

BEYOND THE DUAL BURDEN: THEORISING GENDER INEQUALITY IN SOVIET RUSSIA

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Introduction

Since the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 feminists have shown an increased interest in the former communist states. This has happened in the wake of the new links between East and West, and the research which is being carried out on the impact of the reforms on women in Russia. (Einhorn 1992; Funk and Mueller 1993; Bridger et al. 1996; Buckley 1997). Nevertheless, while 1991 marked the start of the post-Soviet period in Russian history, it was not a break off point in terms of the social relations that formed the basis of Soviet society. It is important to look again at Soviet social relations in order to understand the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet society. This article will present a more theoretical understanding of gender relations in the Soviet era in order to provide a foundation from which to begin to understand the changes in recent years.

The first section will briefly outline some of the work described here as the 'dual burden' approach. While much of the literature on gender inequality in Soviet Russia has been useful in describing the difficulties women faced with the 'dual burden' of home and paid work, it was primarily descriptive and somewhat limited in terms of offering an understanding of the importance of gender relations within the Soviet system. The focus on gender issues resulted in a lack of attention being paid to the wider debates on the nature of Soviet society. Rather, the analysis of women's oppression often assumed that the Soviet Union could best be described as state socialist and gender relations were then placed within that context.

In the second section the applicability of Western feminist concepts to the study of gender inequality in Soviet Russia will be discussed. It is argued that caution has to be applied in attempts to translate western concepts into a very different social context. Part of this process is the problematising of such concepts as patriarchy and reproduction. It is argued that patriarchy is a descriptive rather than an analytical tool and that reproduction must be clearly defined.

The final section presents a new approach to understanding gender inequality in Soviet Russia. It is argued that gender relations cannot be separated from other social relations. The analysis of women's position in Soviet society must not only avoid assumptions about the nature of that society, but in fact must challenge existing explanations. It will be argued that gender inequality in Soviet Russia can best be understood in relation to social reproduction, that is, to the strategy of the state, or central elite, to reproduce the relations of production that maintain its position. Gender relations are particularly significant within this process. First, in relation to biological reproduction, women were regulated as the reproducers of the nation and of the labour force specifically. Second, women occupied a central place as direct producers, both numerically and in terms of their place in the labour hierarchy. Gender relations were also central to the forms of control over the workforce. It will be shown

that production and reproduction were contradictory within the Soviet system, and it is in this sense that gender inequality and the position of women can be understood.

Soviet women's dual burden

Western research into gender inequality in Soviet Russia has contributed significantly to the understanding of the experience of Russian women. In these accounts, the position of women was characterised primarily by the dual burden — women's responsibility for paid labour and domestic labour. Thus it was shown that women in Russia did not achieve the equality claimed by the Soviet state, and may even have been in a worse position than many of their counterparts in the West. They not only had to work long hours in often very tiring, physically demanding occupations, but they also had to work in the home to care for husbands and children.

This dual burden was presented as being oppressive for women because their work in the domestic sphere was regarded as secondary to that of paid labour. But, at the same time, it created the conditions within which women were unable to advance in the 'real' world. In addition, the pressures on women to live up to the expectations of the 'superwoman' image were psychologically oppressive. There are several factors which these accounts drew upon to explain the dual burden.

The inadequacy, or short-sightedness, of Marxist theory was often referred to as an important element in explaining why women suffered the dual burden. It has been argued that crucial issues, such as the role of the family, were not adequately theorised. As a result they were treated as of secondary importance (Lapidus 1978; Buckley 1988; Corrin 1990). Therefore, Marxist theory was seen to have both shaped policy towards women and, in part, accounted for its failure (Molyneux 1981). In relation to the impact of Soviet industrial policy on the position of women, Lapidus argued that any revolutionary intentions or deeds concerning the liberation of women from domestic work were rendered obsolete by conditions of war and the need to modernise a largely rural economy (Lapidus 1978). In the face of such adversities, the enhancement of gender equality was pushed down the line of policy and investment priorities (Heitlinger 1979).

It was also argued that the nature of Soviet economic development had implications for women in Russia. The labour intensive nature of development meant that all labour reserves were tapped to fill the ever increasing demand for labour. Peers noted that the 'drives to develop the economy, with increasingly unrealistic targets for industrial expansion, meant that women were needed to enter the workforce in their hordes and to participate in this great effort...women's employment outside the home took on a new magnitude' (Peers 1985: 125-6). However, Peers argued that women were vital to the Soviet leadership and to the economy, not only as workers but as childbearers, most notably in the context of the labour shortage (Peers 1985). Heitlinger suggested that, 'the production of children has a paradoxical effect on the position of women in state socialist countries' arising from 'the contradiction between the private nature and collective consequences of biological reproduction' (Heitlinger 1979: 29). The family, as the centre for child rearing, was a 'closed unit' and yet it held the key to the future in terms of the children it produces, so the state constantly interfered in it.

There were a range of factors offered as an explanation of the dual burden for women. The Western analyses recognised the importance of the economic system, of demographics and of ideology in contributing to the patterns of gender inequality in Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, while such accounts offered an invaluable insight into the position of women in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, there are some aspects of their analysis which need to be developed further.

The literature on gender inequality in Russia, though providing a considerable amount of information and putting on the map a previously neglected subject, failed to fully develop a theoretical framework within which the empirical information their research uncovered could be understood. Indeed it has been argued that the use of the concept 'dual burden' is in itself very limiting because it tends to focus on the time spent in paid work and in the home rather than the relations involved in perpetuating gender inequality (Haug 1991).

This lack of theorising is most apparent in the failure to develop an understanding of the Soviet mode of production. The Soviet system as a whole is described as state socialist, however this cannot simply be assumed, for the nature of the Soviet system is a matter of great debate which should not necessarily lie outside the scope of work on the position of women. Corrin refers to the societies of Eastern Europe as 'socialist' or 'state socialist', the inverted commas indicating there is something questionable about those labels, yet she 'attempts no grand definitions of how such societies have been and are currently constituted' (Corrin 1990). However, it will be argued that gender relations cannot be isolated from other social relations, but rather must be understood as central elements within the relations that characterise the Soviet system. By examining the nature of gender relations the nature of the system as a whole becomes the subject of investigation.

West meets east: the applicability of western feminism to the study of women in Soviet Russia

As a Western woman, my understanding of gender relations is necessarily grounded in the concepts of feminism developed in the West. The concepts employed in feminist theory are the subject of intense debate as to their validity and efficacy in furthering our understanding of gender relations. But there is also the question of whether these concepts can be applied to an understanding of gender inequality in a system very different from the capitalist or patriarchal capitalist system within which they were developed.

Funk poses the question of 'whether Western feminism's issues, claims and goals can be anything other than "relative", appropriate in the West but not in the East' (Funk 1993: 321). One key example in relation to this, is the 'family'. Olga Lipovskaya argues that the family was the primary site of opposition to the state, within which it was possible to achieve greater freedom. The family was 'bound by strong ties of caring and sharing, where one learns the precious skills of compassion and understanding which it can be argued, go beyond the usual expectations and demands of the western nuclear family' (Lipovskaya 1994).

The post modernist debate within feminism is relevant in the context of theorising gender inequality in Russia because it calls into question and demands the

problematisation of feminist concepts such as ‘patriarchy’ and ‘reproduction’. In particular post modernism cautions against essentialism and the generalisation of feminist concepts outwith their historical and cultural context (Nicholson 1992). The post modernist movement in feminism has questioned the efficacy or validity of using such concepts as ‘patriarchy’ or ‘reproduction’ in creating theoretical meta-narratives. Barrett notes that there has been a shift in attention from the concern with ‘things’ to the concern with ‘words’. That is, from an analysis of the structures that shaped women’s oppression to the discursive construction of identities and experience (Barrett 1992: 201-19).

In relation to theorising gender inequality in Soviet Russia, it is essential to understand the social context within which women live. This means that concepts like ‘patriarchy’ or ‘reproduction’ cannot be assumed to have universal significance or meaning. However, it does not mean that any attempt to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the structures that shape gender inequality should be abandoned in favour of a concern with ‘words’.

What is required is an analysis which uses as its frame of reference the socio-economic context of Soviet Russia, and which avoids the essentialist assumptions concerning the experiences of women. Before going on to outline in detail the basis for such an analysis, I will briefly discuss the ways in which ‘patriarchy’ and ‘reproduction’ have been applied in feminist theory in order to assess how applicable they may be for an analysis of gender inequality in Soviet Russia.

Patriarchy and dual systems theory

The concept ‘patriarchy’ has been the subject of much debate within feminist theory. Patriarchy has been employed in different ways to provide an explanation of gender inequality that, on the one hand, avoids the submersion of gender in class conflict debates, while at the same time recognises that the subordination of women occurs within a specific mode of production, and so any explanation must bear this in mind and avoid the dangers of essentialism and universalism. In the attempt to do this ‘patriarchy’ has been attributed a level of analytic independence from the mode of production, thus creating a dual systems perspective. There is insufficient space in this context to provide a detailed or comprehensive analysis of the application of ‘patriarchy’ in feminist theory. Rather, the focus will be on the implications of the dual systems approach for the analysis of gender inequality in Soviet Russia.

If a dual systems approach is to be used, it must be shown that patriarchy or the sex/gender system has an independent basis rather than taking this as an *a priori* based on the fact that women have been oppressed under different modes of production. Sylvia Walby attempts to do just this and, while I do not think she succeeds, her account is perhaps the most sophisticated attempt. She defines patriarchy as ‘a system of interrelated social structures through which men exploit women’ (Walby 1986: 51).

Walby also tried to make the concept of ‘patriarchy’ more dynamic, by stating that there are different forms of patriarchy — public and private — in which different structures have dominance. Private patriarchy is based on household production as the main site of women’s oppression, while public patriarchy is based principally in the public sites. In private patriarchy the expropriation of women’s labour takes place in

the home by individual patriarchs, while in public patriarchy collective appropriation takes place. In private patriarchy the main patriarchal strategy is exclusionary, while in public patriarchy it is segregationist and subordinating (Walby 1990: 23-4).

At first glance, Walby's approach may seem to offer a suitable framework for the study of gender inequality in Soviet Russia. The focus on the structures of patriarchy operating outwith the domestic sphere, in particular in the state and in paid employment, have a degree of resonance given the high level of state intervention in the lives of Russian women and their widespread participation in the workforce. Moreover, the notion of different forms of patriarchy seems to lend itself to cross cultural analysis by grounding the concept 'patriarchy' in the historical and cultural specificity that it was previously lacking.

However there are problems with Walby's account and with the concept 'patriarchy' which cast doubt on these claims. Most importantly, it is not clear what the basis of the patriarchal system is and its separation from the mode of production in the different forms. In private patriarchy the basis of her argument is that men exploit women in the household, yet she centres this claim on what she regards as typical situations rather than on a systematic analysis of the defining features of this patriarchal mode of production. So, for her, women are 'typically' given less than men and 'typically' work longer hours within the patriarchal mode of production; but this typicality implies that this need not necessarily be the case. If the woman does receive as much or more than her husband, or if she works shorter hours, is she then still exploited? According to Walby's account, she would not be. In addition if, as is increasingly the case, the wife works and the husband is unemployed and dependent on her income, is he then exploited by her? Walby's framework for the patriarchal mode of production only applies to a certain form of household and does not accommodate the experience of women who live outwith it. She provides the framework for an analysis of relations between market and non-market workers rather than between men and women (Crompton and Sanderson 1990: 16).

Her analysis of public patriarchy may seem to address some of these difficulties, but in this case it is even more unclear how it is possible to understand patriarchy as an independent system. In public patriarchy the dominant structure of women's oppression is in employment and the state, the arenas in which the mode of production most obviously operates, making the distinction between it and the patriarchal mode of production even more confused. She states that public patriarchy involves the collective appropriation of women's labour in paid employment, yet the basis for the patriarchal mode of production is the exploitation of women's surplus labour by men in the household (Walby 1986: 52-4). If in public patriarchy this changes, and the basis for women's oppression is the appropriation of their surplus labour within paid employment, then the use of the concept 'patriarchy' as an independent mode of production becomes groundless. This is not to say, however, that gender inequality can simply be understood in relation to class conflict analyses. But, rather, that other concepts may provide a more incisive analysis of the position of women in society.

Therefore patriarchy should not be given the status of a system. Indeed it offers little in terms of its use as an analytical tool (Pollert 1996). Rather, it is a descriptive mechanism detailing certain aspects of women's experience. 'The concept of patriarchy names relations, events, suffering, powerlessness, repression which happens in many forms in our experience.' (Smith 1983)

Production, reproduction and gender inequality

The reason for the analytical separation between patriarchy and the mode of production was based on a dissatisfaction with class conflict analyses, which while providing a coherent and accepted account of the economic mode of production, fail to explain women's specific place within it. The concept 'reproduction' has been used by feminists in addressing this problem (Beechy 1979; McIntosh 1981; Vogel 1995).

Economism is perhaps seen as the greatest obstacle for class conflict analyses in providing an understanding of gender inequality, as it is argued that too much is left unexplained by the exaggerated role given to the economic sphere. In response to this, much feminist theory either adopted Althusser's approach focusing on ideology as 'relatively autonomous' from the economic level, or stressed the importance of reproduction as something distinct from the economic sphere of production. Implicit in this latter approach is the assumption that reproduction is synonymous with the family, and production is synonymous with the workplace.

However, such analyses are limited by the assumption that women's biological role in human reproduction leads automatically to the development of relations of reproduction, embodied in inequality in the family (McIntosh 1981). There is little attempt made to establish how and why the biological fact of women's reproductive capacities develops into unequal relations of reproduction. Also, there is the assumption that reproduction refers only to the domestic sphere (Humphries and Rubery 1984). This is a reflection of the conceptual separation between reproduction and production arising in part from of a desire to avoid criticisms of economism and, in part, from a focus on institutions rather than social relations.

However, there is much in this that is problematic and that needs rethinking. Economism need not necessarily be seen as the result of an over emphasis on the economic. Rather, it is a valid criticism of what we understand by the 'economic'. Thus rather than giving 'relative autonomy' to different levels or completely separating the economic from the non-economic, the conceptualisation of the economic structure itself should be re-defined. Corrigan and Sayer argue that the base/superstructure debates have missed the point (Corrigan and Sayer 1978). They note that Marx does not classify in the abstract any particular social relations as production relations. On the contrary he notes that it is only through empirical observation that this can be ascertained. Beyond this, all that can be said for certain is that production relations consist of any social relations which are indispensable to a given mode of production. Since the economic structure is made up of the totality of production relations it follows that social relations cannot be excluded from 'the economy' in terms of some innate, ahistorical property they have, but rather on the basis of their necessity for the continuance of the mode of production. Thus, what is traditionally regarded as part of the superstructure, and so determined by the economic base, may in fact be part of the base itself.

Such a conceptualisation refutes the assumption that reproduction and production must be separated in order to avoid an economistic explanation of gender inequality, by positing the possibility that reproduction itself may be part of the economic structure. This point is also made by Seecombe.

[I]n most Marxist literature, the field of production is reduced to the production of material goods, the forces of production to the instruments of labour, and social relations of production to those relations found at the site of goods production. In this framework, the production of the species and its labour power does not appear. (Seecombe 1988)

Similarly, Adkins and Lury argue that the material and the economic are too often conflated and recommend that a wider understanding of the 'material' include non-economic processes, such as motherhood and sexuality (Adkins and Lury 1992).

The second aspect of the separation between production and reproduction in much feminist work is related to this and involves the association of production and reproduction with the workplace and the family respectively, with the roots of women's oppression perceived to lie in the latter (McIntosh 1981). Not only does this deny the importance of gender relations in paid work in shaping the structures within which domestic relations are formed and reformed, but it also ignores the significance of gender relations in shaping production relations. In this respect, what is understood as reproduction cannot be confined to a particular sphere or institution, but can only be understood in terms of the relations involved.

But it is not only the conceptualisation of the relationship between production and reproduction that is problematic. Inherent in this is the meaning attributed to the concept 'reproduction'. It is necessary to question what is meant by reproduction, and to what extent gender inequality can be explained by specific aspects of the term. Edholm *et al.* made a significant contribution to this problem, noting that reproduction refers to three different processes: social reproduction, human reproduction and reproduction of the labour force. This, in turn, can be divided into the maintenance of the labour force and the allocation of agents to positions within the labour process (Edholm *et al.* 1977). They clearly highlight the different dimensions to reproduction and the need to distinguish between them, which is lacking in much of the work on reproduction.

Therefore Western feminists must proceed with caution in attempts to apply analytical tools developed towards an understanding of gender inequality in the capitalist West. It is essential to recognise the historical specificity of the concepts of feminist analysis, whether it is the family, reproduction or the sexual division of labour. By failing to do so there is a danger of becoming what Nora Jung refers to as a 'Western supremacist'. This refers to 'feminist scholars who perceive knowledge produced in the West to be superior to that produced by non-Westerners' (Jung 1994: 208).¹

While the recognition of experiential differences between Eastern and Western European women does offer some safeguard against 'western supremacism', it does not offer a full understanding of the structures which shape these experiences. In the final section an approach will be presented which not only recognises difference, but tries to locate it within the particular socio-economic context of Soviet Russia. In this way, it is hoped that a contribution can be made to an understanding of gender inequality in Soviet Russia and to the development of feminist theory.

¹ The same criticism was made by Maria Lazreg (1988) in her account of women in Algeria. She notes that the concepts and perspectives used by Western feminists to study Middle Eastern women reflect the 'dynamics of global politics. The political attitudes of "centre" states are mirrored in feminist attitudes towards women from "peripheral" states'.

Towards a new approach: theorising gender inequality in Soviet Russia

Connell (1987) points out that the problem with accounts based around the idea of social reproduction is often that they are static accounts in which the social system is simply reproduced. Rather, he argues, there is a process of constant construction and reconstruction of the structures and relations that form a social system.

Social structure must be seen as constantly constituted rather than constantly reproduced. And that makes sense only if theory acknowledges the constant possibility that structure will be constituted in a different way. Groups that hold power do try to reproduce the structure that gives them privilege. But it is always an open question whether and how they will succeed. Social reproduction therefore is an object of strategy...It cannot be made a postulate or presupposition of theory. (Connell 1987: 44)

However, while social reproduction analyses are often flawed, this does not mean that the concept need be abandoned altogether. Its appeal lies in the attempt to see the system of social relations in any particular society operating as a whole rather than as separate systems in order to explain different forms of inequality, as with the dual systems approach. Nevertheless, the problems associated with this approach must be addressed.

First, it is essential to avoid making assumptions concerning the meaning of 'reproduction' and its implications for gender inequality. Social reproduction must be understood as a strategy on the part of the central elite in Soviet Russia to reproduce the system to best suit their needs. It will be shown that gender was central to this strategy both quantitatively in relation to the biological reproduction of the population and, specifically, of the labour force. But it was qualitatively central in relation to the reproduction of the labour hierarchy. From this perspective social reproduction can be understood as an open-ended and dynamic process in which people play active parts. This approach will illustrate the role played by various actors whether it be the central elite, managers, female or male workers, in shaping and reshaping the structures in which they live and so shaping the strategy of social reproduction.

Moreover, in referring to social reproduction as the reproduction of the relations of production it may seem that this approach is functionalist. However, one of the central features of this analysis is the significance given to gender relations in understanding the inherently contradictory nature of Soviet society. Not only were the strategies employed by the state in relation to women often contradictory, but the reactions of women, and of economic managers, served to exacerbate and create new contradictions. While gender was central to the process of social reproduction, it was by no means functional for it.

It will be argued here that in Soviet Russia social reproduction related to two key concerns: biological reproduction, and the reproduction of forms of control. It will be shown that both these elements were central to the operation of the Soviet system and that gender relations were in turn central to them.

The state and biological reproduction

We cannot simply assume the significance of the fact that women and men have different roles in biological reproduction. Rather, this must be a step in building the foundations of a theoretical framework. While men and women have differing roles in the process of biological reproduction, the implications of this for the position of women and for social relations in general is a contentious area. The significance of the biological reproductive difference between men and women must therefore be investigated (Brenner and Rammas 1984).

There were two ways in which biological reproduction was important in the Soviet system. First, it was important in terms of the state's concern over the reproduction of the nation. While there is considerable debate as to the nature of the 'nation', questions of nationhood figured prominently in the history of the USSR, in part because it was in essence an amalgamation of nations, but also because as a single entity (a nation) it symbolised a whole new economic form.²

From its earliest days the isolation of the USSR from the capitalist world established the need to strengthen its nationhood, both ideologically and materially. With the onset of the Cold War, this situation was further reinforced. In order to be a world force in the face of opposition from the capitalist West, the USSR not only had to demonstrate its economic prowess, but also had to maintain a military structure of sufficient capacity to defend its position. This was done initially through the development of the country's industrial and military base, and later through the space programme. While much of the 'race' with capitalism was a charade, for the USSR never came near to matching its economic power, it nevertheless served a political purpose in legitimating the positions of the Soviet central elite. The constant comparisons in terms of economic and military might were intended to demonstrate that the Soviet system, or the Soviet nation, was superior to that of the West, which in turn would reflect well upon the leadership.

Women were regarded as a central component in ensuring that the nation was reproduced. It was the task of Soviet women to ensure that the population was maintained at such a level that the nation could itself be maintained both through internal development and protection from external intervention. In the Soviet Union the presentation of women's role in this can best be described as the 'people as power discourse' (Yurval Davis 1996). In this respect, the future of the nation is seen to depend on its continuous growth based primarily on the reproductive powers of women who are called upon to have more children. The roots of the discourse varied throughout the course of the Soviet system. In the 1930s the need to build a strong economy meant women were expected to reproduce more workers. In the post war era the tensions of the Cold War exacerbated this need for more labourers, but also saw a general decline in population.³

By virtue of their role in biological reproduction Soviet Russian women were held responsible for maintaining the birth rate at such a level that the army and the labour force could function. But concern also lay with the 'appearance of nationhood' as a

² On the question of the 'nation' see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso 1983.

³ By the 1970s the demographic impact of the war on the population of child bearing age was negligible, yet it remained a key feature in demographic discussions. War losses came to symbolise the nation and women's role in its reproduction.

legitimizing force. Concerns about mothers and the birth-rate were in part genuine concerns that the population be reproduced at the necessary rate, but they also served as political currency, giving a concrete focus to the idea of the nation.

Second, there were concerns over women's role in biological reproduction in relation to the reproduction of the labour force. As was noted above, the reproduction of the labour force was an important aspect of the reproduction of the nation itself. As the basis for the USSR was its status as a new economic system, building the economy was from the onset regarded as the most important aspect of development. It is in this respect that women's role in biological reproduction was most significant throughout the Soviet era. It is also in relation to this that the contradictions that women presented to the central elite can be understood.

On the one hand childbearing is essential to the continuance of the system, for without it there would be no generational replacement, reproduction of the labour force, and so the conditions for production itself would become far more complex, having to rely wholly on outside sources of labour. On the other hand women were regarded as essential contributors to the creation of a surplus through their direct involvement in production, particularly in conditions of the severe labour shortage which was a central feature of the system. However, their capacity to do so was limited, at the least in terms of time taken out immediately before and after childbirth.

So women's role in childbearing is placed in contradiction to their role as direct producers and the immediate production of the surplus, and thus its appropriation by the central elite. In this sense women's labour posed a contradiction for the central elite concerned with the overall immediate and long term continuance of the system and their place within it. While women's labour was required within the workplace, to build the economy, they were also needed to reproduce the next generation.

The central planners employed a dual strategy to resolve this contradiction, which had severe implications for the position of women. On the one hand, measures had to be taken to minimise the risk to childbearing that women's participation in production would have. Physical bodies do not exist independently of their social surroundings. In particular, the economic system can effect the number of pregnancies women have, fertility rates, and the rates of infant mortality. On the other hand, in the context of a growing demand for labour, measures had to be taken to ensure the participation of women in the labour force.

With this in mind, attempts were made first to control biological reproduction directly through abortion legislation and contraceptive availability, and indirectly through increasingly conservative family legislation. Second, attempts were made to control women's paid labour by encouraging their participation, while at the same time ensuring that it was limited, most notably through the use of protective legislation. These two aspects, although separated here for the sake of clarity, are closely interrelated. For example, maternity leave serves both to encourage women into the workforce, while at the same time minimises the risks to pregnant women and new born children.

The regulation of biological reproduction

During the Soviet period, the policy towards biological reproduction had five key features. First, motherhood was not regarded as an individual concern but a social duty (Heitlinger 1979: 108). Second, there was a continual concern over the low birth-rate. This was particularly acute from the 1930s as the extensive industrialisation strategy called for increasing supplies of labour to feed the labour shortage. Third, women had very limited options for birth control due to lack of contraceptive availability (Du Plessix Gray 1991) and lack of knowledge of different methods (Joy 1995). The most commonly used method of birth control was abortion. While legal, other than during the years 1936-1955, abortion was never advocated. Fourth, family legislation was characterised by the focus on the family as the best site for the reproduction of the next generation (Buckley 1988: 134). Fifth, the emphasis on biological reproduction and the family established rigid boundaries for the expression of individual sexuality. Sex was equated with reproduction so any forms that could not fulfil that function were outlawed (Shreeves 1992).

Attempts to regulate biological reproduction were directed solely towards women and concentrated on controlling their reproductivity either directly through control of access to the means of birth control or indirectly through propaganda campaigns and family legislation. However, there was a second aspect to the state's strategy towards women: the attempt to regulate women's labour force participation, in particular the focus on the 'protection' of women as potential mothers and so as a privileged group of workers.

The regulation of women's labour force participation

While the fact of women's participation in the labour force was rarely condemned *per se*, many saw the high participation rates as neither natural nor desirable. For example, Sonin explained the high levels of female employment in relation to the huge demand for labour during earlier decades of the Soviet system. He argued that the transition to a more intensive strategy of development would reduce the need for women within the labour force. 'The rise in female labour activity should be viewed in close connection with the rise in demand for manpower in the economy, which affects the involvement of women in the sphere of social labour and their distribution within that sphere.' (Sonin 1982: 26) He did not advocate a withdrawal of women from the labour force but their redistribution into work more suited to the female form, in particular in the service industry. 'Work in the service branches usually requires a personal approach, neatness and precision, and relatively little physical labour. This created indubitable advantages for female labour.' (Sonin 1982 :28)

The extent of female labour force participation was also linked by many academics to economic need. It was believed that if the right conditions were created, in which men's wages would support the family, many women would no longer feel the need to work outside the home.

The supply of female labour is more elastic than that of males. It depends to a greater degree on the extent to which a family's requirements are satisfied by the earnings of the head of the family and by income from public consumption funds. The lower the level at which these

requirements are being satisfied, the more the family needs earnings from its women. (Guseinov and Korchagin 1971)

Nevertheless the high level of female labour force participation was condemned in terms of the negative consequences it had for the birth rate, and the impact on the family.

While noting that mass involvement of women in social production is a progressive and legitimate development contributing to their economic and social independence, we must also bear in mind that women perform another social function: motherhood. This aspect of their life is no less important for the development of society than their participation in the production of material and cultural values. (Kiseleva 1982: 286)

.Some examples of protective legislation included the banning of women from night work, overtime and from any jobs detrimental to their health; they were given special rights to be transferred to lighter work during pregnancy; and there were restrictions on the maximum weights they were to lift (Ilic 1995). This legal 'protection' of female workers fluctuated according to the need for women in the labour force. In times of greatest demand it was relaxed, and when demand fell it was re-introduced. For example, during NEP job restrictions in terms of overtime and underground work were enforced, but they were abandoned in 1940 when the need for female labour was most acute (Dewar 1956). Such legislation was intended to protect women as mothers or potential mothers from the harmful effects of paid labour. But it can be seen from the manipulation of such legislation and the timing of discussions on women's labour that it also separated women as a distinct group of workers whose contribution to paid labour was regarded as transitory.

This was perhaps clearest during Perestroika when Gorbachev noted the importance of allowing women 'to return to their purely womanly mission' in the home. During Perestroika concern was expressed over the employment of women in harmful work (Barishev 1988; Dyekov 1988; Levina 1988), and calls were made for their removal from this kind of work and transferral to more suitable work in the service sector. A representative from the AUCCTU stated that it is 'in the interests of the health of mothers and the future generation to save women from exhausting work in the night shifts, furnace sections and other heavy jobs' (*Trud* 6/12/89).

The redistribution of women into the service sector was regarded as an inevitable outcome of the transition of the economy to a primarily intensive path of development and the transition of enterprises to a the new economic method of self financing and cost accounting. During Perestroika it was estimated that 20 percent of industrial workers were to be removed. Yet it was noted that this did not have to be a disruptive process for it could be carried out by 'combining the redistribution of workers with the natural movement of cadres. The only category of workers for whom the real movement between spheres of work connected with a change of workplace is expedient and economically and socially justifiable is women employed in heavy manual labour.' (Boginya and Bon' 1988: 19)

The proposal to transfer women from industry into the service sector suited the plan to reduce the industrial labour force and expand the service sector. The manipulation of protective legislation to these ends can be seen from the fact that conditions of work

within the service sector were often as heavy as those within industry. For example, saleswomen often lift heavy boxes and roll thirty kilogram bolts of fabric, yet there was no discussion of the removal of women from this type of work (Boldyreva 1989). It is clear from this that women were regarded as a labour force to be manipulated, and that protective legislation provided both a legislative mechanism and an ideological justification for this.

Moreover, such legislation had severe negative consequences for women. Protective legislation often meant that women were excluded from many skilled jobs, in particular when legislation sought to 'protect' women from the dangers of mechanisation (Filtzer 1992). By forcing managers to provide childcare facilities, paid maternity leave, time off for sick children, time off for breast feeding, and by restricting the ways in which women could be used within the workforce, the state was not creating a group of privileged workers as they claimed. Rather, this 'protection' signified women, in both material and ideological terms, as weaker and as a second class group of workers.

Gender ideology takes the material fact of the biological difference between men and women and from this presents the gender division of labour as natural and universal and moreover as the foundation of social organisation. Consequently women's natural role in life was presented as related to childrearing and household chores in the domestic sphere. Women's involvement in work outside this sphere was therefore regarded as secondary to men who are seen to be the 'real' workers. Thus nature served to mystify the complex social relations involved in the oppression of women by providing some form of justification for the continuing existence and instigation of processes that maintain it (Miles 1989: 87).

The discussion of protective legislation illustrates the nature of the relationship between the centre and enterprise managers. For managers protective legislation was regarded as an obstacle to their main aim, that is, meeting their performance requirements and so was often violated. The atomised nature of Soviet society meant that managers acted in their own self interests. Nevertheless, protective legislation did have an impact on the way managers viewed female labour — by presenting women's role in production as a limited one, they were differentiated from men within the workforce. This idea of women as somehow less reliable than men was reinforced by the difficulties for women in managing their domestic work in addition to paid labour. As a result women were often denied, by managers, the provision of training to improve their skills and so allow them access to the male dominated skilled jobs (Harden 1998). Protective legislation therefore reinforced women's position within the workforce in material and ideological terms. The implications of this can be discussed further in relation to the labour hierarchy in Soviet Russia.

The position of women within the labour hierarchy is interesting because it can be seen to be a result of protective legislation and the discriminatory practices towards female labour. But at the same time it was also contradictory for the aim to protect women's reproductive role. In addition, it highlights the way in which gender was an integral element within the system of Soviet production relations since the labour hierarchy was at the core of this.

The labour hierarchy was ingrained in the nature of the Soviet system. There was a hierarchy within the economy as a whole between the industrial and the service

sphere, which was reflected in the pay and provision of goods and services to employees. Those industries most closely tied to the service sphere, for example textiles, were similarly neglected and employees suffered lower pay and worse conditions than their counterparts in heavy industry. Within workplaces, there was also a hierarchy between different categories of employees.

What is most significant here is that the labour hierarchy was also a gender hierarchy. The majority of the 'labour surplus' involved in unskilled manual work in heavy industry were women. Within heavy industry, there existed a labour surplus of unskilled workers involved in auxiliary work. They were a labour surplus in the sense that their jobs could easily have been made redundant with basic mechanisation. Their positions were maintained because of the role that they played in end of the month 'storming' to meet quotas, and because by hoarding labour the management could raise the wage fund and so pay the skilled workers more. In conditions of a labour shortage and high labour turnover this was the primary means by which enterprises could attract and keep labour (Clarke *et al.* 1993).

In light industries, such as textiles, although women predominated on the shop floor, control was in the hands of male managers, and it was men who held the most prestigious posts involved in repair and regulation of machinery, including regulating the pace at which the women worked (Filtzer 1992). Women composed the overwhelming majority of employees in the service sector. Their employment, and low pay in this area, provided a functioning service sector at minimum cost to the state, which then allowed more to be ploughed into heavy industry. Within particular occupations in the service sphere women predominated in the lower skilled work, for example within medicine there was a gender hierarchy in relation to specialisations within the medical profession (Harden 1998).

The labour hierarchy, and so gender, was central to authoritarian paternalism as the form of control over the workforce (Clarke *et al.* 1993). On the one hand it fragmented workers within individual workplaces, between industries and between sectors of the economy. On the other hand, it served as the basis for the bargaining power of ministries, workplaces and workers. So not only were employees dependent on the workplace for their reproduction, but their ability to bargain for a share of the facilities, goods and benefits provided by their workplace depended on their position within the labour hierarchy. In both these respects, gender was a central element in the labour hierarchy as the workforce divided along male/female lines and women's bargaining power was limited by virtue of the occupations and sectors within which they worked.

It is not clear from this why it was women who filled the places at the lower end of the hierarchy. In part this can be explained in relation to the employment patterns that developed in pre-revolutionary Russia. In the post-revolutionary period women entered the labour force with fewer qualifications and experience than men (Engel 1994). For male workers the options were wider, and a reordering of the work that was desirable to them took place (Sigerist 1937). This pre-existing hierarchy was reinforced directly by the protective legislation employed by the central elite to address the contradiction between women's productive and reproductive roles.

However, the 'solutions' to this contradiction served to create further anomalies, as women reacted to their position. Women were not simply passive objects of the

centre's strategy to control their reproduction and labour force participation. While Russian women could not act collectively or have a collective voice, they did react to the conditions within which they lived and worked, often in ways that were contra to the directions of central policy. Regardless of central policy or dangers to their health, women clearly did not see the restrictions on their work as for their benefit or the benefit of their children. Rather they were simply limiting women's opportunities to earn more money.

One female lift operator in the mining industry argued that 'if women want to work in harmful and heavy labour it is their right.' (*Trud* 21/7/88) Not only did this kind of work provide greater monthly earnings but also a higher pension ten years earlier than for work in better conditions. Soviet women felt they had a right to these entitlements and were willing to pay almost anything for them. As one female miner said, 'offer me good wages and I'll crawl into a nuclear reactor let alone go underground.' (Laputina 1990) It is clear from this that women reacted to their segregation in low paid jobs by seeking additional earnings through involvement in dangerous work.

Protective legislation was therefore central to the understanding of gender inequality in Soviet Russia. First, it reflected the contradiction between women's roles in production and biological reproduction — by regulating the extent and nature of women's labour force participation, any difficulties posed to reproduction could be minimised. Second, it served as a means of creating a flexible section of the workforce which could be targeted for redistribution, or indeed removal. This was most noticeable during NEP and is perhaps the greatest legacy of the Soviet system, spanning into the post-Soviet era, for women. The seeds for the idea that women should be removed from production because it is harmful to their health and to the reproduction of future generations, so making way for men, or simply providing the means to enable mass redundancies were sown during the Soviet years. It is only now that the results of this can be seen, as unemployment grows so does the idea that it is right for women not men to be the target for removal. As the Minister of Labour said in 1993, 'why should we employ women when men are employed? It is better if men work and women take care of the children and do housework.' (Kay 1995)

Conclusion

This article has sought to explain the structures within which women in Russia had to take decisions and not merely provide a description of their circumstances as a dual burden. It has been argued that gender played an important part in the strategy of social reproduction. On the one hand women were important productive resources both quantitatively boosting the numbers of the labour force, and qualitatively by virtue of their place within the labour hierarchy. On the other hand, women were also expected to ensure the biological reproduction of the nation as a whole and in particular the long term reproduction of the labour force. The contradiction between these two aspects resulted in attempts by the state to control women's biological reproduction and to control their paid labour.

It is clear therefore that we must move away from a description of the position of women in Soviet Russia in terms of their dual burden towards an analysis of the

complex and contradictory ways in which gender relations became enmeshed with labour relations during this period.

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