

WOMEN IN TRANSITION: THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA POST 1989

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The author attempts to discern the position of women in an economic and social context during the period of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia. He discusses changes that have occurred in the post-Communist countries of Slovakia and Czechia. He focuses on the two social variables of child care and the division of domestic labor and the three labor market issues of unemployment, sexually differentiated jobs, and wage differentials. The comparison between the Czech and Slovak Republics and Communist Czechoslovakia, provides some useful insights into the cultural and policy trends.

INTRODUCTION

The Czech and Slovak Republics have experienced a great deal of change since the 1989 "Velvet Revolution" which broke the Communist Party's control over Czechoslovakia. Under Communist rule, women were strongly encouraged to enter the labor force. Being a "burden" on society by not working was looked down upon. In these conditions, women became almost an equal presence in the labor force as men. Childcare and maternity leave were heavily subsidized by the government. Since the introduction of a market economy, however, women have been leaving the labor force through lay-offs, choice, and lack of job availability at a much faster rate than men.

Czechoslovakian women on average work longer hours than men in the labor force and receive less pay for their efforts, because of the nature of the work that is available to them. In addition, women have almost complete responsibility over the unpaid domestic labor required to run a family which greatly hinders their ability to gain better employment circumstances. In light of these facts, it is my belief that structural adjustment policies enacted by Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia see the manipulation of women's labor as a method to quench unemployment, reduce government subsidies, and provide a cheap labor force when needed.

Structural adjustment policies in these countries have seen the removal of women from the labor force, into the home, as the best way to reduce unemployment figures and at the same time a way to cut government budgets by closing many subsidized childcare facilities. Women are therefore priced out of the labor market, where many of them want to be, by extremely high childcare cost that exceed their earnings. At the same time, structural adjustment policies try to retain choices for men. Women are then placed in a position of limited access to the labor market and often can return only as a source of cheap labor.

One issue that must be dealt with, in order to determine if structural adjustment policies do manipulate women's labor as a means to an end, consists of what changes in these countries' social and labor market structures have occurred to change the economic status of women. In this process, the two social factors of childcare and the division of domestic labor will be examined along with the three labor market factors of unemployment rates, sex segregated occupations, and wage rate differences between men and women. These factors are critical to determine what changes have occurred in the Czech and Slovak Republics and what effects they have had on women. By isolating and discussing these factors, on which some information is available, I hope to create a framework for approaching women's issues in these two republics.

The women of the Czech and Slovak Republics seem to reject the ideas and positions of Western feminism. This stems from the different direction Czecho-Slovak women seem to have taken from their Western counterparts due to the policies of the Communist government. These policies pushed women into the work force in numbers that far exceeded those in the West at the time. Now, some Czecho-Slovak women claim to only want to be able to remove themselves from the labor market if they wish.¹ This desire is understandable in light of the circumstances under totalitarian rule; just as the Czecho-Slovakian women's rejection of Western feminism can be comprehended in the historical context of the country. There is a hope among some writers on women's issues from the Czech and Slovak Republics that women will instead find a new, specifically female discourse. "Women who have had the experience of living under totalitarian regimes will not merely mimic men but will discover a new form of political participation and leadership with enough space for solidarity, one that will uphold our "traditional" female qualities."² This hope is not completely out of place in the Czech and Slovak Republics. There is, however, a basic need by women to be critical of their situation and their relation to men in society. There are some severe inequities found between men and women in both the labor force and the domestic realm. These inequalities and their effect on women have to be examined with

¹ See for example "Do Czech Women Need Feminism?" by Jiřina ŠMEJKALOVÁ.

² From "Are Women in Central and Eastern Europe Conservative?" by Jiřina ŠIKLOVÁ, in FUNK, Nanette and Magda MUELLER, eds. *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*.

respect to the issues of women's choice and vulnerability. These inequalities must be addressed by women in the Czech and Slovak Republics in some forum, because women's choices in the labor market are being severely diminished through governmental economic reform policies. This means women are becoming more vulnerable to divorce, poverty, and domestic violence through highly dependant relationships to men.

The initial stage of my work will consist of a basic review of the pertinent literature on this subject; identifying what issues are dealt with and more importantly what issues have been left untouched. The issues that are brought up in the literature will be critically discussed as to their merit and accuracy. In addition, this section will provide background information on the issue of gender in the whole of Central Europe in order to place the Czechoslovakian case in context.

The next section of my paper will attempt to discern the position of women in an economic and social context during the period of Communist rule, in terms of the factors that I isolated above. I will focus on the way Czechoslovakia approached the issue of gender. While it is clear that in Czechoslovakia women played a major role in the work force, it is not clear how and why they played this role. Also, the issues of the division of domestic labor and what status was accorded working women will be approached in order to make a comparison later between the Communist and post-Communist gender realities. This section will briefly touch upon public policy concerning gender, but will mainly focus on the basic division of labor both in the work place and outside the work place and how societal forces affirmed those divisions.

In the next section, I will discuss changes that have occurred in the post-Communist countries of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. I will focus on the two social variables of child care and the division of domestic labor and the three labor market issues of unemployment, sexually differentiated jobs, and wage differentials. In this section, I will try to isolate the importance of the various factors discussed in terms of their impact on women.

I will conclude my analysis by trying to discern the net effects of the economic transition on women in the Czech and Slovak Republics. In addition, I will try to isolate the factors that are most influential on the issue of women. The comparison between the Czech and Slovak Republics and Communist Czechoslovakia, will provide some useful insights into the cultural and policy trends that will continue to affect the issue of gender in the two Republics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on women and gender issues in Central Europe is sparse. Gender issues are very close to the bottom of the public agenda in the region and this is made apparent by the small quantity of literature on gender issues as compared with works on economics and development, for example. The whole framework for

discussion of post-revolution study on gender issues seems to be uncertain, even among the few people who have attempted to publish works on the issue. Also, there is a great lack of hard data sources available concerning women. Due to the lack of hard data, many empirical analyses concerning Central European countries have gaping holes. Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic have been given more attention in the available literature than most of the other countries in Central Europe.

There is a dearth of literature on the gender issues of post-Communist Central Europe. There was quite a bit of writing done by the Communists on the issue in the form of Communist propaganda as to the superiority of Communism to the capitalist Western systems. Little work, however, was done on the problems associated with gender divisions that did exist during Communism. This trend has been carried over into post-Communist Central Europe, where gender issues have often been relegated to the bottom of the academic and public policy agenda.

Many of the authors who are writing on these issues seek to distance themselves from Western notions of feminism and try to avoid framing gender problems in similar ways as Western theorists.³ This by itself is not a weakness and can even be seen as a strength. The Central European gender experience is vastly different in some key ways from the West. While Western women were trying to give themselves the choice to leave the home and go to work, the women of Central Europe were almost forcibly added to the work force. The dilemma of this is that simply rejecting many aspects of Western feminist thought in itself is not a replacement for a framework for discussing gender issues. The impetus is on these theorists to create some framework that can be used to construct dialogue that is pertinent to gender issues in Central Europe.

The final problem that all the literature faces is a substantial lack of data concerning gender and gender related issues. Post-revolution statistics are almost non-existent for some countries and every country's statistics are incomplete in their efforts to isolate issues of gender. The main reason for this is simply a lack of desire or interest on the part of the governments to isolate gender pertinent data.

GENDER AND COMMUNIST RULE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

During the period of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, women were the focus of an ideological and practical transformation. The Communist government espoused the idea of egalitarianism across gender lines. The government, to varying degrees at various time periods, needed women to fill positions in the labor force. These two factors combined to create strong social and economic pressures to push women in great numbers, regardless of their wishes, into the labor force. There was

³ See for example, Jiřina ŠMEJKALOVÁ-STRICKLAND "Do Czech Women Need Feminism?".

often a need for both parents to work in order to support the family. In fact, in 1988, 46% of the labor force in Czechoslovakia was made up of women.⁴ Various factors that minimized women's access to the labor market served to destroy the illusion of gender equality that the ideology of the Communists espoused. These factors included childcare, division of domestic, unemployment, genderization of jobs, and wage differentials.

Childcare

Central European countries developed a system of quality, low cost childcare facilities subsidized by the state, that enabled women to enter the labor market in such large numbers. In Czechoslovakia, there was also an extensive system of paid maternity leave available for women allowing them to stay home, with a guarantee of job security at the conclusion of the leave. This maternity leave seems to have been shortened and lengthened several times in direct response to needs in the labor market. This maternity leave was available to both men and women, but men almost never left employment to take care of children.^{5,6}

Division of Domestic Labor

Marxist ideology calls for the socialization of housework to solve the issue of the division of domestic labor. The reality of the situation under Communism was that little investment was made on the part of the state to facilitate the socialization of housework. Household time saving appliances were not given any priority in the scheme of production. Furthermore, in practice, many household tasks cannot be shared and one person must take charge to accomplish them. This person was inevitably the woman in Czechoslovakia during Communism. The almost sole responsibility for many extremely time consuming household jobs inevitably gave women a lower status in the work place. This was the case because women had less time to devote to work and they would be the ones to have to take off work to take care of sick children or parents. These domestic jobs were unpaid and the time they took often directly conflicted with advancement in the workplace. Marianne Ferber sums this idea up, stating that "Communism officially espoused equality for women in the labor market and in society, but virtually ignored the reality that their role in the household often made this meaningless in practice."⁷ Ferber goes on to point out that it is a commonly held opinion that women often did not demand greater access to higher levels on the career path because of their family commitments.

⁴ FONG, Monica S. and Gillian PAUL, "The Changing Role of Women in Employment in Eastern Europe" table #5.

⁵ FONG and PAUL, pp. 21-22.

⁶ Only 2 men in 1990 took childrearing leave in Czechoslovakia, (HEINEN, note # 42).

⁷ FERBER, Marianne, "Women in the Czech Republic: Jumping from One Frying Pan into Another," p. 5.

This placed great stress on women who had to try to hold down full-time jobs and do most of the domestic labor.

Unemployment

There was no reported unemployment in Czechoslovakia during the Communist period. In 1985, over 60% of women 15 years old and above participated in the labor force as opposed to 78% of men. These levels of participation in labor force are more even in comparison with Western Europe, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries. Although similar data on Czechoslovakia was unavailable, in Poland, in the 80s, there was on average, only .10 unemployed women per job advertised.⁸ The ease at which jobs were found and the family units' need for two incomes placed women in a position where they had little choice but to work.

Gender Employment Distinctions

There was a very blatant distinction on which employment was divided between men and women in Communist Czechoslovakia. While women constituted 46% of the labor force in the country, women only occupied 41% of the jobs in the higher paid production area and had 60% of the lower wage non-production area jobs.⁹ Women dominated service sector areas of home trade, education, health services, and social care with a three-fourths majority.¹⁰ These sectors were given a low wage priority by the government.¹¹ In the area of industry, which the Communist Government made the most lucrative in terms of wages, women only occupied 41% of jobs.¹² There is also a trend for the industrial jobs held by women to be in the lower priority industries like clothing production, while men had much greater numbers in higher paying heavy industry jobs.

Gender Wage Differentials

A large wage differential also existed between working men and working women in Czechoslovakia. Around the time of the velvet revolution, the average female worker only made 69% of what the typical male worker made. It should be noted that this figure is not significantly different from most Western European countries. In some sectors, women enjoyed a slightly smaller differential between their earnings compared to men, most notably agriculture and trade. Even in sectors dominated by women, men earned considerably more. For example, health services,

⁸ FONG and PAUL, table# 10.

⁹ FONG and PAUL, table #5.

¹⁰ FONG and PAUL, table #5.

¹¹ HEINEN, Jacqueline, "The Re-Integration Into the Work of Unemployed Women: Issues and Policies," p. 2.

¹² FONG and PAUL, table #5.

in which women held a large majority of jobs, women only earned 66% of what men earned.¹³ One interesting note on this issue is that the wage differential becomes much smaller between university trained men and women (87%) and the differential also generally decreases with the age group. This means that university trained women 26 years of age or under earn between 90% and 99% of what their male counterparts make and women, for some time, have made up about half of the university student body.¹⁴ This points to education as one key towards reducing wage differentials in the future.

Women in Czechoslovakia, and Central Europe as a whole, had a very unique position in the world under Communism. The ideology of the government dictated equality between the sexes, but this was not the case in practice. Instead, women were equal in the sense that they were in the labor force at an almost equal level to men, but they received less money and had less access to higher level positions. The government did provide certain amenities like childcare and maternity leave that allowed women to work, but manipulated these subsidies to trim or expand the labor force as was needed. In times of labor need, the government reduced maternity leave and expanded childcare benefits, while during times of labor surplus the government decreased childcare benefits and increase maturity leave. In addition, the government did nothing to alleviate the inequities in the area of housework which put women at a substantial disadvantage in the work place.¹⁵

POST-COMMUNIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA: THE CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLICS

It is clear that Czechoslovakian women did not have an equal footing in the labor market, even though they were seen as equal in the discourse and laws of the country. This attempted “emancipation from above”¹⁶ did not succeed. The transition towards market economies in both the Czech and Slovak regions of former Czechoslovakia, however, appears to have reduced any advantages women did have in these countries. The structural adjustment to market economies has relied

¹³ FONG and PAUL, table #12.

¹⁴ FONG and PAUL, table #14, 15, and #17.

¹⁵ See for examples, Marianne FERBER pp. 1–7, Sharon WOLCHIK, pp. 101–102, or Elzbieta MATYNIA, pp. 353–361.

¹⁶ By this I refer to the thesis as presented by Elzbieta Matynia, which describes the Czechoslovakian/Communist movement towards women’s emancipation and equality as being based on the conception that equality in the eyes of the law and in the discourse of the political and economic system was enough to conclude that women in practice were emancipated and equal. It was believed that pressing women into the work force in great numbers would give them economic independence and emancipate them. This ideal, Matynia argues, was mitigated by the dual role of women’s labor in the workplace and in the home and the forced nature of the emancipation.

on women to accept the bulk of negative aspects of the policies. These structural adjustments have counted on many of these women to remove themselves from the labor force during the transition period to reduce unemployment. The policies achieve this by removing or greatly impairing the childcare benefits that women needed in order to move into the work place. The governments save money by reducing subsidies, at the same time women's choices are limited. This has taken place at the same time that maternity leave has been curtailed to limit women's re-access to jobs. There is still a need for women in the work force as a source of cheap labor to drive the transition economy. Women make up a large part of service sector work force which makes them critical as cheap labor in the movement away from heavy manufacturing to the service sector.

Childcare

Childcare has been perhaps the most devastated area concerning women's choice in the workplace. There is little hard data or study done on the effects of transition on the overall state of childcare in either the Czech Republic or Slovakia, but all the literature agrees that there has been a significant disinvestment in childcare by the government and private business in order to reduce budget deficits.¹⁷ This decision of disinvestment in childcare was made by the government as a specific restructuring choice to move child-bearing women out of the labor market. "In Czechoslovakia, the capacity of day nurseries and preschool facilities has declined by 25 and 20 per cent respectively in both parts of the country before partition.... the explicit goal of the government was to relieve pressure on the labor market by making young women take care of their children."¹⁸

In a discussion I had with the director of the local nursery school in the Slovak village of Ihač, in 1993, it became clear that there was an attempt by the government to save money by reducing school budgets with a heavy emphasis on cuts in early child education. This school provided service for a relatively small village of between 300-400 people, but there was a high demand for childcare for children between the ages of 2 and 5. The demand came from the great part of the population of the village who had to travel 20km to the larger city of Žiar nad Hronom to find employment. There was almost no chance for employment, full or part-time, in the village itself and many shopping needs also had to be taken care of outside the village. This meant that residents relied on the nursery school to care for their children and to allow them to find work and do domestic labor. Since the women of the village were the primary childcare givers, this nursery school was extremely important to them. The director of the school who used to have two full-time employees, in 1993 had to get by with one part-time helper. In addition, there was

¹⁷ See for example Marianne FERBER, p. 9.

¹⁸ See footnote #27, in Jacqueline HEINEN.

no budget for breakfast and lunches, medicine or any other material purchases, which were previously provided. The future of the school was in doubt, which meant the future of Ihač women's participation in the labor force was in doubt.

The story of Ihač is rather extreme because of its relative isolation, but the issues remain consistent throughout both the Czech Republic and Slovakia as to the future ability of women to make choices as to their participation in the workplace. As nursery schools are closed or their budgets are cut back, women, in most cases, will either have to look to private care options, or because these private care structures are very expensive, they will have to remove themselves from the work place to take care of their children. This is occurring at the same time the government is providing a slightly greater incentive to take an extended maternity leave,¹⁹ but is providing less emphasis on women returning to the marketplace in their former jobs or equivalent positions.

"The ability of women to undertake employment in the future may be inhibited by the closing of state and enterprise childcare facilities, while private sector alternatives are insufficient and are too expensive for the average household. In addition, employers are reluctant to hire women if they are required to provide costly childcare facilities for their employees."²⁰ This points to the fact that not only will women be forced out of the market place because of expensive or non-existent childcare, but that they also will be segregated out of the workplace because of employers' fear, unwillingness, or inability to provide childcare. Women may, in fact, not be considered for certain position, just because of the lack of reasonable childcare available in a country that once could boast one of the most universally available childcare systems in the world. This is already seen in former Czechoslovakia, in advertisements for jobs that read, for example, "wanted: male engineer".²¹

The effects of this issue on women's choices are extreme. The government in its attempts to restructure the economy is specifically reducing the choices of women. Many members of both the Czech Republic and Slovakia governments have stated that there is too high a level of women participating in the workforce.²² The restructuring strategy, in terms of childcare, is clear: eliminate the availability of childcare, provide slightly larger benefits for a longer period of time on maternity leave, and let private childcare price the majority of childbearing women out of the labor market. In response, the government will be able to cut "welfare expendi-

¹⁹ The maternity benefit level was increased in Czechoslovakia in 1990 as part of the Parental Allowance/Maternity Allowance rate and the length of the allowance was increased from one to three years, (FONG and PAUL, p. 23).

²⁰ FONG and PAUL, p. 28.

²¹ This idea is presented by Elzbieta MATYNIA on page 354.

²² See for example Sharon WOLCHIK, p.102 or Marianne FERBER, p. 9.

tures”, reduce unemployment,²³ and remove the “social evil” created by the Communists of too many women in the workforce. This strategy, however, defeats the idea of allowing women more choices in moving in and out of the workforce, which was the initial complaint against the “emancipation from above” concept that forced women into the workplace. Now instead of forcing women into the workplace and providing childcare, the restructuring program is forcing women out of the workplace by removing childcare options.

The issue of affordable quality childcare should be the centerpiece of efforts by women to retain the opportunity to exercise choice concerning the labor market. It is not enough for Czecho-Slovak women to simply believe that the Communist government forced them into the labor market and now they want to be able to leave it. Instead, the issue of choice should be the top priority and affordable quality childcare is directly tied to choice. Czecho-Slovak women should be able to exit the labor market if they so choose, but this should not be accomplished at the expense of the most important tool, affordable quality childcare, available to women to move in and out of the work force. Once the tool of childcare is gone, women who decide they want to or need to participate in the labor force will often find they are not able. Where the Communists forced women into the labor market, the Czech and Slovak Republics without available childcare will force women out of the labor market or severely limit the choices they have in how to participate. This will serve to place women in positions of more extreme vulnerability to divorce and domestic violence²⁴ because of their increased reliance on a male “bread winner” and their inability to break that relationship of dependance.

Division of Domestic Labor

The inequitable division of domestic labor serves to limit women’s choices in the labor market. The impact of this inequitable division has recently been accentuated by the removal of childcare facilities and subsidies. As discussed previously concerning Communist Czechoslovakia, women in both the Czech and Slovak Republics are still the main providers of childcare and the main providers of all types of domestic labor. There is an estimate quoted in the Ferber piece that states, “(Women) with 42.5²⁵ working hours a week, 4–5 hours of housework a day, commuting to work and standing in queues, a mother of two is left with only 5–7 hours of sleep a day, and close to nothing for developing her own personality.”²⁶ With men’s working hours estimated at three hours less than women’s,²⁷ and the

²³ Women on maternity leave are not counted as unemployed.

²⁴ The reported rates of divorce and domestic violence in both the Czech and Slovak Republics are increasing.

²⁵ Another work by Liba PAUKERT showed women work 44.7 hours and men only 41.7, p. 624.

²⁶ Given as a footnote (#11) on page 7 of Marianne FERBER’s piece.

²⁷ See Liba PAUKERT, p. 624.

extra 4–5 hours of domestic labor required of women per day, women end up working about 7–8 hours per day more than their male counterparts.²⁸

All the effects that this inequitable division of domestic labor on women during the restructuring period in the Czech and Slovak Republics are unclear, but it is very clear that the additional responsibilities placed on women serve to limit their roles and choices in the labor market. “A large percentage of women ... deliberately chose lower paid jobs that did not require very demanding work and that allowed them to cope quite comfortably with their household duties.”²⁹ Retraining and reeducation programs are harder to fit into women’s schedules, the added stress of having little time to relax can effect their ability to be productive at work, and gaining the attention or production necessary for promotions may be impossible due to a lack of time. Women are often the ones who have to take time off from work to care for sick children, which makes them more expensive and less desirable employees than men. In all women have less flexibility and less business appeal due to the 4–5 hours of domestic work required per day. This forces women to take jobs that may allow them more flexibility, but are not as appealing in terms of type of work, salary, and advancement opportunities. This serves to limit women’s access to the most productive and desirable areas of the work force and gives them lower status in the society because of their occupation of areas of lower productivity.

Finally, as GNP rises in both parts of former Czechoslovakia, there is likely to be an increase in the number of women wanting to and trying to enter the labor market, similar to trends in other European countries. This is the case because women, responsible for domestic work, seek paid employment to buy consumer goods to minimize their domestic labor time requirements. This trend combined with the fact that 40% of Czecho-Slovak working women would refuse to become a housewife and only 28% would be happier quitting their job and staying at home, shows that women will remain a force in the labor market despite domestic labor inequalities.³⁰

Women who reject Western notions of feminism and call for a uniquely Czecho-Slovak approach to women’s issues cannot ignore the vast inequitable division of domestic labor. It is very clear that the unequal distribution of domestic labor has severely limited women’s choices in the labor force due to the large amounts of time required for completing domestic tasks. Domestic labor must be more evenly distributed or women will never be valued in the labor force on an equal level with men. This will continue to leave women with fewer choices in the labor market and

²⁸ It is, also, interesting to note that by including domestic hours worked as unpaid labor into the total hours worked by women, the wage differential between men and women, that will be discussed later, is much greater.

²⁹ Hana HAVELKOVÁ, “A Few Prefeminist Thoughts” from FUNK and MUELLER, eds..

³⁰ Liba PAUKERT, pp. 620-621.

strengthen their dependant relation towards men that often leaves women vulnerable to abuse and poverty.

Unemployment

Unemployment seems to be a significant problem for women in post-Communist Czechoslovakia. Women have in many cases been the first to be laid-off and face long-term unemployment in order to protect the male "bread winner",³¹ women are kept out of some high growth areas through discriminatory practices, and women are often the ones placed in the increasing category of the part-time labor force, which often marginalizes their labor efforts.

Women are much more likely to be affected by long-term unemployment than their male counterparts. This is the case because of "the tendency, on the part of both the governments and employers, to perceive men as heads of household and to consider that they should be given priority in employment."³² Long-term unemployment is not the specific domain of women, but they have a rate of long-term unemployment that is 3 points higher than men in the Czech Republic and 9 points higher than men in the Slovak Republic.³³ This is accentuated by the fact that retraining programs and employment offices are definitely focused on reemploying the male "bread winner" and women do not feel comfortable or confident with these mechanisms.^{34,35}

A very dynamic area of growth in the economies of the Czech and Slovak Republics is in the area of self-employment. This area, however, seems to be almost completely shut off to women because of discriminatory practices in granting loans.³⁶ This distinction can be seen in a survey that shows only half the number of women as men planning to start or thinking about starting their own business. This same survey found that 44% of women and 45% of men felt that entrepreneurship is mainly a male sector and women should only provide help.³⁷ This attitude is likely derived from the fact that women, because of the time constraints of their domestic responsibilities, are believed to be unable to put in the necessary time to make an entrepreneurial effort successful. This shows there are definite social and structural barriers for women to enter this lucrative sector.

One of the tools that the governments of the Czech Republic and Slovakia have utilized in trying to control unemployment is to encourage the growth of the part-

³¹ Jacqueline HEINEN, p. 4.

³² Jacqueline HEINEN, p. 13.

³³ Jacqueline HEINEN, footnote #16.

³⁴ Jacqueline HEINEN, footnote #45, #15, and p. 14 and p. 11.

³⁵ FONG and PAUL, pp. 26-27.

³⁶ Jacqueline HEINEN, p. 11.

³⁷ Liba PAUKERT, p. 629.

time labor sector. Dividing up full-time work into part-time work can obviously accommodate more individuals thus decreasing unemployment. In addition, since women are the main contributors in the labor force of part-time work, this allows them the time and flexibility to provide the domestic labor, especially childcare, that the government no longer wants to pay to provide.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, women are often forced to move into the part-time work market due to the increasing monetary demands on the family,³⁸ the shrinking permanent job market, and the increase in domestic labor responsibilities. The flexible hours of these jobs often attract women with domestic responsibilities, such as children or care for older parents. Many of these same women are unable to find permanent jobs that would allow them to cover the cost childcare or other domestic labor. Once in these part time positions, the trend, as in other European countries, has been for this type of labor to be marginalized. The limited earning power of these part time positions also makes women vulnerable to increasing rates of divorce and domestic violence. This is the case because part-time work does not give women economic independence and forces them to rely on their male partner for financial support. Therefore, the Czech and Slovak governments encouraging the use of part-time work to help reduce unemployment and move women out of competition for the male “bread winners” jobs, is very problematic for women.

The tight control of the Communist government is being replaced with the tight controls of the patriarchal slanted economic system.³⁹ Women are now more commonly considered a source of cheap labor, whose role is only to complement the male “bread winner” in the market. In addition, women are supposed to facilitate the male’s role in society as the main “bread winner” by supplying unpaid domestic labor and providing for the next generation of male “bread winners” through unpaid childcare. This means the Communist economic system, of inducing women to become integral, albeit slightly less important, contributors to families’ financial viability, is being replaced by a systems that sees men’s work as all important and women as a source of cheap market labor and unpaid domestic labor. This will only serve to further marginalize the position of women in society.

Gender Employment Distinctions

This is one area where women seem to suffer less a disadvantage to men simply because of the Communist’s structural allocation of labor resources being so contradictory to its modern Western economic counterparts. Women were highly employed in the lower paid service sector, while men had the majority of higher paid heavy-manufacturing jobs. With the restructuring towards a market economy that relies heavily on the service sector, men often lack the skills or the adaptability

³⁸ 76% of Czechoslovakian Women surveyed in 1981 said they work because of economic necessity as opposed to 40% in a similar survey in 5 EU countries (PAUKERT, p. 620).

³⁹ Marianne FERBER, p. 12.

of women to fit into the growing service sector.⁴⁰ In addition, some of the highest paying jobs in the service sector are “female” positions. These include working in the growing banking and finance industries as well as tourism.

In addition, the light industry sector, dominated by women, seems to be an area of possible growth. Goods such as glass, china, ceramics, furniture and wood products all retain a relatively strong foreign market. These sectors tied to exports of finished goods, with high skill added value, are one possible source of future increases in female employment.⁴¹

This sector’s future is in direct contrast to the heavy industrial sector and the engineering sector. The previously lucrative heavy industrial sector that had restricted women’s involvement to non-physical activities is hard hit by the privatization and reorganization that is occurring. Areas of heavy industry are hardest hit by unemployment. Similarly, engineering industries, which employed approximately twice as many men as women are also hard hit by restructuring.⁴²

With the continued trend in the educational system of moving women into these light industrial jobs or into the service industry, women could be able to make up some ground on men in areas of employment and wage differentials because of the decline of some traditionally lucrative areas that are dominated by men. It is likely, however, these areas presently considered the realm of women will rapidly grow more male dominated as it becomes apparent there is money to be made for the male “bread winner” in these sectors.

Gender wage Differentials

The area of wage differentials promises to be one of the greatest hindrances to women exercising choice within the labor market. Wage differentials appear to be increasing for several reasons in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia: the private sectors pay policies, the inability of women to break into any top management positions, and the continued focus by the government on the needs of male wage earners, while ignoring women.

The private sector seems to have a tendency to pay men much greater salaries than women. This does not bode well considering that the private sector is obviously employing an increasingly greater proportion of workers. “As privatization proceeds and the number of private enterprises increases, however, women’s relative earnings may be adversely affected, inasmuch as the male-female earning gap is known to be bigger in the private sector and in smaller enterprises than in the large enterprises and in the public sector.”⁴³ For women, the private sector is an

⁴⁰ Liba PAUKERT, p. 631.

⁴¹ Liba PAUKERT, p. 631.

⁴² Liba PAUKERT, p. 632.

⁴³ Liba PAUKERT, p. 632.

area where they need to go to find jobs, but their choices may be limited by the reluctance of private employers to compensate them fairly for their labor.

Women have been unwilling or unable move into higher level, higher paid managerial roles in the labor force. This means that even in areas of the economy that women dominate, it is still likely that men earn more in those sectors, because they are filling managerial positions that pay more. Some data from Poland suggests that women there are only one-third as likely to aspire to be managers.⁴⁴ While this data cannot be directly related to Czechoslovakia, it is likely that there may be similar attitudes among Czecho-Slovak women. The reason for this lack of motivation of women to move up the promotion ladder seems to stem from the wariness women have concerning the time constraints domestic labor responsibilities place on them and the fear that the additional responsibilities of a managerial position will be too much to handle. This lack of motivation, in conjunction with the prevailing attitudes towards women as not being entrepreneurs⁴⁵ and men as the "bread winner" makes it very difficult to believe that in the near future, women will begin to gain greater access to managerial positions.

The governments of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, also, serve to perpetuate the wage differentials between men and women and limit the labor choices of women. The governments' policies of reducing the availability of affordable childcare institutions makes women more likely to have to take care of children reducing their desirability in the workplace and giving the employer an excuse to pay a lower wage. The governments encourage women to enter the work force as part-time workers, which also limits their ability to get paid equal wages to men.

The outcome of the continued wage differentials between men and women is to make women more vulnerable to divorce, more dependant on men, and families more inclined to maximize the importance of the male wage earner and diminish the importance of the female wage earner making domestic labor more logically the realm of the woman. This all creates more obstacles for women in their attempt to make independent choices as to what they want their role to be in the labor market.

CONCLUSIONS

Women in Czechoslovakia, under Communist rule were subject to policies designed to enact emancipation of women from above. These policies were embedded in an ideology that called for gender equality, but the policies were designed to foster equal numerical participation in the labor force, not equal access to wages and certain jobs. Women did gain almost equal representation in the labor force, but their wages and job choices severely lagged behind their male counter-

⁴⁴ FONG and PAUL, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Liba PAUKERT, p. 629.

parts. The Communists used women as a source of cheap, easily accessible labor to help bring about their plans for economic development.

The literature is fairly detailed about the effects of Communism on women, but the effects of post-Communist economic transition in Czechoslovakia and later in the separate Czech and Slovak Republics, is not well documented at all. There has been little effort on the part of the Czech or Slovak governments to differentiate between women and men in labor statistics.

The information that is available points to the fact that present policies by both governments serve to perpetuate women's lack of choices in the market place, the large wage differentials between men and women, and the feminization of poverty.

The governments have placed a low priority on subsidized childcare facilities, which has been perhaps the largest blow to women's position in the labor force. By cutting back a much of the previously available childcare space, the governments of the Czech and Slovak Republics hoped some women would remove themselves from the labor force to take care of their children, thus lowering unemployment. This causes employers to severely question the value of female employees since they may at any juncture need time off to take care of their children. The resource of childcare was one of the achievements of Communism that seems to be unanimously approved of, but the present governments feel it is too great a burden on the social welfare system. These governments need to take a serious look at the effects of this action, before they further cut back budgets for childcare facilities. Women should not be inhibited from participating in the labor force simply because they do not have access to affordable childcare. Considering the expense of women's education and the positive impact they have on productive capabilities, it is a waste of this investment to then force childbearing women out of the labor market. Slovakia and the Czech Republic should seriously examine the possibility of effecting a smooth transfer of childcare into private hands and insuring it can be provided at an affordable cost. This step would remove the need of women to choose between having children and having a career.

In addition, the large wage differentials between men and women, must be dealt with. The first step in this direction is to continue to ensure equal access to education that in most cases both countries currently possess. The degenderization of employment also needs to be enacted. As long as there are specific tasks delineated separately to men and women, the male "bread winner" is likely to fill the most lucrative positions. The degenderization of employment and the increased access to managerial positions will help break the myth of the rights of the male "bread winner" to higher wages.

Finally, the feminization of poverty has to be dealt with at all levels of society. The domestic labor that is deemed a woman's responsibility limits her earning potential in a variety of ways. First, there is the fundamental fact that about 5 hours of every day a woman is doing domestic labor, where a man is free to pursue other interests. Also, the childcare issue, severely limits the ability of woman of child-

bearing age to gain employment and access to high wages. Employers are reluctant to employ women based on their domestic childcare responsibilities and they often choose to discriminate against women. Finally, these factors all combine to create a group of women twice as large as their male counterparts who are victims of long-term unemployment. This comes at the same time when unemployment benefits are being severely cut. Single-mothers, especially, have a hard time trying to become employed due to all of these factors.

These issues need to be addressed by the governments in the form of retraining and job placement offices that service men and women equally and also take into account the specific needs that women may have in gaining employment. The governments must improve their efforts on monitoring employment situations based on gender.

Czecho-Slovakian academics studying women in society have disassociated themselves with Western forms of feminism and have in fact often rejected the notion that they are feminists.⁴⁶ This is a byproduct of the Communist effort to force emancipation on women from above. At the same time they ignore the issue of real equality between the sexes. The post-Communist Czech and Slovak societies seem to be moving towards the replacement of the “emancipation from above” concept with a traditional patriarchy.⁴⁷ The roots of a feminist ideology in the Czech and Slovak Republics must first deal with the realities and legacies of the past. This ideology must accept the facilitating aspects of the Communist regime (ie. childcare) and try to develop new solutions to the problems experienced by women due to the economic transition. The issues of childcare, domestic labor, unemployment, wage differentials, and gender divisions in the labor market are intertwined problems that women have to face. These issues need to be addressed at this point because “women in employment... may be described as a secondary workforce, occupying less desirable positions and more prone to unemployment...”⁴⁸ With no changes in the current system, women will continue to bear the brunt of the impact of reforms, will continue to have their work devalued, and will continue to be expected to sacrifice their free-time to supply hours of unpaid domestic labor. This leads to a heightened level of vulnerability for women in society to divorce, poverty, and domestic violence because of their increased dependance on men. Basically, as women’s labor market choices dwindle, their ability to remove themselves from harmful situations also dwindles. These issues must form the basis of a framework to discuss women’s problems in modern Czech and Slovak societies.

⁴⁶ See for example Jiřina ŠMEJKALOVÁ-STRICKLAND or Sharon WOLCHIK.

⁴⁷ FERBER, p. 12.

⁴⁸ FONG and PAUL, p. 35.

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