

Industrialization's Impact on the Social and Economic Freedom of Women in the USSR

IB 20th Century History

October 31, 2018

Work Count: 2190

Identification and Evaluation of Sources

This investigation will investigate the question: did the Soviet push to get more women into the workforce lead to increased freedom and liberation of women, or did it confine their rights ever further. This investigation will focus on the 1930s and early 1940s in order to examine the effects of the industrialization effort on the daily lives and rights of women in the Soviet Union.

The first source I will be evaluating is *Vecherniaia Moskva*'s "More Women into Production!" It is a newspaper article, published on June 30, 1930 by the Moscow City Newspaper. This article was used as first hand account of the effect of industrialization and the effectiveness of industrialization on Soviet women. I used it to show how the industrialization efforts of the Soviet Union fell short in many capacities of their goals to give women an equitable stance in society.

The origin of this article is valuable because it gives a first hand account of the effect of industrialization on the Women of Moscow. However, it does come from a government run newspaper and may have been edited to be less critical of the Soviet government. This article was written with the purpose of advocating for the further inclusion of women in the Soviet workforce. This is valuable because it gives specific ideas about how to better integrate women into the workforce, providing a detailed idea of the shortcomings of Soviet policy. However, this article is still limited by the lack of scope. It only gives the perspective of a woman in Moscow and may not be indicative of the rest of the USSR.

The second source evaluated in depth is Thomas G. Schrand's paper "The Five-Year Plan for Women's Labour: Constructing Socialism and the 'Double Burden', 1930-1932," published in December 1999. I used this paper to outline a key element of one of the things

holding Soviet women back from social equality, as the “Double Standard” described in the paper was a key element of my paper.

Schrand has a Masters in Russian and Eastern European Studies and a Phd. in history and has written on Gender Relations in the Soviet Union extensively. This origin means that the author is an expert in the field of study in which he is writing. However, the author is not Russian and may lack some elements of cultural understanding. The purpose of the paper is to outline and provide evidence for the “Double Standard” placed on the Soviet Union during the First Five Year Plan, beginning in 1930. The paper is thusly highly focused in both subject and scope. This makes it challenging to research the state of women before or after the period discussed. The content of the paper also limits it because of a lack of first hand accounts and accurate government records from the time described. This is due to the time that has passed and the secrecy of Stalin’s Government.

Investigation:

Stalin’s Five Year Plans were all encompassing efforts on the part of the government and citizens of the Soviet Union to increase the industrial output of the USSR. This involved a massive push to get women into the workforce. This push had wide ranging effects on the lives of the women in the Soviet Union. There exists a dissidence between the effects of this effort on the lives of women. Many historians see it as a liberating event that allowed women to overcome their traditional domesticated roles. While other historians see entering the industrial workforce as an added burden on top of the domestic duties of Soviet women. It was the burden of labor combined with an ineffective effort to alleviate the traditional domestic roles of Soviet women that infringed upon the personal freedoms of Soviet women.

Women in the Soviet Union, upon the implementation of the push towards industry, experience a wide variety of new jobs made available to them. Fields such as engineering and

medical practice were opened to women.¹ These new fields of work aimed to fulfill the socialist goal of female liberation.² This liberation from their husbands was part of Lenin's emphasis on gender equality that was expanded and continued under Stalin's reign and beyond.³ These fields of employment, not only, had women participation as similar levels to that of men, they were dominated by women from the early Soviet Union onward.⁴ These economic opportunities succeeded in improving Soviet women's quality of life by giving them increased financial stability, opportunity, and freedom. This early accessibility of jobs was very beneficial to women seeking economic and social independence from their husbands and comparable socio-economic standing to Soviet men. However, many industries remained closed off to women until the 1930s, such as heavy industry and manufacturing.⁵ It was this new economic freedom that expanded Soviet women's rights and quality of life the most, as it allowed women freedom from the traditional domestic roles that they were forced into previously.

This would change during the First Five Year Plan, as women entered more physically demanding areas of employment, such as construction and manufacturing.⁶

¹ Buckley, Mary. "Women in the Soviet Union." *Feminist Review*, no. 8 (1981): 79-106. doi:10.2307/1394929.

² Marx, Karl, 1818-1883. *The Communist Manifesto*. London ; Chicago, Ill. :Pluto Press, 1996

³ Schuster, Alice. "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality." *The Russian Review* 30, no. 3 (1971): 260-67. doi:10.2307/128134.

⁴ Buckley, Mary. "Women in the Soviet Union." *Feminist Review*, no. 8 (1981): 79-106. doi:10.2307/1394929.

⁵ Schrand, Thomas G. "The Five-Year Plan for Women's Labour: Constructing Socialism and the 'Double Burden', 1930-1932." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 8 (1999): 1455-478. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153838>.

⁶ Knickerbocker, H. R. "The Soviet Five-Year Plan." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939)* 10, no. 4 (1931): 433-59. doi:10.2307/3016236.

| | 1929 | 1930 | 1931 | 1932 | 1933 | 1934 | 1935 |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| In the whole economy | 3,304,000 27.2% | 3,877,000 26.7% | 4,197,000 26.9% | 6,007,000 27.4% | 6,908,000 30.5% | 7,204,000 31.7% | 7,881,000 33.4% |
| Heavy industry | 939,000 27.9% | 1,236,000 29.0% | 1,440,000 29.3% | 2,043,000 32.3% | 2,207,000 34.5% | 2,274,000 35.6% | 2,627,000 38.3% |
| Construction | 64,000 7.0% | 156,000 9.6% | 189,000 10.1% | 380,000 12.8% | 437,000 16.0% | 454,000 18.7% | 450,000 19.7% |
| Agriculture | 441,000 28.0% | 425,000 27.4% | 221,000 23.1% | 394,000 21.3% | 508,000 24.2% | 506,000 25.4% | 685,000 27.0% |
| Transport | 104,000 8.0% | 146,000 9.7% | 173,000 10.2% | 243,000 11.6% | 322,000 13.8% | 358,000 15.1% | 384,000 16.6% |
| Trade & food service | 134,000 19.0% | 279,000 28.0% | 405,000 34.6% | 675,000 28.9% | 786,000 40.5% | 766,000 40.0% | 822,000 39.4% |
| Institutions* | 961,000 38.2% | 1,134,000 29.6% | 1,245,000 40.3% | 1,593,000 42.5% | 1,766,000 45.2% | 1,864,000 47.6% | 1,978,000 48.8% |

* Institutions refers to education, health care, government, and administrative positions.

Figure 1: A Chart Showing the Number of Women Employed and Percentage of Women Workers in Industries

The number of women in the entire economy doubled by 1932.⁷ The largest increases of female participation are in construction and heavy industry, areas that, due to increased demand for labor, required increased female participation.⁸ This increase in more physically demanding labor fields, however, had much more varying effects on the women that entered them.

This increase in production had positive effects on some women. Valentia, a crane operator who found work under Stalin, interviewed in 2011, remembers fondly the push toward industrialization.⁹ She states that under Stalin she was always able to afford food at the factory and was able to live comfortably with her factory job.¹⁰ Her favorable feeling towards Stalin and his industrial push emphasises the stability and sense of security that was gained from her employment. Her sentiments are echoed in a Soviet Newspaper writing on the subject of the status of women in the workforce. The article claims that many women have been recently employed by the factory in the area, but the number of women recruited is insufficient.¹¹ The article argues for more women entering the workforce for personal benefit and for the good of

⁷ See Figure 1

⁸ See Figure 1

⁹ Valentina. "Soviet-era Nostalgia Still Strong, 20 Years on." Interview by Agence France Presse. Youtube. December 21, 2011. Accessed October 30, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9chetJZw488>.

¹⁰ Valentina. "Soviet-era Nostalgia Still Strong, 20 Years on." Interview by Agence France Presse. Youtube. December 21, 2011. Accessed October 30, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9chetJZw488>.

¹¹Z, Minkin. "Newspaper, Women Workers." Women in World History : MODULE 11. Accessed October 31, 2018. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson11/lesson11.php?menu=1&s=8>.

the Soviet Industrial effort.¹² These first hand accounts show a favorable view towards the new opportunities given to women during the First Five-Year Plan. Many women were enthusiastic and excited to join the workforce, as employment offered them financial freedom, a better quality of life, and higher social standing relative to men. This supports the idea that industrialization improved the quality of life for Soviet women as they gained more opportunities and social equality. However despite these positive effects, industrialization had many, unforeseen, negative consequences for Soviet women that resulted from the disconnect between policy imposition and cultural change as well as the leadership of the Soviet Union's understanding of the condition of women.

The emancipation of women from their perceived confines of their domestic duties was an issue of seemingly great importance to Stalin, one that he emphasized in many speeches.¹³ However, there was a crucial disconnect between Stalin's egalitarian rhetoric and concrete policy action. When women were integrated into the workforce, key cultural changes in the domestic responsibilities of women had not taken place. These cultural domestic responsibilities, which included child care, housework, and other traditionally feminine duties, remained part of the Russian culture after the revolution. In the absence of cultural change, it fell to the Soviet State to provide the assistance in the domestic duties of women in order that they could be fully integrated into the workforce. This support, for the most part, did not happen during the push towards industrialization.¹⁴ This lack of support from the state in the domestic realm meant that women were expected to fulfil their traditional maternal roles as well as their responsibility to the state as workers.

¹²Z, Minkin. "Newspaper, Women Workers." Women in World History : MODULE 11. Accessed October 31, 2018. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson11/lesson11.php?menu=1&s=8>.

¹³ Schuster, Alice. "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality." *The Russian Review* 30, no. 3 (1971): 260-67. doi:10.2307/128134.

¹⁴Engel, Barbara Alpern. "Women in Russia and the Soviet Union." *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 781-96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174213>.

Child raising was the foremost concern of Soviet Women and was the issue that most prevented them from being fully integrated into the workforce.¹⁵ Thusly, the Soviet Union attempted to provide a large scale daycare support system for working mothers. This system, however, fell far short of the needs of the massive amount of women that left the household in order to participate in the Soviet Industrial effort.¹⁶ A women writing for a Soviet newspaper describes the insufficient response by the state to the need of Soviet women. "She tries with all her might to get away from this 'vicious' circle, but she cannot. She tried to work at the factory, but had to quit work after ten days, because the horrible work of the childcare center left her children going hungry and without supervision."¹⁷ This lack of a response to the needs of Soviet women dealt a massive amount of pressure on top of the heads of Soviet Women; they both needed to provide for their families and the state. A condition that the State was not willing or able to help. This meant that Soviet women chose to work. They were sacrificing the well being of their children or taking on the massive burden of working and performing all of their domestic duties.

The First Five Year Plan and its massive effort to rapidly industrialize the Soviet Union both allowed and required women to enter the workforce in massive numbers in both areas that they had previously been present such as engineering and medicine and in new fields such as manufacturing and construction. This increase in female participation had adverse unintended effects on the personal lives of the Soviet women that entered the workforce. These adverse effects come from the lack of either a cultural change to shift the domestic responsibilities of Soviet women or an adequate state run child care program to alleviate the burden of child

¹⁵ Schrand, Thomas G. "The Five-Year Plan for Women's Labour: Constructing Socialism and the 'Double Burden', 1930-1932." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 8 (1999): 1455-478. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153838>.

¹⁶ Schrand, Thomas G. "The Five-Year Plan for Women's Labour: Constructing Socialism and the 'Double Burden', 1930-1932." *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 8 (1999): 1455-478. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/153838>.

¹⁷ Severa, Pravda. "Newspaper, Daily Life." *Women in World History* : MODULE 11. Accessed October 31, 2018. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson11/lesson11.php?menu=1&s=9>.

raising from Soviet Women. This was not the deliberate violation or oppression of the women of the Soviet Union, but rather a lack of understanding of the situation of women and foresight on the consequences of increased female participation in the labor force made by the male dominated Communist Party.

Reflection:

During the course of this investigation, I learned and developed many new skills that are used in the study of history. I also gained an understanding of the study of historiography, an area that is crucial when understanding and evaluating secondary sources and academic papers. These skills and lessons are reflected not only in the end result of my paper, but also in the research and work that was done that does not appear in the paper itself. These lessons, such as choosing a field of focus, were crucial to writing this paper.

During the researching of this investigation, I found that there was a general consensus among most western historians, who make up the majority of the available academic literature that was available to me, about the state of women during the industrial push under Stalin. investigation. Thusly, I was forced to go to primary sources and academic papers written by Soviet historians for alternate viewpoints. These papers had diametrically opposed viewpoints on women's participation in the workforce. The two vastly differing viewpoints led to some difficulty at first as I attempted to remedy and explain their differences. It was then that I turned to primary sources and first hand accounts. They also were not void of differences. However, through analysis of the academic literature and of the primary sources, I was able to come to a satisfying conclusion.

During the course of my investigation, I also had to confront my personal biases and predisposition to the issues that I was researching and writing on. This was most evident when I was analysing primary sources. I tend to view history in a manner that closest resembles social

and feminist historical theory. Through an understanding of historiography, I was able to notice where my biases may be affecting my reading of a source and use a different lens or approach to history to understand the source at hand.

In my conclusion, I found that my analysis of the effects that rapid industrialization on women was very similar to that of the majority of western historians. At first, I thought this agreeance with others in the field of history was a problem, but, after consideration, I realized that this was most likely the result of a similar cultural upbringing and shared value system. It is not as much of a problem of originality as it is a synthesis of historical understanding. My understanding of the events also varies in several key areas from that of other western historians. When many other historians see a direct and intentional violation of the rights and liberties of women, I see a state that failed to foresee the gap between policy and culture. I view the failures of the Five Year Plans to ameliorate the quality of life for Soviet women to be the result of a lack of foresight and understanding of women's condition by a male run government.

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