corners” for peasant women, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.97.



Zhenotdel delegates, they were asked, “What type of book interests you?”<sup>74</sup> Zhenotdel delegates responded overwhelmingly that fiction was their favourite genre followed by political, then professional material.<sup>75</sup> In 1925, Zhenotdel delegates again in questionnaires told the journal *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* that it needed to “strengthen the political department.”<sup>76</sup> Significantly, of the more than a thousand women at this conference, less than ten percent of women surveyed bothered to answer the question on the political department.<sup>77</sup> The journal’s political department, like many Red Corners, sometimes conveyed its message through poems and worker memoirs and, simply put, the delegates indicated that they were not interested whatsoever in this type of literature.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless if delegates were interested in political instructional material, the 1927 report catalogued an extremely limited supply. In balance, by 1927 Red Corners had failed to capture the attention of women workers.

Predictably, the activities of daily life, shaped the attention of women workers and their subsequent participation in clubs. More specifically, access to quality day care facilities was problematic. A comprehensive report conducted throughout Leningrad city detailed a wide range of problems. The day care facilities were bereft of an overall plan and leadership. In what the author described as “*kustar* methods”: personnel lacked

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<sup>74</sup> In total 1,380 Petrograd Zhenotdel city delegates answered this question, see RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.127.

<sup>75</sup> Among worker women 618 (56.7 per cent) and 198 (59.1 per cent) white-collar women preferred fiction, then 390 (35.8 per cent) worker women picked political books and 121 (36 per cent) of white-collar women picked political books RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.127.

<sup>76</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, 13, op.13122, l.1. In total, 1,192 questionnaires were handed out at the 1925, 4<sup>th</sup> Zhenotdel Provincial Leningrad Conference.

<sup>77</sup> In total, 1,192 questionnaires were handed out at the 1925 4<sup>th</sup> Zhenotdel Provincial Leningrad Conference. Nevertheless, only 104 women responded that the political department needed to be strengthened by including “more often and more teachings of Lenin, political literacy and how to struggle against illiteracy,” see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, 13, op.13122, l.1.

<sup>78</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13122, l.1.

experience and qualifications while the facilities had limited capacity and high costs.<sup>79</sup> For instance, during NEP, cost effectiveness was a challenge because an average worker's salary could not realistically absorb the cost per child of factory day care of 31 rubles and 85 kopecks per month.<sup>80</sup> In Leningrad, as in Moscow, "Lack of child care facilities was the most frequently cited obstacle..." to adult women's participation in clubs and their services.<sup>81</sup> In early 1927, Zhenotdel leaders noted that, without additional funding, Leningrad's Trubochnii works would be closing its day cares for workers' children.<sup>82</sup> At the Khalturin textile mill fewer than twenty percent of women participated in clubs. For instance, the day care closed at 5 p.m. and meetings went to 6 p.m. and this particularly impeded the activity of adult women workers.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast to the Khalturin textile mill, almost half (46.2 per cent) of all women workers participated in clubs at the Uritskii tobacco factory on Vasil'evskii Ostrov.<sup>84</sup> It is problematic interpreting the relatively robust club participation rates because women

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<sup>79</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.9-11.

<sup>80</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13293, ll.9-11. According to figures cited by Goldman, "In 1926, 21 percent of male workers throughout the country were paid less than forty rubles a month, compared to fully 65 percent of the women," *Women at the Gates*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Hatch, "Hangouts and Hangovers," 115. His observation was based on women in the garment industry. However, earlier statistics highlight that "Young women were much more likely to be club members than adult women..." in "Hangouts and Hangovers," 100. In Leningrad, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.36. See Clark's questionnaires and how worker women dropped out of literacy classes due to child care issues, "Literacy and Labour," 1327-1341; esp. 1334-1335 and Schrand, "The Five-Year Plan," 1465.

<sup>82</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (February 19, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13301, l.23. Given the timing of this decree, it is very likely linked to the decrees on rationalization. Moreover, a decision was postponed on day care, and a subsequent meeting only revealed that the costs for running a day care in the 1927-28 budget year would be 20,000 rubles, see TsGAIPD SPb, (24 September, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13301, l.68.

<sup>83</sup> There were 2,875 women in the workforce and 503 attended clubs, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.160. For complaints about the day care, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.161. At Leningrad's Svetlana factory, day care existed, but was "very far from the factory" and impeded organizational efforts, see TsGAIPD SPb, (July 15, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.124.

<sup>84</sup> Uritskii had 2,205 women workers and this figure comes from collating four clubs, ranging from 8.1 per cent to 81.5 per cent membership, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.135. Goldman argues that "Women working in textiles and tobacco had somewhat greater chances for advancement..." *Women at the Gates*, 15.

workers joined disproportionately either “Down with Illiteracy” or the “Mutual Aid Association.”<sup>85</sup> Moreover, when pressed about what interested them, Uritskii factory women responded “co-ops” but only 8.1 per cent of them managed to join a circle on co-ops, the lowest participation figure for any club at this factory.<sup>86</sup> Did the women workers simply feel compelled to “speak Bolshevik” and join in on the rhetoric that they should be interested in co-ops? As a rule, neither the Mutual Aid Association nor co-ops were particularly popular with women; Zhenotdel was continually berating women to join these organizations in the 1920s.<sup>87</sup> The Mutual Aid Association’s membership was possibly inflated and was an example of “the desire of local unions to pad membership statistics and increase income generated from membership dues.”<sup>88</sup> Club membership does not, of course, reflect either voluntary membership or “active” participation in its activities.

At the Krasnaia Znamia (Red Banner knitwear) mill, like at the Uritskii tobacco factory, just under half of the women workers joined a club (46.9 per cent).<sup>89</sup> Krasnaia Znamia

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<sup>85</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.135. Hatch concurs with adult women in literacy classes, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 104.

<sup>86</sup> One question on the Zhenotdel report asked: ‘Which questions interest women workers and delegates?’ Women workers and delegates were “most interested in local, [questions] *byt’*- labour exchange, co-operatives, children’s homes, and schools.” TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, 135. There were 178 co-op members, 8.1 per cent of the total female factory force, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.135.

<sup>87</sup> In a questionnaire asked of politically active women in a Zhenotdel conference, only 27 of 949 responded that they worked in co-ops, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13048, l.200. For the unpopularity of co-ops, see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 May, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.29; TsGAIPD SPb, (30 July, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.51; TsGAIPD SPb, (24 March, 1927), f.16, op.13, 13246, l.53. For evidence on the unpopularity of Mutual Aid Associations, at Sovietskaia Zvezda, 3 women joined its committee; it was the lowest number of all the committees, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.166. From over two thousand women and nearly three thousand women respectively at Skorokhod and Khalturin, only 10 and 11 women joined the Mutual Aid Association committee, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, ll.164 and l.159.

<sup>88</sup> Hatch, “Hangouts and Hangovers,” 101.

<sup>89</sup> At the Krasnaia Znamia factory of 1,823 women, 856 women joined clubs, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.148. Out of a total workforce of 2,408, there were 1,823 women and 585 men, see

was a showcase mill, re-designed by Erich Mendelsohn in the twenties, which made, for example, the Soviet navy's striped jerseys. Women predominated in this labour force; they also had health and legal advice lectures and nearly seventy per cent of women workers went on tours.<sup>90</sup> In balance, the Krasnaia Znamia mill boasted, according to the archival report, "good work conditions" because it had a "club, children's room, women worker's Red Corner, library, reading corner, and day care facilities."<sup>91</sup> Most women workers probably wanted these services. Textile workers at Krasnaia Znamia were able to negotiate a relatively positive work experience because they had access to a broad range of social and cultural activities in their clubs.

#### Factory Reports in Leningrad County and Leningrad

The State Music Publishing House's "Bricks" (*Kirpichiki*) was a popular cultural sensation because nearly a million copies of its sheet music were printed.<sup>92</sup> It was one of only five songs in the 1920s which sold more than 10,000 copies of sheet music and, apparently was "widely sung," the song's message and popularity is, therefore,

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TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.151. See Constructivists Liubov' Popova and Varva Stepanova at Moscow's First State Cotton-Printing Factory discussed in Christina Kiaer's "The Russian Constructivist Flapper Dress," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no.1 (Autumn 2001): 185-243.

<sup>90</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.150. See Frances L. Bernstein on how sexual enlightenment was constructed, "Envisioning Health in Revolutionary Russia: The Politics of Gender in Sexual Enlightenment Posters of the 1920s," *The Russian Review* 57 (April 1998): 191-217. Women workers complained there were no tours at the Karl Marx Railway Club in Moskovsko Narvskii district TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.253 and Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 251.

<sup>91</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.152. These group tours "facilitated the important task of imparting the proper interpretation of sights seen, whether in museums or on the road," see Diane Koenker, "Travel to Work, Travel to Play: on Russian Tourism, Travel and Leisure," *Slavic Review* 62, no.4 (Winter 2003): 660. In Petergof district the PEPO works had a Mat Mlad (materinstva i mladenshestva) club and gave free medical care to unemployed mothers; in contrast, in the same district, at the factory, Til'mansa, the club struggled with an "inappropriate element" and "drunkenness" see TsGAIPD SPb, (1922), f.16, op.13, d.12791, l.30.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Rothstein, "The Quiet Rehabilitation of the Brick Factory: Early Soviet Popular Music and Its Critics," *Slavic Review* 39, no.3 (September 1980): 382. The song was also called "Brick Factory Song" (*Pesnia o kirpichnom zavode*).

particularly useful to historians.<sup>93</sup> As Robert Rothstein explains the text is essentially a romantic adventure story: a fifteen year-old working-class girl begins work at a brick factory; she courts Sen'ka at night but unemployment hits the factory and they, plus 270 other workers, are laid off.<sup>94</sup> During world war one looting destroys the factory, but the Revolution inspires the young woman and Sen'ka to get the factory going again.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, despite a narrative that highlighted her activism and working-class credentials, Rothstein does not mention that it was only Sen'ka who becomes "Comrade Sen'ka," not to mention that he becomes the "director" of the factory. According to Katerina Clark, in the 1920s, there existed "dominant political tropes" for fictional "'men of action' [to] perform tasks more quickly than seems at all feasible according to the dictates of science."<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, although the song concludes by reassuring the audience that in true fairy-tale like fashion the couple live happily ever after, unlike Cinderella, the female brick worker is left unnamed and, quite literally, she cannot go to the Party!

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<sup>93</sup> Robert Rothstein, "Popular Song in the NEP era," in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, 256-257.

<sup>94</sup> Rothstein, "The Quiet Rehabilitation," 382. The text is written by the prolific Pavel German whom would latter be accused of *tsyganshchina!* For a discussion of the many debates in music in the 1920s including a public preference for "gypsy music," see Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution*.

<sup>95</sup> Rothstein, "The Quiet Rehabilitation," 382. In an abridged form Sen'ka parallels the exploits of Gleb Chumalov in Gladkov's 1925 novel *Cement*. As Clark explains, "*Cement* tells of how a cement factory that fell into disrepair during the Civil War is restored and brought back into production by a group of local enthusiasts led by the larger-than-life Gleb Chumalov," in *Petersburg*, 198. Curiously, Clark does not mention Dasha Chumalova, the heroine and Zhenotdel leader whose quest for impartiality compel her to keep her daughter, Niura, in a children's home where she will eventually starve to death.

<sup>96</sup> Clark, *Petersburg*, 198. See preceding footnote. Significantly, although the Party defined these tropes they were also fused with a "popular taste for adventure romance," see Clark, *Petersburg*, 198. As Clark elegantly elaborates, blending examples of "red Pinkertons," *Mess-Mend, or a Yankee in Petrograd*, and Mayakovsky's new epic poem *150,000,000* there was a shift from "collective to individual heroes," see *Petersburg*, 175. Significantly, most of these heroes were male.

In July 1926, Zhenotdel Party organizer, Drozdova, conducted a field report of an actual Kirpichnii (Brick Works) Factory in Leningrad county.<sup>97</sup> How did Zhenotdel fare when organizing these women workers? Drozdova's report questioned their proletarian credentials because the "majority" were not only seasonal workers, but described as "peasant *bedniaki* and *batrachki*."<sup>98</sup> Most of the 395 women were ethnically Russian, and also young, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four,<sup>99</sup> and therefore, according to Soviet dictates, not cadre workers.

Are peasant women who spend half the year working in a factory, workers? At what point does their rural identity shift? As Chris Ward explained in his study of cotton workers during NEP, the pattern is "not a discontinuity between worker and peasant but a continuum between mill and village, and one having two axes."<sup>100</sup> What is clear is that the urban Zhenotdel leader, Drozdova, who was reporting on these women considered them if not fully peasant, certainly a lower category of worker, a seasonal worker. And, in turn, it is through the prism of this official source, that the historian must continually strive to portray not only her story accurately, but to avoid inadvertently being a

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<sup>97</sup> This report was conducted from 1 May, 1926 to 13 July, 1926 and presented to the Collegium of the Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel on 15 July, 1926, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.96. For discussions of other seasonal workers, see TsGAIPD SPb, (19 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.7; TsGAIPD SPb, (7 April, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.17.

<sup>98</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.96. The female workforce was therefore predominantly poor and landless peasant women; the report did not give an exact numerical breakdown of each group. Farnsworth argues that, "Seasonal workers were in no position to make demands, especially women who, after a winter of unemployment, came from a long distance to find jobs, food, and shelter. Anxiety that they might have to travel further to find work impelled *batrachkas* to accept any work conditions," in "The Rural *Batrachka*," 70.

<sup>99</sup> TsGAIPD SPb (15 July, 1926) f.16, op.13, d.13151, ll.96-97. Likewise, Farnsworth found in the "Moscow area, the majority of *batrachkas* were young women, between ages 18 and 25," see "The Rural *Batrachka*," 68. There were also 1,416 male workers and white-collar workers at this factory - both groups were listed together.

<sup>100</sup> Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 33. Similarly, Hoffman argues, that a migrant's self identity was described as "'at the factory I call myself a worker, but in the village - at the village assembly - I call myself a peasant,'" in *Peasant Metropolis*, 215.

mouthpiece for the regime. In fact, it is difficult to select the appropriate language to describe these women: are they “seasonal workers,” “workers,” “peasants,” or “peasant-workers”?<sup>101</sup>

The seasonal women workers experienced challenging conditions of daily life (*byt'*) which impeded Zhenotdel's organizational efforts. They did not have the support and the responsibilities of the home environment; they lived in barracks and bought food at the co-op store at high prices (bread for 5 kopecks and eggs for 50 kopecks).<sup>102</sup> The rhythms of the work itself had a deleterious effect on organizing because the rabkom (Worker's Committee) met, for example, on 16 April, when there were still few seasonal workers around and the report noted that in this main committee there was only one woman worker, a white-collar worker.<sup>103</sup> All manner of organizations failed to convene because of the alleged “weakness” of these “worker-peasant” women – cultural committees did not meet whatsoever, the MOPR (International Aid Society of Revolutionary Fighters) did not have any questionnaires on its members, the co-ops were deemed unsatisfactory, and there was a dearth of lectures and Red Corners.<sup>104</sup> It would, of course, be difficult to

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<sup>101</sup> Defining the status of seasonal migrant workers was arduous because, as quoted in Danilov, occupations were considered “‘seasonal’ if they were permanent in character and were repeated every year’, in which case the occupation in question was registered ‘either as the main or as the subsidiary occupation, depending on whether it provided the main means of livelihood’.” *Rural Russia*, 314n.59.

<sup>102</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.97. For a sense of the worker's budget including food, clothing, and firewood during the FFYP see Rossman, *Worker Resistance*, 166. Lev Kopelev describes how during NEP the “private stores and shops [were] stocked far more abundantly and decorated more colourfully than the drab Central Workers Co-ops,” *The Education of a True Believer*, Trans. Gary Kern (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), 166.

<sup>103</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.100. There was no factory committee, only a “worker's committee.” According to Murphy at Moscow's Hammer and Sickle the “factory committee was the main union organ within the factory, meeting with management on a regular basis and brandishing authority in defense of worker rights,” in *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 92.

<sup>104</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, ll.103-5. Hiroaki Kuromiya discussed how “To some extent, high absenteeism and violent entertainment were attributable to the nature of mining labour itself...However, the contemporary discussion almost invariably blamed colliers' peasant background.” In

foster attachment to one co-op institution, the store, when prices were so high. Similarly, it would also be challenging to continue the literacy work of the Red Corner at home when home was presumably a noisy barrack.<sup>105</sup> Peculiarly, Drozdova's report contends that the seasonal workers manifested a "good attitude to zhenotdel work."<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, more in keeping with the balance of the report, she concludes that "all organizations were still weak and women's participation in them was basically unnoticeable [and] there is an absence of zhenotdel work."<sup>107</sup> This "absence of zhenotdel work" could also be explained by the workplace culture itself— wherever men numerically dominated, women participated proportionately in far fewer organizations, committees, clubs, boards and so on.<sup>108</sup>

Organizing women was more successful when women were working in factories where they were numerically superior to men. Zhenotdel, however, was in a peculiar predicament. As many scholars have observed, male cadre workers were the ultimate paragon in the Soviet hierarchy,<sup>109</sup> yet the Zhenotdel experience in the factory illustrated that women thrived, organizationally speaking, not with more male cadre workers, but

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"The Commander and the Rank and File: Managing the Soviet Coal-Mining Industry, 1928-33," in *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization*, ed. William G. Rosenberg and Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993): 148.

<sup>105</sup> See Kotkin's discussion of barrack life and how poverty, overcrowding, and noise contributed to an erosion of the so-called "smithy of proletarian culture" in *Magnetic Mountain*, 180-182.

<sup>106</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.103.

<sup>107</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.105.

<sup>108</sup> In the Kirpircnii (Brickworks) factory there were 395 women to 1,416 men, TsGAIPD SPb, (15 July, 1926) f.16, op.13, d.13151, ll.96-97.

<sup>109</sup> As Kotkin explains, "It was not uncommon for workers to trade boasts about who started work at the youngest age: fifteen, twelve, and so on. Extra value was attached to that initial experience if it had been gained in industry, especially in one of the older and well-known industrial enterprises, such as Putilov (renamed Kirov) in Leningrad or Gujon (renamed Serp i molot) in Moscow. The ultimate boast was when one could trace one's lineage back to a family of workers: father, grandfather, greatgrandfather." *Magnetic Mountain*, 216. Kotkin's selection of the words father, grandfather, greatgrandfather is not accidental, as opposed to mother, grandmother, greatgrandmother. Also see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 6-9; *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization*, xiii; and Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 27.



when surrounded with more women workers. This phenomenon can most easily be verified in Leningrad city. In 1926, for instance, a Zhenotdel report on Krasnyi Tkach in Volodarskii district, Elektrik in Petrogradskii district and Avdeeva in Vyborg were all lamenting the insignificant percentage of women workers participating in party and leadership work, and how the percentage of women joining the party had dropped and that it was “in danger of going lower.”<sup>110</sup> The report also complained that the percentage was especially weak among women workers in administrative work “even those from factories where female labour predominated.”<sup>111</sup> The insertion of the word “even” suggests that this was a surprising situation.

When Zhenotdel organizers assessed how women workers were integrating into broader factory life – participating in meetings, clubs, the Party, the Soviet or a co-op – most findings suggest that working in a predominantly female-based factory improved integration. Zhenotdel organizers’ reports covered dozens of Leningrad factories in the 1920s and tens of thousands of women workers. More specifically, the organizer usually gave a final sweeping assessment of Zhenotdel work in a particular factory as either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” Many of these reports also listed the number of women and men working in these factories.<sup>112</sup> Fascinatingly, these reports chronicle that the only factories that received an “unsatisfactory” rating were the ones where women were numerically inferior to men. In 1925 neither the Zhenotdel organizers nor leaders,

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<sup>110</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 November, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13152, 1.75. Krasnyi Tkach had 1,285 women workers in 1925 see figures cited under headline “Volodarki,” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.12 (1925): 46.

<sup>111</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 November, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13152, 1.75.

<sup>112</sup> If the report did not list the number of women and men working in the factory, then figures in *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* were employed.

took the findings in individual factory reports and concluded generally that women thrived organizationally with more women.

For example, in the Blokhina Trampark in Petrogradskii district women workers were marginally outnumbered by men, still received an “unsatisfactory” assessment and were poorly integrated into almost every facet of factory life.<sup>113</sup> The women attended fewer meetings than their male counterparts, only one or two belonged to most committees, and women were twice as likely not to join the Communist party than men who were twice as likely to join the Party.<sup>114</sup> For instance, in a factory of 734 women only seven women joined the Party during the 1925 second Lenin Levy (proletarianization of the Party), and overall, even communist women at the Trampark were described as “extremely passive and do not provide any [organizational] help whatsoever. The Zhenotdel organizer is [also] guilty of not forwarding questions to meetings of local organizers....”<sup>115</sup> In

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<sup>113</sup> In a factory of 1,484 people there were 734 women and 750 men, the report was conducted at the factory on the 15 July, 1925 and was submitted to the Collegium on the 29 July, 1925, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925) f.16, op.13, d.13036, ll.129-133.

<sup>114</sup> There were 247 Communist Party members and candidates in total; women comprised seventy-four of all members (just shy of 30 per cent) in a factory where they nearly comprised fifty percent of the labour force, TsGAIPD SPb, (29 July, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.129. In a plethora of twenty committees, clubs and organizations, women simply did not join or joined in minimal numbers, see a sampling: co-ops: two women; Day Care: three women; Industrial Meetings: two women; Boards of Clubs; two women; Labour Exchange: two women; Cultural Commission: two women: MOPR; one woman; Liquidating Illiteracy: one woman. Only the housing committee had more than three women – it had eight women, see TsGAIPD SPb, (29 July, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.133. The above supports Koenker’s contention of “Women’s gravitation to organizations devoted to daily life indicates the influence of their domestic burden, but it provided them as well with a comfortable separate space in the workplace away from the hostility of men,” in “Men against Women,” 1451.

<sup>115</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 July, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.130. To put this into perspective, in Leningrad’s small private factory of Lor where women predominated (seventy three women out of 139 workers), during its second Lenin Levy seven women workers also joined the Communist party, see the Collegium meeting of 19 August, 1925, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.144. As John Hatch explains the “1924, 1925, and 1927 recruitment drives [Lenin Levies] were aimed primarily at the bolshevization of the cohort of relatively young, socially active, skilled urban workers” in “The “Lenin Levy” and the Social Origins of Stalinism: Workers and the Communist Party in Moscow, 1921-1928,” *Slavic Review* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 576.

addition, the Zhenotdel organizer worked with an overwhelmingly unskilled labour force, only three of the 734 women were skilled.<sup>116</sup>

Interestingly, these factory reports revealed, that where women predominated, they were also more likely to be skilled workers. For instance, in 1925 at the Khalturin textile mill in Tsentral'nii district there was a total labour force of 4,274 including 2,875 women and 1,397 men.<sup>117</sup> Dominating men numerically, standard in the textiles industry, contributed to an anomalous situation in NEP Russia. There were 2,665 skilled women workers listed in this labour force, (92.7 per cent); it was the only factory in Leningrad where women joined the Communist party in greater numbers than men!<sup>118</sup> In the thread spinning Sovietskaia Zvezda mill in Moskovsko Narvskii district, there were more than double the number of women workers than men, and again, unlike most women workers in the 1920s, 96.7 per cent of its women workers were skilled.<sup>119</sup> The Zhenotdel organizer, however, did not provide a definition of “skilled” nor did she provide

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<sup>116</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 July, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.133. Women workers were often designated unskilled workers in the 1920s, see Goldman, *Women*, 124-125; Koenker, “Men against Women,” 1452-1457; and Wood, *The Baba and the Bolshevik*, 156.

<sup>117</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (August 24, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.159. It was common in the textiles industry that women predominated, as Rossman puts it “Nationwide as well as in IIR [Ivanovo Industrial Region], slightly more than three out of five operatives were women.” *Worker Resistance*, 20.

<sup>118</sup> This is the only mixed factory of women and men in the archival reports where there were more female Communists listed than male Communists. In Khalturin there were 362 women and 263 men who were both candidates and members of the Party, see TsGAIPD SPb, (August 24, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.159. Few textile workers joined the party, 7.9 per cent of women and 5.9 per cent of men at this mill. Cross referenced against Chris Ward's figures he found that in October 1925, 15.1 per cent of operatives were in the Party at Khalturin, see *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 108. In a similar range, my archival figures from Zhenotdel calculated 14.6 per cent of men and women were in the Party on 24 August, 1925 at Khalturin, TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.159. By 1928, Communist party membership for women had risen to 12.1 per cent [men are not listed], see TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.8, l.140. Ironically, this is the exact figure used in 1927 for women [12.1 per cent of Communist party members overall], as quoted in Rigby, *Communist Party Members*, 361.

<sup>119</sup> In total there were 2,160 workers, 1,451 women workers and 710 men workers, of the women workers 1,407 were listed as skilled, see TsGAIPD SPb, (24 June, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.166. That Soviet women were frequently unskilled and its implications, see Ilič, *Women Workers*, Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, 156-157, Goldman, *Women*, 124-125, and Chase, *Workers*.

examples of what occupations were skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled. The high proportion of skilled women workers in these textile mills is not reflective of other findings during NEP;<sup>120</sup> it is very possible that the Zhenotdel organizer combined the “skilled” with the “semi-skilled” workforce. Despite these limitations, both the Khalturin and Sovietskaia Zvezda had an overwhelmingly female and skilled labour force and both mills received satisfactory Zhenotdel ratings.

Fascinatingly, how skill was constructed in the factory workspace provides one key as to why some women workers were so isolated. Diane Koenker’s discussion of the generational conflict between male printers in the 1920s emphasizes how the older, skilled male worker viewed and treated his younger, male apprentice in “hues of feminized subordination.”<sup>121</sup> For our purposes, “Male printers’ hostility to sharing their work space with women was often expressed in terms of skill: skill was something men could express, the ability to earn a skilled wage was a marker of masculinity. Women could never become skilled.”<sup>122</sup> Women became both emboldened when surrounded by more women and conversely, being surrounded by more men in Diane Koenker’s words

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<sup>120</sup> On the one hand, “Rashin’s 1929 sample contradicts data from the 1926 census which listed 53 per cent of the textile workforce as skilled, 40 per cent as semi-skilled and 7 per cent as unskilled...” while another Soviet historian, “for instance, writes that among women cotton workers in 1923, 43 per cent were unskilled, 37 per cent were semi-skilled and 20 per cent were skilled,” as quoted in Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 26. Ward argues skill was a “social construct which cannot be deduced from technology” and “...it seems that workers became skilled by staying in the mill for a long time” in *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 26. Goldman argues that, ““Skilled” work refers to jobs requiring one and a half to three years of training, and “semiskilled,” three months to one and a half years of training,” see *Women at the Gates*, 153.

<sup>121</sup> Diane Koenker more specifically states, “The years of apprenticeship were recalled in hues of feminized subordination: masters beat their apprentices like they did their wives; apprentices minded the owners’ children, helped the cook in the kitchen, and even milked the cow,” in “Fathers against Sons/Sons against Fathers: The Problem of Generations in the Early Soviet Workplace,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (December 2001): 800.

<sup>122</sup> Koenker, “Fathers against Sons,” 800. Interestingly, even in a women’s organization, the Zhenotdel report on Pechatnyi Dvor, women workers are not listed as a separate category but with white-collar workers, i.e. “470 women workers together with white-collar workers,” in TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.54.

led to the existence of “an aggressively masculine work environment.”<sup>123</sup> In 1927, in the Leningrad textile mill Kulotis, women outnumbered men. In all likelihood, this allowed the women workers the space to work “actively and with a business-like character“ to promote “especially ... questions [around] “brak” (defective output) in factory board reports.”<sup>124</sup> The women’s activism, however, must be tempered with an understanding that as the historian Jeffrey Rossman explains in his study of Ivanovo textile workers, “Given her relatively low wages, she was no less sensitive to measures (such as increased fines for defective output) and conditions (such as low-quality raw materials) that suppressed take-home pay.”<sup>125</sup>

In contrast, in the printing industry where women were usually in a minority, Diane Koenker discusses how women “workers at the Leningrad Pechatnyi Dvor print shop were rebuked for their lack of ‘consciousness’: they would not come to regular meetings but instead would gather on their own (outside union control) and in the washroom to discuss how to raise their pay grades.”<sup>126</sup> Different source bases have come to similar conclusions; Zhenotdel’s reports on delegates in Pechatnyi Dvor mirror Koenker’s

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<sup>123</sup> Koenker, “Men against Women,” 1451. In 1923, 35 per cent of the 10,000 printers were women in Petrograd, in Moscow it was 25 per cent, see Koenker, “Men against Women,” 1440.

<sup>124</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.3, l.51. In the textile mill Krasnaia Znamia women workers rarely attended production meetings because for two years they complained about the quality of the yarn and it did not improve and “interest among women workers in production meetings has cooled down [ostyvaet].” TsGAIPD SPb, (1928) f.24, op.8, d.12, ll.59-60. Textile mills were not uniformly ranked “satisfactory”; many were ranked “weak” see the following, Zhenotdel reports, on Nogin, (3 June, 1925), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.50; on Krasnaia Nit’ (1925) TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.268, Rabochii, (15 July, 1925), TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.85. Rabochii had 13, 211 and Nogin 1,896 women workers, see “Volodarki” in *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.12 (1925): 46.

<sup>125</sup> Rossman, *Worker Resistance*, 21. Also see Ward’s discussion of Leningrad’s Nogin mill and high waste rates, *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 84. In the imperial era Smith discusses how a “new recruit to the galoshes section of Triangle works was fined for waste: ‘the forewoman pounced on the unfortunate young girl and threatened to summon the foremen, who is well-known for his despotism towards women workers. The threat so terrified the girl that she fainted... Yet for some reason, this and similar incidents cause merriment among the other women,’” in “*Workers and Supervisors*,” 142.

<sup>126</sup> Koenker, “Men against Women,” 1451.

findings. Pechatnyi Dvor was described as a workplace where delegates' reports were "incomplete," shop meetings were "unregulated," and there was an overall sense of "inexperience" because the organizer, not the delegates, did most of the work.<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, even among the shop's leadership there were significant shortcomings: there was rivalry over who would lead work among women; among the three cells no single cell was devoted to delegates and the women's organizer failed to attend *biuro* meetings.<sup>128</sup> Despite protocols that clearly outlined that all work with women workers should go through the women's organizer [Zhenotdel's], one shop cell's leader tersely summarized his disapproval with, "Why is there this nonsense?"<sup>129</sup>

Overall, a chronic lack of co-operation and co-ordination between various party and state bodies existed on the factory floor. Significantly, a summary of factory reports conducted in 1926 of six workplaces, including Pechatnyi Dvor, the textile mill Krasnaia Znamia, the hospital Erismal, the tobacco factory Uritskii, the pipe factory Trubochnii and the shoe factory Skorokhod covered 10,057 women workers in Leningrad city.<sup>130</sup> Many of these workplaces were male-dominated and the women shop organizers were lambasted for lacking "initiative and independence" yet concluded a more "serious attitude on behalf of party organizations and Zhenotdel," was required.<sup>131</sup> It was in this strained atmosphere that the Central Committee's Orgbiuro issued a decree in May 1926

<sup>127</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.54.

<sup>128</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.55.

<sup>129</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.55.

<sup>130</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.55.

<sup>131</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.55. Pechatnyi Dvor, Trubochnii, and Skorokhod had a minority of women workers, see respectively TsGAIPD SPb, (13 May, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.54; TsGAIPD SPb, (1927), f.16, op.13, d.13301, l.23; and TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.164. Krasnaia Znamia had more women workers while Erismal and Uritskii list 575 and 2,205 women workers respectively, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.148; TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13151, l.55 and see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.135.

that shifted responsibility for organizing women workers from the *zhenproforganizator* (an organizer specially designated to work with women) to local factory committees.<sup>132</sup>

The policy of organizing factory workers according to gender was coming to an end.

Paradoxically, in early 1927, the Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel finally endorsed the idea that organizing women was more efficacious in female-dominated factories. This politically sensitive idea was championed not by Zhenotdel, but by Orgotdel and the Leningrad Provincial Council of Trade Unions (LGSPS).<sup>133</sup> In their comprehensive joint report of nine Leningrad factories, they concluded that, “where women workers do not predominate for the most part they are not a qualified work force, these women workers are less active, and poorly attend production meetings.”<sup>134</sup> Although not its intent, the report did emphasize the impact of the May 1926 decision to switch to local factory committees for women’s work. Factory committees “in the majority of cases” not only did a “weak job of attracting women workers to production meetings;” but women workers no doubt felt disconnected because, it was “rare” that factory committees’ “work reports [were] on men and women separately.”<sup>135</sup> Significantly, by early 1927, the

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<sup>132</sup> Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 43. Also see Goldman’s subsequent discussion of the impact of this decision on the same page.

<sup>133</sup> In short, these organizations were less susceptible to charges of “feminism” and Zhenotdel was also reluctant in the mid-1920s, despite extensive individual factory reports pointing to this, to articulate the idea that female-dominated factories improved organization.

<sup>134</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (24 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.28. The report was conducted by both organizations and entitled, “Ob uchastuu rabotnits v proizvodsoveshchaniikh i komissiiakh,” and was endorsed at the 24 February, 1927 Collegium Meeting of Zhenotdel Provincial Leningrad. Murphy also found that women workers who only made up 6 per cent of his Hammer and Sickle factory work force poorly attended production meetings. For instance, of “the 2,500 attendees at a March 1929 production conference, only eighty were characterized as “youth” and only seven were women,” *Revolution and CounterRevolution*, 121n.228.

<sup>135</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (24 February, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.28. Few delegates worked in factory committees. Despite 159 delegates at Sovietskaia Zvezda none are listed in the factory committee nor at Blokhina Trampark; at Krasnaia Znamia five delegates out of 101 delegates worked in the *fabkom* and ten

broader lesson that organization improved when women predominated in the labour force was quickly ignored. All party and state leaders were now beginning to mobilize their membership around rationalization and rapid industrialization.

### Demotion and Labour Militancy

During the onset of rationalisation in 1927 and the subsequent launching of the First Five-Year Plan, the Leningrad archival material identifies that women workers resisted the intensification of their labour. Nonetheless, in the official discourse, Zhenotdel delegates were exhorted: “to be the first to industrialize the country [and] to fulfil the [First] Five-Year Plan and defend the Soviet Union.”<sup>136</sup> Significantly, fulfilling the plan and defending the Soviet Union were conflated and therefore inseparable. Moreover, this example suggests that although delegates were “interns,” they were clearly expected to model exemplary behaviour and lead the way.

Instead, two conferences held in January 1928, sponsored by the Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel, chronicle labour unrest among Leningrad women workers. The first was a routine one-day conference to discuss ways to improve Zhenotdel’s mass work among women workers and peasants. The second was a high-level two-day conference of provincial Trade Union, Zhenotdel and Economic leaders (Council of National Economy OblSNKh). Both conferences identify dissension among Zhenotdel delegates and women workers across a wide range of industries. Moreover, in the midst of this labour turmoil, the Provincial Head of Zhenotdel, Maria Shitkina, was transferred to work in the courts.

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delegates in Khalturin and Skorokhod, see respectively, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13036, l.166;l.13;l.148;l.159; and l.164.

<sup>136</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.26.



Keeping in mind that Zhenotdel was disbanded in January 1930, the sources are limited to the opening stages of the First Five-Year Plan. There is considerable historiographical debate as to the intensity and nature of worker resistance to the First Five-Year Plan. There was diffuse, but sporadic women worker resistance in Leningrad factories; in the historiographical debate, therefore, the dissension occupies a middle ground of resistance.<sup>137</sup>

In December of 1928, Maria Mikhailovna Shitkina was removed from her post as head of the Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel and transferred to work in the courts. According to her party archival “Autobiography,” only three years earlier in her own carefully crafted words, she had been entrusted, “to do party work [as] Head of Provincial Zhenotdel [and] to remove Zinovievite Opposition.”<sup>138</sup> In her party character record in her personal file, Maria Shitkina had “good organizational talents,” “[was] a strong administrator” and, most significantly, “does not have any Party deviations.”<sup>139</sup> Consequently, given all the

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<sup>137</sup> Ward’s characterization of 1928 as “no reports of anything like the events in the CIR [Central Industrial Region] three years previously” while Rossman argues that there was a “great wave of worker resistance that swept across the IIR [Ivanovo Industrial Region] during the FFYP...” see respectively *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 220 and *Worker Resistance*, 236. Rossman chronicles how “Having surged from 732 in 1929 to 2,930 in 1930, the number of IIR operatives involved in job actions skyrocketed to 16,000 in 1931.” *Worker Resistance*, 151. In respect to the extensive strike movement in 1925, Ward notes how, “The Menshevik press made no mention of any discontent in Leningrad; indeed *uplotnenie* seems to have been enforced there more vigorously than anywhere else – 60 percent of all spindles by end of 1925” and in 192 n.75, “With one dubious exception- the Krasnyi Parus mill... The problem is I have found no record of any mill of that name in Leningrad in 1925.” *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 192. I have found a record of this mill in 1925 in a speech by Zhenotdel delegate Ostankina, a worker at the factory, Krasnyi Parus, in day 2 of the Fourth Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel conference, see TsGAIPD SPb, (8 March, 1925), f.16, op.13, d.13047, l.152. I have also located this mill in records in 1929, see TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.3. The mill was in Petrogradskii district.

<sup>138</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (27 September, 1933), f.1728, d.423296, ll.11-12. Fitzpatrick contextualizes these files thus, “Recounting one’s autobiography, challenges to the account from others, and defense of it became standard Soviet practice in a variety of Soviet situations, including purging and “self-criticism” sessions; moreover, all personal files contained a narrative autobiography and a questionnaire and (in detail) the nature of his or her class position, including changes over time,” *Tear off the Masks*, 5.

<sup>139</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1 October, 1937), f.1728, d.423296, l.2. Predictably, this character record was conducted in conjunction with her investigation during the Purges – she was cleared, see TsGAIPD SPb,

available archival material, Shitkina's demotion to the courts, is probably linked to two convergent, unconnected events. In 1928, there was a general purge of Soviet personnel in bureaucracies and agencies, including the courts, and there was a critical need to find reliable Communist replacements.<sup>140</sup> Further, Leningrad delegates were withdrawing their support from Zhenotdel due to declining living standards and labour unrest associated with rationalisation and the First Five-Year Plan.

What was the nature of this labour unrest among women workers from late 1927 to 1929? Significantly, as the private stenographic transcript of the aforementioned high-level conference of the provincial Council of National Economy, Trade Union, and Zhenotdel leaders revealed, the tanning, chemical/resin, transport, and, most notably, textile industries all experienced labour unrest.<sup>141</sup> Labour dissent was not only spread across numerous industries, there were four key issues for women workers in the late 1920s. The salient issues identified in the archival record were: pay systems and gendered wage rates, veteran women refusing to work with new hires, women laid-off due to rationalization and dissatisfaction among women promotees.

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(23 August, 1937), f.1728, d.423296, l.1. This fits in with Melanie Ilić's discussion where there were "few women victims of the purges. From the larger dataset ... it seems that less than 4% of those executed were women (22 of the total 673 entries)" in "The Great Terror in Leningrad: A Quantitative Analysis," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no.8 (December 2000): 1518.

<sup>140</sup> Other departments and agencies affected by this "anti-bureaucratic" purge of "former people" were the Labour Exchanges, militia, finance and agriculture. For an excellent analysis of the battles and difficulties in acquiring personnel with the "correct" credentials, see James W. Heinzen, "'Alien' Personnel in the Soviet State: The People's Commissariat of Agriculture Under Proletarian Dictatorship, 1918-1929," *Slavic Review* 56, no.1 (Spring 1997): 73-100.

<sup>141</sup> Labour unrest among tanners due to rationalization, see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.35; among chemical/resin workers see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, ll.49; 35-36; among transport workers see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, ll.55; 56; 96 and among textile workers see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, ll.35; 36; 59-60; 97; 98. Also see fascinating Collegium meeting entitled, "K kollegii otdele rabotnits po voprosu starykh i molodykh rabotnitsakh," concerning conflict among women textile workers, TsGAIPD SPb, (3 January, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.3.

### Gender and Generational Conflict

Overall, rationalisation centred on increasing labour productivity through the intensification of labour. In Leningrad, at least, there is evidence that the process of rationalisation was underway before the official publication of its decrees. For instance, on 10 March 1927, in Leningrad's textile mill Krasnyi Maiak "conflict" was identified among female weavers because, understandably, they resisted being demoted from work grades 5, 6, and 7 to grade 4.<sup>142</sup> Officially, for cotton mills, however, the government's October 1927 Jubilee Manifesto signalled the intensification of labour. Its key aspects were: the switch from an eight-hour day to a seven-hour, three-shift working day and servicing more looms.<sup>143</sup> For textile workers, at least, three key factors would interact and influence their reception to the Jubilee Manifesto and this intensification of labour, ties to the land, generation, and gender.<sup>144</sup> Although Chris Ward has expanded considerably the field of Soviet labour history with his discussion of 'wage dependence' and 'time dependence,' critically, the latter does not generally apply to Leningrad city because only a "tiny 4.4 per cent" of cotton workers held land.<sup>145</sup> In short, therefore, in Leningrad at least, ties to the land were insignificant and therefore perhaps workers were even more wedded to factory life than workers elsewhere.

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<sup>142</sup> For the weavers' plight see, TsGAIPD SPb, (10 March, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13301, l.27. The rationalisation decrees were published by order of the Central Committee in *Pravda* on 25 March, 1925.

<sup>143</sup> Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 205-208 and Rossman, *Worker Resistance*, 27-33. Rossman discusses how, of "the provisions they opposed, the most unpopular required them to service 20 percent more looms than before (that is, forty-eight looms instead of forty)" in *Worker Resistance*, 33.

<sup>144</sup> See Rossman on this point, *Worker Resistance*, 20-27.

<sup>145</sup> Ward, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 37. This is based on Rashin's sample of 10,292 workers from six Leningrad mills – 449 workers held land. Ward clarifies that, "there is no evidence that proportions ever approached those apparent in the CIR, [Central Industrial Region]" *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 37.

During rationalisation conflicts intensified between women workers over wage rates on the factory floor. For instance, in Leningrad's rubber factory Krasnyi Treugol'nik, there "was a serious conflict with women workers [that] up until now it is not settled."<sup>146</sup> That women workers were inherently deemed less skilled than men was implicit in rationalisation because at Krasnyi Treugol'nik some women in the galoshes department, but not the men, were transferred "to lighter work."<sup>147</sup> Yet confirming the haste with which rationalisation was conducted, initially the women's wage-rate stayed the same.<sup>148</sup> Conflict arose because the new group of women workers hired protested: "why does a group of women workers who work in the easiest conditions, on the old [higher] wage-rates, [and we] now have our wages lowered?"<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, it was the new hires who rebelled, because of the unfairness in wages between women, not between women and men.

In the crisis, Zhenotdel did not object to women being transferred to "lighter work" but rather objected that, Krasnyi Treugol'nik "should have lowered the wage-rate at once [for everyone]."<sup>150</sup> Many Zhenotdel officials clearly supported the regime's goals during rationalisation. Similarly, a year later the Zhenotdel press discussed the entire crisis at

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<sup>146</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.35. Significantly, the factory "quadrupled its workforce in five years, reaching 20,000 in 1928," see Hiroaki Kuromiya, "The Crisis of Proletarian Identity in the Soviet Factory, 1928-1929," *Slavic Review* 44 (1985): 285.

<sup>147</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.35.

<sup>148</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.35. Ward discusses how chaotically rationalisation proceeded see, *Russia's Cotton Workers*, 207; 212 and 224.

<sup>149</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.36. Women textile workers at Proletarskaia Pobeda also protested when they were transferred to the lowest rank during rationalisation schemes, see TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.35. There were twelve ranks.

<sup>150</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.36. At a subsequent conference it was emphasized women workers at Krasnyi Treugol'nik who numbered 8,050 of the workforce (55 per cent) had to absorb changes like the 7-hour shift, and the factory provided "only 250 spaces for children," see TsGAIPD SPb, (1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.108.

Krasnyi Treugol'nik, carefully excising the labour strife and trumpeting productivity.

The press noted, with alliterative flair, that in 1928 there was a “serious ‘galoshnyi golod’ [galosh famine]” when only 25,292 galoshes were produced, but a year later production reached 28,685, and “now the ‘galoshnyi golod’ has significantly weakened.”<sup>151</sup> At Krasnyi Treugol'nik, women were not merely divided from men by a perception that skill was a masculine attribute, but also divided from each other.

There was also a generational split between “young” and “old” female workers that mirrored Koenker’s “fathers and sons” which intensified in late 1927 and early 1928. In Proletarskaia Pobeda textile mill, “the old women workers refused to go over to the new methods of work, young women workers were sent in, then the old women workers requested themselves to be transferred.”<sup>152</sup> Two acts of resistance came from veteran women workers: refusing to work and putting in a work transfer en masse. Similarly, in the textile mill, Kulotis, women workers did not agree to adopt the euphemistically labelled “new methods of work.”<sup>153</sup> As historian Rossman generally puts it, veteran

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<sup>151</sup> M. Kliueva, “Vypolniaet li Lensovet nakazy izbiratelei?” *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* no.24 (December 1929): 4. A galosh is usually a rubber over-shoe worn for muddy or wet weather. Trumpeting productivity questions the argument that “The Zhenotdel...served, in their time, as a counter to the ethos of “productionism,”” see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 35.

<sup>152</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.36. Similarly, Komsomol deployed ‘Shock brigades’ to Ravenstvo mill in May 1928, see Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 245. Ward does not provide a gender breakdown of the “shock brigade” and suggests “women in drawing-frame rooms ‘tried to talk the brigade out of their resolve, pointing out the injustices, that would inevitably follow” in *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 245. In the post-Soviet era, Proletarskaia Pobeda (Proletarian Victory) was renamed Victory factory. No precise definition of when a worker becomes a “Veteran” worker exists; Rossman argues they were “male and female workers in their thirties or forties,” *Worker Resistance*, 6.

<sup>153</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.36. Strife was present and recognized at the highest levels. In December 1928, M. I. Tomskii, chairman of the trade unions’ central council, discussed a recent incident where a Leningrad Skorokhod shoe worker shot and killed his foreman. As recounted by Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Tomskii attributed the incident “for this and similar ‘unhealthy and shameful’ occurrences of recent times was the ‘uncultured’ and ‘rude’ behaviour of foremen and the unions’ failure to intervene in relations between foremen and workers,” in “Masters of the Shop Floor: Foremen and Soviet

women workers, were resentful “that they bore the brunt of the burden and ... their earnings had been dragged down by new hires [and desired] each machine’s output be measured at the end of the shift instead of the end of the day.”<sup>154</sup>

The Zhenotdel press also discussed the generational conflict between women workers. The debate was framed, however, to emphasize how both “old” and “young” workers contributed to the factory labour force and although it acknowledged “abnormal” relations, the scale of the conflict was de-emphasized and co-operation urged.<sup>155</sup> The exemplary work records of individual women workers were showcased in *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka*.<sup>156</sup> Numerous letters were published which were often signed “old” or “young” [worker] and this gave Zhenotdel both the appearance of neutrality in the conflict and signalled to its reading audience that it cared about all women workers.<sup>157</sup> Co-operation between women workers on the factory floor was broadly linked to other rationalisation campaigns against waste, truancy, and labour discipline promoted in the First Five-Year Plan.<sup>158</sup>

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Industrialization,” *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization*, ed. William G. Rosenberg and Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), 166.

<sup>154</sup> Rossman, *Worker Resistance*, 32.

<sup>155</sup> See M. Kliueva, “Chto skazal soiuz tekstilei o vzaimootnosheniakh mezhdu starym i molodymi rabotnitsami,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.4 (February 1929): 2.

<sup>156</sup> See profiles on Praskov’ia Chistiakova, whom had worked for forty years in a resin factory and at Krasnyi Treugol’nik, and 58 year Khalturin textile veteran “tetia Malasha,” see “Stranichka staroi rabotnitsy,” in *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.9 (Mai 1929): 6-9.

<sup>157</sup> Read the letters from the same edition and same textile factory, *Rabotnitsa*, entitled, “Zakonno eto ili net” signed “Young woman worker,” and “Razlad byvaet” signed “Old woman worker,” in *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.24 (December 1928): 14-15. See letter entitled “Chasto my sami portim molodykh,” signed “Old woman worker” from the Neva textile mill, *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.20 (October 1928): 13.

<sup>158</sup> For articles linking co-operation to all the labour campaigns see, N. M. “Pereklichka tekstil’shchits. Na bor’bu s brakom, progulami i prostoiami,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.14 (June 1929): 12-14.

### Unemployed and Promoted Workers

There were chronic labour shortages and unemployment during the early stages of the First Five-Year Plan.<sup>159</sup> Although the unemployment of women workers was a complex and persistent problem throughout NEP, the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan promised greater state involvement in the economy in general, and in particular, greater use of paid urban female labour. In 1928-1929, Zhenotdel delegates voiced their concerns about the connection between rationalisation and the unemployment of women workers. At the Vera Slutskaya textile mill, Zhenotdel delegate, Kosushkina explained, “here our staff of women has decreased...instead of 100 women workers, we have about a 100 on reserve.”<sup>160</sup> Her sentiments were echoed by Parshina, of Number Two Glass Factory, who lamented that when “we had begun to switch to mechanization...[due to rationalisation] of the factory,...we saw, that our women were all swept away [laid off] from the factory floor.”<sup>161</sup> Similarly, the Zhenotdel press continued to highlight the growing numbers of unemployed women.<sup>162</sup> Overall, it is extremely difficult to evaluate fully the scale of this problem because of successive measures to curtail benefits;

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<sup>159</sup> Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 110.

<sup>160</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.98. Nationally, because of a concomitant shift to heavy industry, “the cotton industry,... lost 115,400 workers (58,600 of whom were women) between 1929 and 1931)...” based on figures in *Trud v SSR*, 184, 230 as quoted in Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 93.

<sup>161</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.66. Brovkin argues that “By far the most radical component of workers were the unemployed,” in *Russia After Lenin: Politics, Culture and Society, 1921-1929* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 184.

<sup>162</sup> On 1 September, 1929 at the Leningrad Labour Exchange there were 93,000 registered unemployed women and they comprised 67 per cent of the unemployed, see Zelikson and Gortseva, “Na bor’bu s zhenskoi bezrabotitsei,” *Rabotnitsa i krest’ianka* no.21 (November 1929): 27. As Goldman emphasizes the “number of women entering industry in 1929 did not increase significantly over the number for the previous year, and between 1929 and 1930, women’s share of industry in fact decreased slightly.” *Women at the Gates*, 92.

moreover, ultimately, on 20 October 1930, unemployment was declared “liquidated” by the Soviet Union.<sup>163</sup>

The quality of women worker’s lives continued to hinge on the critical definition of “skilled” worker. For instance, in one Leningrad provincial paper factory, its factory apartments were only reserved for the male skilled workers. The Zhenotdel report blithely recorded this made women dependent on “their husbands” and because the “factory was four versts [6.4km] from town...they [women workers] could not [easily] participate in social work.”<sup>164</sup> Moreover, the same report emphasized that these lack of skills and social circumstances made women workers more vulnerable to unemployment and less able to improve their skills; despite the party rhetoric, factory managers were unwilling to employ women as promotees because they lacked a base line of skills.<sup>165</sup>

Paradoxically, both unemployed women and the so-called elite women worker promotees were often disgruntled during the First Five-Year Plan because the working environment did not meet expectations. Since the publication of Sheila Fitzpatrick’s now classic essay on “cultural revolution and class war” and her *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, social mobility and social support for the Stalinist system has been highlighted by numerous historians.<sup>166</sup> As Fitzpatrick explains in her most recent work,

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<sup>163</sup> See Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 127. People could register at Labour Exchanges for jobs but not collect benefits.

<sup>164</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d. 12, l.109. Unfortunately, the factory is not named. The state had chronic housing shortages in the 1920s and 1930s, see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 234-242, Ward, *Russia’s Cotton Workers*, 212, Murphy, *Revolution and CounterRevolution*, 99 and Rossman, *Worker Resistance*, 23-24.

<sup>165</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d. 12, l.109.

<sup>166</sup> Overall, the following works were not particularly cognisant of the role of gender, see Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin’s Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge



the goal was “providing affirmative action (the Russian term was *vydvizhenie* which literally means promotion) for those whose class position made them natural allies of the revolution.”<sup>167</sup> Archival evidence suggests limits to this interpretation, because although women worker’s class position may have made them “natural allies” of the revolution, their gender often did not. Women workers, even elite promotees, faced pervasive discrimination on the factory floor during the opening stages of the First Five-Year Plan. This discrimination, although prevalent in the 1920s, was particularly galling because now there was an officially state sanctioned affirmative action program. At the highest levels, the discrimination and lack of progress among women promotees was discussed widely at conferences and Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium meetings.

By 1929, the Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel Collegium was now convening only twice a month, but in January it discussed the issue of women worker promotees in both meetings.<sup>168</sup> In the 31 January 1929 meeting, Zhenotdel’s new Provincial Head, Liudmila Shaposhnikova, discussed the “especially weak...growth of the women worker promotee movement.”<sup>169</sup> Moreover, Shaposhnikova singled out the “party apparatus” as “guilty” of “sluggishness” (*kosnost*) in this regard.<sup>170</sup>

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University Press, 1988) and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Industrial Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Donald Filtzer barely discusses “promotees” but does argue that promotion “did not in any way change the class character of the society which promoted them,” and “never altered the basic fact that the *Stalinist elite was at war with its own society*,” in *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Production Relations, 1928-1941* (New York: M.E Sharpe Inc., 1986), 48-49. In Fitzpatrick’s 2005 *Tear off the Masks* there are three full chapters and parts of several others devoted to women, gender and sexuality. Goldman views the promotee movement as a shift from class to individual promotion, in *Women at the Gates*, 66-67.

<sup>167</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks*, 5.

<sup>168</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (January 3, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.3 and TsGAIPD SPb, (January 31, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.4. In 1925 there were 27 meetings in a year and by 1929, over thirty per cent fewer, only 20 meetings, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.31 and TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13146.

<sup>169</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (January 31, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.4. For the other January meeting see, TsGAIPD SPb, (January 3, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.3. Liudmila Kuz’minichna Shaposhnikova-Zaideman’s personal

In April 1929, a Zhenotdel conference was convened specifically for women promotees, and it chronicled widespread dissatisfaction.<sup>171</sup> Its 73 page stenographic report provides a unique blend of dozens of women worker promotees' and leading party functionaries' unfiltered voices. Submitted in conjunction with this conference, one report in particular provides rare information about female promotees.<sup>172</sup> From 1928 to January 1929 there were 559 women promotees in industrial production and 69 in non-industrial production (soviets and so on) in Leningrad.<sup>173</sup> Significantly, the percentage of women promotees inside industrial enterprises was 14.3 per cent.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, that factory managers and economic planners impeded the progress of women promotees is suggested by the fact that there was a higher percentage of women promotees working outside of production (16.9 per cent).<sup>175</sup> The central rationale of the promotee movement is highlighted when the report champions in a binary fashion as "satisfactory" that there were only 17 white-

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file was f.1728, d.218937. Intriguingly, the file was only nine pages and did not contain information regarding her arrest and subsequent execution in 1942; for an interpretation based on connections to her high-ranking husband, see Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 284. The issue of women promotees was discussed in 1927, see document sent by TsK Zhenotdel by A. Kal'gina, TsGAIPD SPb, (31 January, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13301, l.1.

<sup>170</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (January 31, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.4.

<sup>171</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, ll.1-73. The full title was "Soveshchaniia pri oblastnom otdele po rabote sredi r-ts i kr-nok sovместiu s vydvizhdenkami na partiinuiu, Sovetskuiu, professional'nuiu, kooperativnuiu i khoziaistvennuiu rabotu." It is difficult to find information on promotees, as Goldman admits it "is difficult to assess women's advances in industry," *Women at the Gates*, 271. She qualifies that "Statistical breakdowns of industry in the 1930s show women's shares of many skills but do not disclose how many people were employed in each," *Women at the Gates*, 271.

<sup>172</sup> The "Dokladnaia zapiska" in the Leningrad archive was entitled, "Itogi Vypolneniia Direktiv TsK i Oblastkoma VKP (b) O Vydvizhenii Zhenshchin na Rukovodiashchuiu rabotu." see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.37.

<sup>173</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.37.

<sup>174</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.37. As Goldman argues, "By 1928, women's overall share of industrial jobs stood at 28.6 percent where it remained even after the adoption of and implementation of the first five-year plan," in *Women at the Gates*, 12. Heinzen contends that "Indeed as late as 1927, only five peasant promotees were transferred to Moscow (in a central organization with approximately 3,000 people), and just six followed the next year, despite intense pressure on Narkomzem [Commissariat of Agriculture] by party inspectors," in "Alien" Personnel in the Soviet State," 89-90.

<sup>175</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.37. Typically this is soviets, trade unions, and so on.

collar workers among the 559 women promotees but “unsatisfactory” that 26 per cent were non-party.<sup>176</sup>

Shaposhnikova opened the conference with the admission that there was a “conservative attitude toward promoting women to leadership work, which we often meet amongst specialists in our organization, and even, unfortunately, we meet such conservative attitudes amongst red leaders.”<sup>177</sup> To illustrate her points, Shaposhnikova selected two separate examples of prejudice against women in the labour force. Interestingly, both were peasant women, one described as a “non-party peasant woman,” the second, a landless peasant woman (*batrachka*).<sup>178</sup> So, for example, Shaposhnikova chronicled how the newly promoted peasant woman board member at “each step” and “in every way possible was ignored in her work” and for the *batrachka*, “all endeavours to ignore her work” transpired.<sup>179</sup> Interestingly, dovetailing with broader trends of this era, Shaposhnikova interprets these incidences respectively as examples of “bureaucratism” and “conservatism.”<sup>180</sup> So, although the Zhenotdel leader is generally willing to admit “red leaders” display conservative attitudes, she avoids scrupulously overt references to discrimination. Moreover, even in this unpublished record, Shaposhnikova selects peasant women with undoubtedly questionable class credentials, who have been subjected to discrimination; she does not select women workers and therefore does not broach the delicate topic of relations between working-class women and men.

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<sup>176</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.37.

<sup>177</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.2.

<sup>178</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.2; l.3. See Farnsworth, “The Rural *Batrachka*,” 64-93.

<sup>179</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.2; l.3.

<sup>180</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.2; l.3.

The issue of relations between working-class women and men was raised by women promotees at the conference and sometimes framed using the language of the Party. Sitarzh, a Labour Exchange promotee for the last eight months, recounted how it was difficult to deal with the unemployed all day long and frustrating that there had not been a “single document on women in leadership positions.”<sup>181</sup> Echoing Shaposhnikova, she urged vigilance in the future, so “we will not have parasitism and bureaucratism.”<sup>182</sup> Kanovala, promoted into an administrative position at Krasnyi Maiak, framed her argument by cleverly quoting party leaders Kirov and Komarov who, at a general party conference, urged that “women need to keep up toe to toe (*noga v nogu*) with men....”<sup>183</sup> Having established equality as a general party principle, Kanovala proceeded to lambast male attitudes, “when women are promoted to leadership work, men [still] think baba.”<sup>184</sup> Similarly, another promotee employing virtually identical language, despaired that work was “difficult” because “economic planners see a woman as a woman, but not as a woman worker!”<sup>185</sup> A year earlier, at another Zhenotdel conference one delegate advocated that to overcome “antagonism among men” and the “mass of women workers and peasant women” that “educational work among men” was needed.<sup>186</sup> Adhering to standard Bolshevik lore, according to the Zhenotdel delegate Alekseeva, it was the newly

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<sup>181</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.5.

<sup>182</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.2.

<sup>183</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.23. They are assuredly S. M. Kirov and probably N. P. Komarov. Komarov was Leningrad’s Regional Party Second Secretary and Chairman of the City Soviet at various points in the 1920s, see Ruble *Leningrad*, 233.

<sup>184</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.23.

<sup>185</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.31.

<sup>186</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.98.

arrived “middle and wealthy peasants” who “mocked women worker promotees.”<sup>187</sup>

Consequently, not all men required an “education.”

Nonetheless, a minority of female promotees were able to negotiate a positive work experience on the factory floor. Teren’eva, a worker at Krasnyi Sheinik, was one of seven female promotees, and declared, “I love my work [and I am] always learning new things.”<sup>188</sup> Nikolaeva was a master craftsperson and recounted when she asked her boss if she made any mistakes, he replied, “None, work went well.”<sup>189</sup> Guseva at the textile factory Neva, discussed how relations were “good between the economic department and with the workers” but admitted that she only had a lower level of education and the job required a mid to higher level [education].<sup>190</sup> Overall, despite limitations, these women’s experiences may point to the pride and enthusiasm many women felt about their work.

Continuing Guseva’s admission of having inferior qualifications, the conference was replete with examples of women worker promotees who were poorly instructed. Bakova, from a Leningrad Labour Exchange, put it simply that it was universally accepted that “when women workers are promoted, they are not instructed.”<sup>191</sup> As one women worker promotee from the Red October factory declared, “I think, that what we need most of all is to give instructions...so we know how to lead;” another promotee said “they [women promotees] are poorly instructed” and a third suggested “courses, administrative courses

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<sup>187</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (23 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.13, l.99.

<sup>188</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.27.

<sup>189</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.29. In contrast, Gavrilenko argues that there were a very small number of women master craftspeople and there was a need to promote women into these positions, see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.21.

<sup>190</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.30.

<sup>191</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.28.

for women promotees.”<sup>192</sup> Without clear instructions, for instance, one woman worker spent the first two months after her promotion sitting in her office reading!<sup>193</sup>

Women worker promotees may well have lacked basic qualifications, but how instructions were implemented were part of a broader factory culture. Women workers often felt isolated from key administrative and leadership bodies. Krasilina, from the textile mill Krasnyi Tkach, despaired how the budget for women workers was “not organized so she can work” and the “District Party Committee does not know us. When one comes across the specialist, he gets you to run errands, like a rat.”<sup>194</sup> Similarly, Vetroshkina argued that, “our [factory] administration’s attitude toward women worker promotees is not the same as toward specialists.”<sup>195</sup> For example, she explained, once promoted, for a woman worker “shortcomings were highlighted” and she did not receive “a spoke in the wheel” of help.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, in the textile mill, Anisimov, Begunova worked only as an “assistant,” while another, textile promotee, Stepanova, complained of her unfair treatment at Krasnyi Maiak.<sup>197</sup> Factory administrations, co-ops, collectives,

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<sup>192</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.17; l.19; l.16. It is probably the “Red October” cotton mill rather than the former Fastov “Red October” factory which manufactured and repaired equipment for sugar refineries and distilleries. The factory produced storage tanks, containers, flues, coils, boilers, iron and copper tubing, and spare parts for the boiler equipment.

<sup>193</sup> This example was recounted by Bakova from the Labour Exchange, see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.28. This mirrors Goldman’s example of a woman who was promoted and sharpened pencils, *Women at the Gates*, 223.

<sup>194</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, ll.10-11. Smirnova, a woman worker promotee from Skorokhod, also complained that budget problems impeded her work, see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.25.

<sup>195</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.12.

<sup>196</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.12.

<sup>197</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, ll.7-8; l.9.

and trade unions were all singled out by women workers as demonstrating “insufficient attention” and “insufficient leadership” towards female promotees.<sup>198</sup>

Khorover, a male Party leader, concurred that this “bureaucratic distortion” needed to be overcome in “our shops, enterprises, [and] institutions.”<sup>199</sup> However, Khorover discounted the evidence presented at the conference that many trade unions contributed to female discrimination. He argued that women workers’ complaints should be handled through the trade unions, not Zhenotdel, to overcome what he colourfully termed a “caddish (*khamskoe*) bureaucratic attitude.”<sup>200</sup> In a tug of war with Zhenotdel, Khorover was explicit. He opposed Shaposhnikova giving directives, leading work, and holding conferences on the topic of female promotees because these women workers were “answerable to an institution’s leadership.”<sup>201</sup> He then modified his attack. He wanted female promotees responsible “not only to Zhenotdel” but to an “institution’s leadership” which, in graphic contrast to Zhenotdel he labelled a “living leadership.”<sup>202</sup> In short, Khorover’s clear preference was to curtail Zhenotdel’s space on the factory floor; he argued that both factory administrations and trade unions could and should assume more control over women workers.

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<sup>198</sup> For factory administrations see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.9; l.19; for co-op leaderships see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.10; l.14; for factory collectives see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.13; for trade unions see TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.12; l.13. Other Zhenotdel conferences also criticized the above institutions see, TsGAIPD SPb, f. 24, op.8, d.12, l.92.

<sup>199</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.33.

<sup>200</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.35.

<sup>201</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.34.

<sup>202</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.34.

### 1929 District Delegate Elections

It is extremely difficult to assess the precise nature of women worker resistance because party and state officials employed maddeningly obtuse language! As noted, they employed words such as “conflict” (*konflikt*) or “serious conflict” (*ser’eznii konflikt*) but this does not tell the reader if it was a work stoppage, an industrial sabotage, strike, disturbance, labour slow down and so forth.<sup>203</sup> The archival sources clearly point to multiple tensions among young and old workers, male and female workers, unemployed women, and even women worker promotees. Consequently, one is very hard pressed to find any single group of non-party women uniformly content with how the First Five-Year Plan was implemented!

With multiple and conflicting tensions on the factory floor, Leningrad women workers were clearly reducing their participation in delegate elections during late 1929.<sup>204</sup> Do we classify this as an act of resistance or indifference? In Moskovsko Narvskii in the metalworking plant Krasnyi Putilovets women’s organizers’ articles about the election were not published, although in the textile factories of Ravenstvo and Vereteno they were.<sup>205</sup> In the textile mill Nogin election material was wiped off the walls, but by who,

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<sup>203</sup> See respectively, TsGAIPD SPb, (10 March, 1927), f.16, op.13, d.13301, l.27 and TsGAIPD SPb, (22 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.12, l.35. Leningrad factories also had “simmering, but fractured discontent.” Murphy discusses, “We now know that the parameters of proletarian resistance to Stalinism ranged from open revolt in Ivanovo, to simmering, but fractured, discontent in ...[Moscow’s] Hammer and Sickle Factory,” *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 228. Interestingly, tensions with peasant-workers are rarely addressed in my sources, perhaps because after 1929, with collectivization, was there a massive influx into the cities. Goldman argues that the “first great peasant departures occurred in the spring of 1929 in tandem with collectivization,” in *Women at the Gates*, 99.

<sup>204</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.3. See Goldman’s discussion of calls to eliminate local Zhenotdels and women’s organizers in enterprises where female labour predominated in Moscow, *Women at the Gates*, 48.

<sup>205</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.4. See Black, “Party Crisis,” 107-126. Black argues in 1925 that there were 10,405 workers in the plant, he does not give a gender breakdown, see “Party Crisis,” 108. In contrast, Murphy does for Hammer and Sickle at various points in the 1920s, for



was left unspecified.<sup>206</sup> In this district as a whole, for Zhenotdel there was “no party, trade union, nor komsomol or other organizational participation” and this contributed directly to seven factories, including Krasnyi Treugol’nik, listed as failing in their campaign objectives.<sup>207</sup> In Petrogradskii district Agit-Prop failed to provide assistance, and in many enterprises in Volodarskii the campaign was not covered in the press at all.<sup>208</sup> In 1928, one Vasil’evskii Ostrov delegate cautioned shop organizers that it was because of “lower wages, that is why women workers...are not interested in this [Zhenotdel] work”<sup>209</sup> and by 1929 in the same district “active” women workers were not drawn into the electoral campaign.

In Tsentral’nyi district one gets a sense of the broader malaise of the entire election campaign and Zhenotdel’s major dilemma. During the 1929 delegate campaign, the morale of Zhenotdel delegates was tested because economic conditions were still deteriorating despite the introduction of rationing in late 1928.<sup>210</sup> Women workers asked delegates pointed questions about “our economic planners” and the “tasks of the Five-

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instance in 1929, there were only 356 (6 per cent) women workers in the plant, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 212.

<sup>206</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.4. Election material was displayed in a stengazeta (wall newspaper) and for a nuanced discussion of this Soviet genre, see Catriona Kelly “A Laboratory for the Manufacture of Proletarian Writers’: The Stengazeta (Wall Newspaper), Kul’turnost’ and the Language of Politics in the Early Soviet Period,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no.4 (2002): 573-602. Generally, the incident at Nogin is surprising because, according to Kelly “(tearing down the stengazeta before time) was likely to provoke resentment if not scandal,” in “A Laboratory,” 585.

<sup>207</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.3.

<sup>208</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.3.

<sup>209</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (12 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.1. Another Zhenotdel delegate emphasized economic matters and concurred that interest in Zhenotdel was declining because delegates were not paid for their efforts and would lose their salary if they did organizational work, see TsGAIPD SPb, (12 January, 1928), f.24, op.8, d.8, l.1. Murphy has observed the same phenomenon in Hammer and Sickle, when workers’ wages were cut, interest in party work declined, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 86-88.

<sup>210</sup> Rossman argues that, “the shortage of food was the most common source of dissatisfaction on shop floors during the FFYP,” *Worker Resistance*, 46. Rationing was introduced in November 1928 in major urban areas, see *Worker Resistance*, 58 and Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 76-77.

Year Plan” and “such a mood crept in (*proskal’zyvalo*).”<sup>211</sup> Signalling a definitive end to the ideals and language of NEP and its *smychka*, the women workers declared that in the kolkhoz there were “many loafers (*lodyrei*) who do not want to work.”<sup>212</sup> In an astonishing admission that encapsulated a key economic problem, the women workers declared, “Our food is bad because the town supplies few manufactured goods to the countryside.”<sup>213</sup> As Wendy Goldman argues, women workers entered the Five-Year Plan workforce “*samotek* – spontaneously and haphazardly,” not primarily due to state or party intervention and “the most successful recruiter of women into production... was hunger.”<sup>214</sup>

Moreover, economic conditions were compounded by political exigencies as the delegate election campaign was conducted simultaneously with a party purge in Petrogradskii and Tsentral’nii districts!<sup>215</sup> In many respects this was a disconnect; delegates in their sworn pledge were told that the Party “waits for you to join its ranks”<sup>216</sup> and yet a party purge was being conducted at the exact moment when they were being elected as quasi party representatives - Zhentodel delegates. It was difficult to sustain enthusiasm for Zhentodel and its policies when the December election was conducted in the midst of economic turmoil, party purges and apathy from other party and state organizations. In

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<sup>211</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.6.

<sup>212</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.6. Kolkhozes also “worked badly” due to “insufficient machines”, see TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.6.

<sup>213</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.6. For food prices see Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 78-80.

<sup>214</sup> Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 68 and 281.

<sup>215</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (29 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.4. Interestingly, dated 1 August, 1929, in Sofia Smidovich’s personal file there is a letter by Emelyan Yaroslavskii questioning Smidovich’s claim that women communists were subject to discrimination in party purges, see RGASPI, f.151, op.2, d.4.

<sup>216</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.39, l.26.

exactly a week's time, district Zhenotdel elections would be phased out, or abolished entirely, in the wake of the massive overhaul in Moscow.

### Liquidating Zhenotdel and the Collectivization of Agriculture

Overall, for historians the causes of Zhenotdel's liquidation are obscured by incomplete documentation at the national level. Namely, there is neither a personal file for Artiukhina, Zhenotdel's last director, nor a comprehensive finding aid available for Central Zhenotdel files from 1925 to 1930 in Moscow.<sup>217</sup> Consequently, although the official reasons for Zhenotdel's abolition are well documented in the Soviet press, the actual decision-making process up until now has been elusive.

Interestingly, a former party regional archival repository in St.Petersburg helps clarify the decision making process, rationale and timing more effectively than the Central archive in Moscow. When and why was the decision made to liquidate Zhenotdel? On 2 December, 1929 a Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel Collegium meeting was convened and item six on the agenda was a directive from the Provincial Party Committee Plenum to discuss Zhenotdel's "new forms and methods."<sup>218</sup> So although, Zhenotdel was officially

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<sup>217</sup> In the finding aid only three dela are available for the post-1925 period, RGASPI, f.17, op.10, delo 494, delo 495 and delo 496. Delo 494 covers 1927-28, delo 495, 1927 and delo 496, 1931 and were added to the Zhenotdel fond on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1991. Significantly, the Central Zhenotdel Collegium meetings are not available in this extremely limited supply of delo. As Carmen Scheide emphasizes, only "limited archival data is available for the *Zhenotdel* in the second half of the 1920s, Artyukhina's personal files are also rather limited and omit details of her work as ... head of the Zhenotdel from 1925, and her involvement in the dissolution of the *Zhenotdel* in 1930," see "'Born in October': the Life and Thought of Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina, 1889-1969," in *Women in the Stalin Era*, ed. Melanie Ilić (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 10. Overall, this helps explain why Wood's work *The Baba and the Comrade* focuses on the pre-1925, not post-1925 period, and why Scheide's source base is "biographical data...drawn from her [Artyukhina's] memoirs," see "'Born in October,'" 10. In contrast, the Leningrad Zhenotdel fond has over 800 delo including Collegium meetings.

<sup>218</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101. Archival evidence shatters Hayden's interpretation that the "decision of the Party leadership to dissolve the Zhenotdel was so abrupt and

abolished on 5 January 1930, presumably at least as late as November 1929 the issue was raised and forwarded to provincial Zhenotdels.

During this 2 December 1929 Collegium meeting only two women voiced approval of liquidating Zhenotdel. These women, Penina and Basova, “indicated that it is necessary to bring about a reorganization of zhenotdel’s work,” and to transfer “work of delegates’ meetings to Agit-Prop and a part of the work to Orgotdel (Organization department) in the towns.”<sup>219</sup> In contrast, all the remaining Collegium members voiced their disapproval. Collegium members Rautke and Pavlova concurred respectively that it was “premature” to liquidate and wanted to “plan practically” how to revive Zhenotdel’s work.<sup>220</sup> The Collegium member Ul’dukus was pointedly “against such a liquidationist mood in work among women,” especially because of the “industrialization [of] a mass of women workers arriving from the countryside ....”<sup>221</sup> To punctuate how peasant women were central, yet masked in this discussion, it is fascinating that Ul’dukus described them as “a mass of women workers arriving from the countryside.” She has already reshaped these peasant women into women workers. Ul’dukus elaborated that the conditions of the First Five-Year Plan would confront Zhenotdel with “very huge work [and] it is [too] early”<sup>222</sup> to liquidate Zhenotdel. The concluding speaker and Collegium member, Gurshkina, was more direct, “We should not liquidate Zhenotdel otherwise all work

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unexpected that even the top Zhenotdel leaders appear to have been taken by surprise,” in “Feminism and Bolshevism,” 368.

<sup>219</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101.

<sup>220</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101 and TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101.

<sup>221</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101

<sup>222</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101.

among women will fall to pieces.”<sup>223</sup> In short, the overwhelming consensus in the archival record is that the Provincial Leningrad Zhenotdel Collegium considered its work too important to be delegated to other organizations and therefore argued that it was premature to consider liquidation. Significantly, no official vote was taken and a motion was passed that the “issue should be forwarded to the Regional Meeting of Zhenotdel Heads of Women Workers and Peasant Women.”<sup>224</sup> However, the issue was not forwarded but was decided by the Politbiuro a month later on 5 January 1930.<sup>225</sup>

During this 5 January 1930 Politbiuro meeting central authorities arrived at the opposite conclusion of Zhenotdel. As a leading party member Lazar Kaganovich explained in the Politbiuro meeting “in view of the fact that work among women has acquired important significance in the present period, it should be carried out by all departments of the Central Committee and, more specifically, it should be continued under the rubric of the successful mass campaigns which the Party organizes in towns and countryside.”<sup>226</sup> In other words, Zhenotdel should and would be disbanded and its activities subsumed under other organizations.

Zhenotdel’s dissolution was part of a broader reorganization of the Central Committee’s departments, including the Department for Work in the Countryside, Statistical Department, and the Jewish Section (Evseksiia). The political scientist Gail Lapidus

<sup>223</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101.

<sup>224</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101.

<sup>225</sup> The Politbiuro decided Zhenotdel’s fate and supports Lapidus’ argument that “[T]he history of Zhenotdel made it clear that whatever supportive role might be assigned to women’s organizations, the liberation of women was not to be the result of action by women on their own behalf but a function of the policies and priorities of the male leadership of the Party,” *Women in Soviet Society*, 93-94.

<sup>226</sup> “Protokol 112: Zasedaniia Politbiuro TsK VKP (b),” RGASPI, f.17, op.3, d.771, l.51 as quoted in Goldman, “Industrial Politics,” 63.

argues that it was fitting that Zhenotdel and Evseksiia were disbanded simultaneously, because “Stalin was preoccupied with deviance rather than with oppression, in both ethnic and sexual politics. His strategy called not for indemnification but for repression, suggesting yet a deeper connection between the twin fates of Zhenotdel and Evseksiia.”<sup>227</sup> Overall, while the connection between the twin fates of Zhenotdel and Evsetskiia has been made, more of an emphasis needs to be drawn between the reorganization of both the Department of Work in the Countryside and Zhenotdel.<sup>228</sup> By March 1930, for example, the International Women's Day slogan was "100% Collectivization!"<sup>229</sup>

How women workers felt about NEP, factory life and the broader Soviet regime is, of course, extremely difficult to gauge. Nonetheless, the preceding discussion does give some clues about how women workers were participating and integrating in the broader Soviet project. Leningrad women workers were indifferent to Red Corners and, most specialized ones for women had collapsed in factories by March 1927. Similarly, workers' clubs, especially for adult and minority women, did not meet their needs. Yuri Slezkine's portrayal of the Soviet Union as a communal apartment (*kommunalka*), where each national group had its own room but shared the kitchen, bathroom, and corridors may well be a useful metaphor to visualize state-nationality relations, but for Leningrad minority women all evidence suggests they stayed in their own room!<sup>230</sup> The building of a coveted “proletarian community” across lines of gender, generation, and nationality did

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<sup>227</sup> Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 80.

<sup>228</sup> See especially Goldman, “Industrial Politics,” and Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 272-274.

<sup>229</sup> Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 344.

<sup>230</sup> Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 414-452.

not occur in Leningrad's clubs. The most active Leningrad club members, predictably, were not located in one particular branch of industry but were found in those factories and plants with the most broad-based social programs. The lynchpin to women's organizing was the factory space and, overall, from Zhenotdel's perspective, worker women were more active, socially engaged and skilled when they predominated in the workforce. A limited activism or integration was practised both by the heroine idealized in the song "Bricks" and by the actual Leningrad county seasonal brick workers. These women brick workers, like the song's heroine, participated marginally in party and soviet organizations. The staggering popularity of the song "Bricks" suggested many during NEP shared the state's vision of limited activism for women (only Sen'ka joins the Party and becomes factory director). The song "Bricks" can be placed alongside the *chastushki* (popular ditties) as "the Bolshevik attempt to reconfigure values for women, a limited willingness to compromise came into being not in the mid-1930s, but existed from the beginning."<sup>231</sup> In effect, when the goals and sacrifices of the First Five-Year Plan required articulation and implementation, the regime had failed to attract some women workers through insufficient funding or inappropriate programs.

When the First Five-Year Plan was introduced, however, there were manifold tensions and labour strife among young and old female workers, male and female workers, unemployed women, and even women worker promotees. The Zhenotdel goal of combining responsible paid work, social work and motherhood became even more

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<sup>231</sup> William B. Husband, "Mythical Communities and the New Soviet Woman: Bolshevik Antireligious *Chastushki*, 1917-1932," *Russian Review* 63, (January 2004): 106. As Husband explains, *chastushki* "revealed the ideals and behavior the revolutionary regime hoped to inculcate among females as well as its view of its intended audience," in "Mythical Communities," 105.

challenging. Predictably, Zhenotdel's ideological paragon remained blue-collar workers; but the conclusion will address some of the ramifications of how this pre-eminence was challenged by the inclusion of a broader cross-section of urban delegates and a massive influx of peasant delegates.



## Conclusion

In the 1920s, Zhenotdel influenced a broad spectrum of women through its programs. However, as a party organization orchestrating a massive plan of urban social engineering, it had decided that how millions of women worked and organized their lives was misguided. Consequently, one's assessment of the entire Zhenotdel project is intimately connected to its demise. Its liquidation has been aptly summarized as "a signal to do away with women's inspectors in NKT (the Commissariat of Labour), organizers in the factories, the women's sectors in Agitmass, and the delegate assemblies."<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the experience of Zhenotdel activists was not unique in the interwar and must be situated in a wider European and Soviet context.

In Weimar Germany, women "worked as welfare inspectors, child and family counselors, and health officers...they served especially on committees dealing with health and education. But the major ministries and offices – economics, defense, interior – remained closed to them."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many Soviet women in the 1920s, like women elsewhere, were negotiating between "family time and industrial time."<sup>3</sup> As Kathleen Canning explains, women's work identities

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 62. Delegate assemblies and delegates' meetings are synonymous.

<sup>2</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 126-127.

<sup>3</sup> This quote is taken from the title of Tamara Hareven's work, *Family Time and Industrial Time: the Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

“refuses the dichotomy between family and factory...and aims instead to explore how identities were shaped by the continual intersections of family time and industrial time, by the locations of family, neighborhood, and community.”<sup>4</sup>

Although this is a nuanced model, for Zhenotdel delegates operating in a predominantly rural country and, by definition, carrying out social work, this model is applicable but does have its limits. Despite other responsibilities, most Zhenotdel delegates were expected to complete internships, conduct campaigns, attend delegates’ meetings and participate in conferences, on a volunteer basis. Paradoxically, delegates were often in the unenviable position of being “interns,” yet expected to manifest exemplary modelling. Significantly, other NEP organizations also often operated with a “volunteer” ethos, and showed similar tensions.<sup>5</sup> This conclusion offers some broad insights on how Zhenotdel’s constituency changed; how archival research has both confirmed and altered the existing historiography; how housewife delegates challenge a continuity paradigm; how Zhenotdel became increasingly “Stalinist” organizationally; and how delegates used party language.

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 222-223.

<sup>5</sup> For example, as Charles E. Clark demonstrates, the Down With Illiteracy Society (ODN) also was teaching skills, but the society members were expected to act as a “school of socialism,” in “Uprooting Otherness.” In addition, Steven Robert Coe discusses how under the conditions of NEP, the volunteer aspect of *sel’kory* were initially lauded for their enthusiasm, but ultimately difficult to control, see “Struggles for Authority in the NEP Village,” 1151-1171. According to Hugh D. Hudson, *sel’kory* were also difficult to manage, see “Shaping the Peasant Political Discourse during the New Economic Policy: the Newspaper *Krestianskaia Gazeta* and the Case of ‘Vladimir ia.’” *Journal of Social History* 36, no.2 (Winter 2002): 303-317.

### Zhenotdel's Constituency

How fully and to what extent most women participated in this project of social engineering is debatable. Zhenotdel fulfilled part of its mandate and funneled delegates on, for instance, to the Leningrad soviet.<sup>6</sup> In balance, Zhenotdel had limited success in facilitating delegates to join the Party in urban centers and were a dismal failure in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> These were some broad trends of women ostensibly politicized, and it is important to keep in mind only a small fraction of women participated in Zhenotdel.<sup>8</sup>

Both nationally and in the Leningrad province, Zhenotdel's constituency fundamentally shifted across the 1920s. Despite the rhetoric in Western literature of Zhenotdel being a "genuine proletarian women's movement," there were far fewer blue-collar worker delegates as a percentage of the total at the end of the decade than at the beginning.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, even in the cities the pre-eminence of

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<sup>6</sup> In 1927, women delegates to the Leningrad soviet came from the following: 35 per cent Zhenotdel delegates, 35 per cent Trade Unions, 25 per cent Komsomol and 5 per cent students, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, d.13246, l.23.

<sup>7</sup> In 1927/28 in eight okrugs of Leningrad Oblast', only 138 of 17,893 (.77 per cent) delegates in the countryside and only 140 of 3,815 (3.7 per cent) delegates in the towns joined the Communist party that year, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.8, d.8, l.121. According to figures from Gozhanskii, Zhenotdel delegates joined the Party in the following Leningrad districts: Tsentral'nyi 102 (7.8 per cent); Petrogradskii 87 (8.1 per cent); Vasil'evskii Ostrov 72 (8.9 per cent); Moskovsko Narvskii 144 (11.7 per cent); Vyborg 137 (13.1 per cent) and Volodarskii 126 (14.7 per cent), see TsGAIPD SPb, (July 1929), f. 24, op.8, d.39, l.65.

<sup>8</sup> According to Chirkov, across the Soviet Union, there were 95,000 delegates in 1922, 620,000 in 1927 and 2.2 million in 1932, *Reshenie*, 93. Krupskaja estimated that 10,000,000 Soviet women passed through the delegates' meetings before they were abolished in 1935, figure quoted in Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, 247.

<sup>9</sup> Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 33. Stites also discusses "the end of the Proletarian Women's Movement," *Women's Liberation*, 344. In 1923/24 in Leningrad blue-collar workers delegates were (72 per cent), white-collar workers (24.7 per cent), housewives (1.4 per cent) and others (1.9 percent), see TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13118, l.18. By the end of the 1920s, the categories were more precise and a perceptible shift in the Leningrad/Kronshadt delegates occurred. For 1928/1929 for Leningrad the delegate breakdown was: blue-collar workers (66.7

blue-collar worker delegates was waning with greater reliance on housewife delegates.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the 1920s, peasant delegates predominated because nationally, “the women who became involved in the local assemblies organized by the Zhenotdel were predominantly peasants (59 percent), with a smaller number being workers (14 percent), white-collar workers (8 percent), and housewives (10.5 percent).”<sup>11</sup> In short, at the grass roots level Zhenotdel was not a “genuine proletarian women’s movement;” the overwhelming majority of its delegates were peasants and the numbers of workers actually diminished. Zhenotdel was now a more inclusive organization and more accurately reflected a broader cross section of women in society. Scholars have accepted Zhenotdel’s proletarian rhetoric in the literature too readily while neglecting its more diverse composition.

From especially 1923 onward, Zhenotdel was exhorted to increase its cohort of peasant women delegates. The organization faithfully complied during NEP, until

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per cent); housewives (15.7 per cent of which worker’s wives were 12.1 per cent); white-collar workers (13.4 per cent); domestics (1.9 per cent) and others (2.7 per cent), see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op, 8, d.35, l.6. For 1927/1928, the delegate breakdown was: blue-collar workers (65.5 per cent); housewives (12.1 per cent of which workers’ wives were 7.9 per cent); white-collar workers (11.8 per cent); lower service personnel (mladshii obsluzhivaiushchii personal, or MOP) 8.3 per cent; and domestics (1.8 per cent), see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op, 8, d.35, l.57. Overall, in Leningrad Province in 1927/1928, of the 37, 657 delegates, peasant delegates were slightly less than the national delegate total at 56 percent of the total, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op, 8, d.35, l.57.

<sup>10</sup> Housewife delegates increased their percentage from 1.4 percent in 1923/24 to 15.7 percent in 1928/1929. Interestingly, from 1928/1929 to 1929/1930, there was considerable anxiety that among Leningrad workers’ wives in all districts there was a drop from 12.1 per cent to 8.7 per cent of delegates, see TsGAIPD, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.57. Possibly, some white-collar workers were now re-classified as MOP, see figures in previous citation.

<sup>11</sup> Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 46. Despite citing these figures, Goldman emphasizes the “working-class” identity of Zhenotdel, she discusses how its demise destroyed “key organizational links between the Party and working-class women” [and] “The fates of both organizations [Zhenotdel and KUTB] were ultimately bound up in a struggle between working-class feminism and productionism....” Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 46 and 35.

by the end of the 1920s Zhenotdel was significantly rural in composition. Ironically, this was not rewarded with the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan: political exigencies shifted rapidly and an overwhelmingly peasant woman delegate membership was potentially dangerous on the eve of collectivization.<sup>12</sup> The broader historiographical significance points to the following paradox: although urban in its ethos, given its rural constituency the liquidation of Zhenotdel perhaps should be viewed not as the “death of a proletarian movement,” but as the “death of a peasant movement.”

#### Comparisons and Confirmations of Organizing Women

A fair portion of this dissertation has been to confirm speculations, or using Donald Raleigh’s words, “cases when the archival record merely confirms what we thought we knew, there is something reassuring about putting to rest speculation about the Soviet other and taking some comfort in the evidence.”<sup>13</sup> Interspersed throughout this study are numerous examples that question most Bolshevik party members’ commitment to Zhenotdel and to the full participation of women in public life. For instance, at the highest level, the archival record confirms categorically Kollontai’s political isolation as Zhenotdel director. Zhenotdel was a flashpoint for broader party rivalries. Kollontai’s vision for Zhenotdel, revealed a fundamental disconnect with key bodies like Orgbiuro and VTsSPS with the latter wanting exclusively to organize women. Workers’

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<sup>12</sup> Similarly, ironically, many Zhenotdel leaders, as well as promotees, as detailed although they had grave misgivings about how the First Five-Year Plan was implemented, supported the goals of the Plan but this loyalty did not save Zhenotdel from liquidation.

<sup>13</sup> Raleigh, “Doing Soviet History,” 18.

Oppositionists, Shliapnikov and Kollontai, sparred against allies, Molotov and Stalin, over convening a Congress of Eastern Women. National leadership ambivalence about the Zhenotdel project not only percolated down to the local level, it often signified NEP's multiple contradictions and uncertainty about how far the Revolution should proceed. Significantly, the low status of Zhenotdel often continued late Imperial trends within the Party of subordinating the "woman question" to the revolution.<sup>14</sup> Studying Zhenotdel and its various constituencies of women, suggests that the revolution had limits and the conservative social trends usually associated with Stalin, began already in the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

There is a high degree of continuity, irrespective of historical era, between high-ranking male trade unionists dismissing unemployed women workers as "princesses" or "housewives" during NEP and trade unionists deriding female worker promotees as "babas" or "women" on the factory floor during the First Five-Year Plan. In the urban centres, Zhenotdel initially assumed that male Bolshevik party members, as either trade union leaders or factory managers, wanted to either retain, or to increase, their female workforce. Similarly, in 1922, during fascinating gendered provincial debates with officials representing the Commissariats of Health, Education and the Militia, the only leaders who

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<sup>14</sup> According to Elwood, "no aspect of the woman question or of Social Democratic work among proletarian women was discussed at party congresses or conferences in the decade before the war," in *Inessa Armand*, 112

<sup>15</sup> See the following scholars who see conservative trends developing in the 1920s: Farnsworth, "Bolshevik Alternatives," 139-165, Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 362-388, Husband, "Mythical Communities," 89-106 and Isabel Tirado, "The Village Voice: Women's Views of Themselves and their World in Russian *Chastushki* of the 1920s." *The Carl Beck Papers*, REES, University of Pittsburgh, no.1008 (1993): 1-67.

protested the isolation of prostitutes in dormitories were from Zhenotdel because they deemed it morally wrong to punish only women, and not men.

Significantly, women workers were not uniformly championed by the Soviet authorities, but they were a more privileged group than peasant women. For instance, unlike urban organizers, some Zhenotdel township organizers were only funded by the Bolshevik party in March (to organize activities to coincide with International Women's Day). This practice that I named "Marchism" works on multiple levels: it is a sardonic departure from "Marxism," it conveys a sense of "progress," it is the type of ebullient catchword favoured in many Bolshevik campaigns, and it is a derivation of the month itself. One space where women, especially peasant women, challenged prescribed roles and expectations were Zhenotdel conferences. In addition, in some townships, peasant women thrived irrespective of their participation in state and party organizations. What does not confirm speculation was the extent to which Zhenotdel relied on housewife delegates.

Although throughout the 1920s Zhenotdel viewed the delegates' meeting as its organizational lynchpin, it adopted a flexible, multifaceted approach to organizing women. Predictably, the logistics of organizing women workers in factories was easier than organizing housewives, prostitutes, peasants or the unemployed. A housewife was to be specifically targeted through her husband's place of work and his workers' clubs was emphasized for organization. Problematically, workers' clubs met the needs of young, single women more than adult, married

and minority women. Zhenotdel's journal *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka* assumed greater importance in the late 1920s because of severe cutbacks to paid organizers; peasants, the unemployed, and housewives who were difficult to access, were particularly reliant on this medium.

### Housewives Challenge A Continuity Paradigm

In terms of continuity between the 1920s and 1930s, Zhenotdel's extensive use of unpaid white-collar housewives for cultural enlightenment work anticipates the wife-activist (*obshchestvennitsa*) movement of voluntary social service work in the middle to late 1930s. Overall, both Zhenotdel's mandate and increasing reliance on unpaid housewives throughout the 1920s questions Rebecca Balmas Neary's argument that the *obshchestvennitsa* movement was "the attempt to formulate a new and uniquely Soviet culture of daily life (*kul'tura byta*) in the 1930s and to devise a system of gender roles which would reinforce that culture."<sup>16</sup> Chapter three emphasized how unpaid housewife delegates were already an integral part of the Zhenotdel delegate system in the 1920s, and by the end of that decade archival evidence highlighted how in one year alone 1,802 delegates in Leningrad city were housewives.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Zhenotdel's emphasis on transforming housewives (*domokhoziaki*) to workers' wives (*zhenrabochi*), was part of a broader project during the NEP. Other scholars have

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<sup>16</sup> Balmas Neary, "Mothering Socialist Society," 397.

<sup>17</sup> For 1928/1929, Zhenotdel, as noted, had 15.1 per cent housewife delegates in Leningrad. In contrast, there were 66.7 per cent women worker delegates who comprised 7,684 women, see TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op, 8, d.39, l.6. In contrast, Balmas Neary's admits, "it is difficult to get an accurate total number of women involved...Official materials usually referred to "many thousands" or "tens of thousands," see "Mothering Socialist Society," 397n.5.



discussed how the domestic servant (*domashniaia prisluga*) was reformed into the domestic worker (*domashnaia rabotnitsa*) and the *batrachka* correspondent, to emphasize that she laboured as a *rabotnitsa* was a *rabkorka*.<sup>18</sup> In balance, most of the historical discussion of housewives has been in the 1930s, and this study has begun to fill a lacuna in the housewife historiography by discussing the 1920s.<sup>19</sup>

### The Stalinist System and Regional Archives

If housewives have largely not been integrated into the historical discussion of the 1920s, Stalin is virtually absent in the Zhenotdel archival record.<sup>20</sup> No doubt Stalin's absence is explained partly by this dissertation's focus largely on a regional archive, the missing Zhenotdel files from 1925-1930 in Moscow, and the liquidation of Zhenotdel virtually at the exact moment when Stalin seals his public bid for power. Nonetheless, in 1928-1929, the Zhenotdel leaders, in the archival record, did not invoke Stalin by name privately, even if they heartily endorsed the First Five-Year Plan publicly.

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<sup>18</sup> For domestics, see respectively Spagnolo, "When Private Home," 235 and *batrachkas*, Farnsworth, "The Rural *Batrachka*," 72. Interestingly, in the urban sphere, Zhenotdel's efforts to target housewives from around 1925 and reconstruct their name parallels efforts with domestics who underwent their transformation under Narpit's auspices in 1924. However, in the rural sphere, it was 1930 before "the journal *Batrachka* became *Sel'sko khoziastvennaia rabotnitsa* (The Woman Agricultural Worker)," but "the older generation remained "batrachkas," see Farnsworth, "The Rural *Batrachka*," 82.

<sup>19</sup> In contrast, housewives and the 1930s *obshchestvennitsa* movement is discussed by: Buckley, "The Untold Story," 569-586; Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured," Balmas Neary, "Mothering Socialist Society," 396-412 and Schrand, "Civic-Minded Women," 126-150.

<sup>20</sup> See Stalin's rationale to not convene the Congress of Eastern Women in chapter one, RGASPI, (26 August, 1921), f.134, op.3, d.37, l.26. In contrast, Leningrad party boss, Sergei Kirov, is invoked by Zhenotdel leaders and occasionally by women workers, see TsGAIPD SPb, (30 March, 1926), f.16, op.13, d.13243, l.36 and TsGAIPD SPb, (3 April, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.35, l.23.

Consequently, in the late 1920s increasing centralization or a “creeping” Stalinism, if indeed that is even the correct phrase, can be measured organizationally. In the crucial 2 December, 1929 provincial Collegium meeting to discuss disbanding Zhenotdel, no vote was held while previous meetings in the early 1920s recorded the Collegium’s voting breakdown.<sup>21</sup> Not only was this evidence of democracy eroding within Zhenotdel, the number of provincial Collegium meetings were cut dramatically by the late 1920s. In 1925, there were 27 Collegium meetings convened annually, and by 1929, only 20.<sup>22</sup>

Archival documentation suggests proof of centralization and further evidence that Zhenotdel was being eclipsed. Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel produced largely a bell curve of documents, and by the late 1920s there was a precipitous decline in available documentation. Although there is the distinct possibility that these documents existed, but have since been destroyed, it is more likely the combination of fewer provincial Collegium meetings, paid organizers and field trips reduced the paper trail. In the heady years from 1927 to the end of 1929, Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel should have been producing reams of documents on all these key campaigns: rationalization; productivity; promotees; the First Five-Year Plan and the preparation of collectivization. Instead, in 1929 for instance, perhaps one of the most important years for women in the 1920s, there were fewer documents available than at any point in the 1920s, and less than fifteen per

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<sup>21</sup> No official vote was taken and a motion was passed that the “issue should be forwarded to the Regional Meeting of Zhenotdel Heads of Women Workers and Women Peasants,” see TsGAIPD SPb, (2 December, 1929), f.24, op.8, d.31, l.101. It was not. In contrast, voting occurred in the Zhenotdel Collegium in 1922, see RGASPI, (21 September, 1922), f.17, op.10, d.3336, ll.1-2.

<sup>22</sup> See TsGAIPD SPb, (1929), f.24, op.8, d.31 and TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16, op.13, d.13146.

cent of 1925's delo total!<sup>23</sup> That decision-making and progressive centralization occurred above Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel and Central Zhenotdel in Moscow, especially in the late 1920s, is suggested by the available dela in their respective Zhenotdel fonds. From 1925-1930 Moscow has only three dela, which contain no Collegium meetings, and in Leningrad of the impressive 818 dela strong Zhenotdel fond, from 1927-1929, there are only 107 dela.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, it can be more productive to study Zhenotdel from provincial repositories because of the relative wealth of documentation both quantitatively and qualitatively. Provincial archives can also help solve outstanding historiographical debates about the center. From Klavdiia Nikolaeva's personal file in the St. Petersburg repository, she was initially pegged for the directorship of Central Zhenotdel in December 1921, and this suggests the original decision to replace Kollontai occurred well before her publication of the *Workers' Opposition* in the spring of 1922. Again, despite public proclamations of support for disbanding Zhenotdel, the archival record definitively settles the matter.<sup>25</sup>

Provincial Zhenotdel leaders in Leningrad in December 1929 opposed

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<sup>23</sup> In 1925, there were 114 dela, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, dd.13034-13147. In 1929 there were 16 dela, see f.24, op.8, dd.31-46. My regional study supports Kevin Murphy's case study in that "The focus on NEP is intentional: this was the golden era for documentary evidence about Soviet society, precisely because lively and animated voices from below could still be heard," *Revolution and CounterRevolution*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Each successive year the number of dela declined; there were sixty-seven in 1927, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, dd.13302-13244 and f.24, op.8, d.1; 1a; 1b; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; and in 1928 there were twenty-four, see TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.13, dd.7-30 and in 1929 there were sixteen dela, see f.24, op.8, dd.31-46. In Moscow, as repeatedly mentioned in this dissertation, only three dela are available for the post-1925 period, f.17, op.10, d.494, d.495 and delo 496. Delo 494 covers 1927-28, delo 495, 1927 and delo 496, 1931 and were added to the Zhenotdel fond on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1991. For confirmation see N. I. Dubinina, *Istoricheskii opit deiatel'nosti KPSS po razvitiu sotsial'no aktivnosti zhenshchin, 1917-1941* (Moskva, 1983), 16.

<sup>25</sup> Nikolaeva and Artiukhina "outwardly supported the decision" in Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 56.

vociferously the liquidation of Zhenotdel. In all likelihood, this was how a majority of Central Zhenotdel leaders felt although we can make no definitive conclusions until more information manifests itself because not only is the Central Zhenotdel fond devoid of complete documentation, including Collegium meetings, but the former central party archives has no party personal file on the last director Artiukhina. In short, as far as Zhenotdel is concerned, provincial archives trump central ones.

Nonetheless, caution is merited because archival access does “not hold answers to all of the pressing questions that concern historians.”<sup>26</sup> Consequently, there is still a great deal of value in Hayden’s pre-archival dissertation because it is generally thoughtful scholarship, irrespective of archival access. In my study, the files are generally silent, even in the St. Petersburg repository with intact personal party files, on why leaders were selected and subsequently removed from a posting.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the Zhenotdel fonds have very little financial information (budgets, payroll and so on) pertaining to this organization, which was very frustrating from the point of historical examination, but quite revealing in that these decisions were clearly made entirely at the party organizational level.

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<sup>26</sup> Raleigh, “Doing Soviet History,” 18.

<sup>27</sup> Most appointments are not directly explained in either the St. Petersburg or Moscow repositories. Exceptions to this were Maria Pozdeeva and Maria Shitkina. The former left because of child-care responsibilities, see the letter TsGAIPD SPb, (29 November, 1923), f.16, op.13, d.12902, l.77. Shitkina was made head of Leningrad Provincial Zhenotdel because of “Zinovievite opposition,” see her personal file, TsGAIPD SPb, (27 September, 1933), f.1728, d.423296, ll.11-12.

### Language

It is women's own voice that this dissertation has attempted continually to integrate into Zhenotdel's narrative. This is the first study to examine extensively Leningrad's Zhenotdel journal *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*, vital given the subject material, but it does shift the focus away from the traditional, Moscow-centric emphasis on *Kommunistka*, *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa*.<sup>28</sup> This study has culled the archival fonds and included questionnaires from 1,192 women who answered detailed questions on *Rabotnitsa i krest'ianka*; questionnaires from 698 Zhenotdel delegate club members and, the aforementioned questionnaires from 155 new Zhenotdel delegates effectively on political consciousness.<sup>29</sup> Added to this mix, stenographic records of Zhenotdel conferences have been analyzed and then selections of women's speeches folded into the dissertation. In particular, the combination of access to conference material and to questionnaires, has not only expanded our knowledge of Zhenotdel delegates, but has provided invaluable insights on women workers and women often neglected in the 1920s, peasant women, white-collar workers, housewives and prostitutes.

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<sup>28</sup> Scholars have traditionally employed these journals. Attwood's study examines specifically *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka* in *Creating the New Soviet Woman*. In the pre-archival era Hayden in "Feminism and Bolshevism," relies extensively on *Kommunistka*; but these journals are still quite heavily used by Wood in *The Baba and the Comrade* and Clements in *Bolshevik Women*.

<sup>29</sup> In total, 1,192 women answered the questionnaire and from this number 722 were workers (out of which 382 were unskilled and 340 skilled workers); 261 peasant women; 118 white-collar workers and 91 housewives, TsGAIPD SPb, (1925), f.16; op.13, d.13122, l.1. The 698 Zhenotdel club delegates' file was located at RGASPI, (1923), f.17, op.10, d.418, l.128.

For instance, it was not only Zhenotdel leaders and other party officials who invoked party norms in the archival record, but many so-called ordinary women.<sup>30</sup> The eighteen year-old prostitute, Ekaterina Mikhailovna, cleverly constructed her life story as a conflation of vulnerability and collectivism. She reaffirmed her humanity, loyalty and pledge for Zhenotdel assistance with “prostitutes are people who struggle for soviet rule.”<sup>31</sup> Peasant women challenged Bolshevik stereotypes of themselves as dark, ignorant, or benighted in Zhenotdel conferences but they frequently employed the Bolshevik language of equality to dispel those same stereotypes. Similarly, women worker promotees often accepted party norms and sprinkled their speeches with attacks against specialists, bureaucrats or peasants. Predictably, female promotees were generally more critical of their treatment by males whether on the factory floor or in authority positions than Zhenotdel or party leaders. In some respects, this dissertation has come full circle from chapter one where 155 Petrograd urban women explained in their own words, using their own language, why over ninety percent of them did not speak up at meetings in 1920. Compared to the female promotees during the First Five-Year Plan, the Petrograd women are less articulate and they have not yet mastered party norms but, also interestingly, the Petrograd women speak more distinctly in their own voice.

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<sup>30</sup> According to Sheila Fitzpatrick, the inclusion of archival data “basically tell us is that the leaders used the same language in private as they used in public...,” *Cultural Revolution Revisited*, *Russian Review* 58, no.2 (April 1999): 203.

<sup>31</sup> TsGAIPD SPb, (1926), f.16, op.13, d.13242, l.56. Briefly, she was abandoned as a child, raised in a children’s home, and after a bout of unemployment, was forced into prostitution.

In conclusion, Zhenotdel's history conforms to broader historiographical trends. Central Zhenotdel's frequent requests for basic information from its branches point to disorganization and poor control over the locality. The provincial party organization not only ignored orders from the Central Committee and Central Zhenotdel, but issued contradictory orders. There was little consensus on what broader NEP society and state could and should be in the 1920s. The vociferous debates on, for instance, unemployment and prostitution, punctuated that there was limited room in the "proletarian" fold. Zhenotdel activists lacked financial and jurisdictional autonomy, faced party ambivalence and hostility, and operated largely with volunteers. In 1908, Kollontai voiced her disapproval of Russian feminists in philanthropic societies who "cannot empty out the ocean of pain and misery created by the capitalist exploitation of hired labour with the teaspoon of charity."<sup>32</sup> Zhenotdel definitely subsisted on a socialist "teaspoon of charity." Thus, with multiple contradictions and tensions, Zhenotdel was an unworkable organization.

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<sup>32</sup> Kollontai, *Social Bases*, 109 as quoted in Stites, *Women's Liberation*, 437.

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- fond 134, opisi 1, 3, 4 (Aleksandra Kollontai)
- fond 151, opis 1 (Petr Germogenovich Smidovich)
- fond 151, opis 2 (Sofia Nikolaevna Smidovich)

TsGAIPD SPb (Central State Archive of Historico-Political Records of St.Petersburg, formerly the Party Archive of the Institute of Party History of the Leningrad Oblast Committee of the CPSU)

- fond 16, opis 13
- fond 24, opis 8
- fond 1728, delo 338948 (Praskoviia Frantsevna Kudelli)
- fond 4000, opis 5, delo 4445 (Ludmila Rudolfovna Menzhinskaia)
- fond 1728, delo 201890 (Klavdiia Ivanovna Nikolaeva)
- fond 1728, delo 488425 (Maria Vasil'evna, Pozdeeva)
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