

With the Best of Intentions?:

The Gender Politics of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party

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## Contents

Abbreviations and relevant expressions.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1. Literature review: Laying the foundations for primary source analysis.....	5
Chapter 2. The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's outlook on the woman question.....	9
Chapter 3. Viewpoints regarding women's issues in the <i>Társadalmi Szemle</i> .....	14
Conclusion.....	20
Bibliography.....	21

## Abbreviations and relevant expressions

Gyes	Childcare allowance (gyermekellátási segély), introduced in 1967
MDP	Magyar Dolgozók Pártja (Hungarian Workers' Party (1948-1956))
MNOT	Magyar Nők Országos Tanácsa (National Council of Hungarian Women)
MSZMP	Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (1956-1989))
Nőfelelősök	Party members responsible for the representation of women's interests within Party organs
<i>Társadalmi Szemle</i>	"Societal Review", a social scientific journal in Hungary (1931-33, 1946-1998)

## Introduction

“We are talking about such a great question of social justice that it could not be solved for thousands of years. It is only understandable that socialism also needs a little time.”<sup>1</sup>

The sentences above, uttered by no other than János Kádár, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the paramount leader of the People's Republic of Hungary from 1956 to 1988, concern the issue of women's equality. Also referred to as the “woman question” at the time, the topic came to the fore during the Tenth Congress of the Party in 1970. Kádár called attention to the gravity of the problem of women's equality in his speech, and he emphasized that the nature of the issue makes it impossible to resolve with a single edict. He declared that merely the principles proclaimed by the Central Committee and the decrees issued by the Council of Ministers are not enough. Instead, the problem of gender equality needs to be solved via small, everyday tasks performed throughout long years of consistent work, as the quote above testifies.

The present thesis will attempt to contribute to the understanding of women's history in Hungary by analyzing the attitude of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, governing from 1956 until 1989, toward gender equality and women's emancipation. The central question is: How did the Party view the issue of women's equality, and more importantly, why did their efforts aimed at improving women's position in society fail eventually?

Hungary as a sovereign and independent nation state is a relatively new formation since the country acquired its current borders only after the First World War, following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Being an ally of Germany during the Second World War, Hungary stood on the losing side, and so when it was eventually “liberated” by the Red Army in 1945, it had a very limited scope of action to determine its future. In the course of the next four years, the Hungarian Communist Party supported by the Soviet Union gradually increased its political power through various means, among which were modifying the electoral law, rigging elections, and arresting political opponents. By 1949, the Communists had complete control of the state and proclaimed Hungary a People's Republic, as well as introduced a new constitution modelled on the constitution of the USSR.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 1940s and 1950s, an ambitious program of rapid modernization and industrialization was set off in order to rebuild the country after the war destruction and to catch up with the West. However, the harsh dictatorship of the proletariat that characterized early state socialism eased somewhat in later years, especially after the Revolution of 1956, a failed but popular attempt to curb foreign influence and to reintroduce more political freedom in Hungary, that was violently repressed by the Soviet Union. On the one hand, this event

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<sup>1</sup> Gábor Pál Pető, “Ipari Szakmunkásképzés És Női Egyenjogúság (Industrial Vocational Training and Women's Equality),” *Társadalmi Szemle* 29, no. 1 (1974): 56, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1974/?query=pet%C5%91%20g%C3%A1bor%20p%C3%A1l&pg=57](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1974/?query=pet%C5%91%20g%C3%A1bor%20p%C3%A1l&pg=57).

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Andorka, *A Society Transformed: Hungary in Time-Space Perspective* (London: Central European University Press, 1999), 8, accessed January 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=8788&site=ehost-live>.

showed to reformists that the Soviets were not willing to release their grip on any of the countries in the Eastern bloc. On the other hand, more radical Communists also realized that there was a limit to the amount of state control and party directives that the population was able to tolerate. By the early 1960s, steps were taken that pointed to economic and political liberalization that resulted in a form of market socialism, also referred to as “goulash communism.”<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the official Marxist-Leninist ideology still informed much of the objectives and policies of the ruling Socialist Party. One such area was the issue of women’s emancipation. Karl Marx addressed this topic in his writing as a form of oppression connected to, but separate from, class oppression. Heather A. Brown shows that Marx’s dialectical thinking applied to the question of gender relations and roles, too.<sup>4</sup> Marx rejected a static nature/culture divide and he argued that what is conceived of as “natural” is conditional to specific socio-historical contexts. Brown argues that a similar conception holds true of Marx’s thinking about gender relations, that “he seemed to view gender as subject to change and development, rather than as a static concept.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Marx believed that gender relations can and should change. However, this change could not be taken for granted. Marx believed that in order to eliminate gender inequality, not only political and economic relations had to change, but social relations as well. Thus, the revolution of the proletariat would not by itself solve the problem of women’s oppression; achieving gender equality would require more extensive efforts that go beyond merely altering the relations of production.<sup>6</sup> What is more, according to Marx, women’s position in society could indicate the development of society itself.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of gender equality is likely to remain a highly topical issue for the foreseeable future, and historical insights can provide valuable information regarding the present position of women in a given society. This thesis takes the years from 1970 to 1989 as its focus of research, as these two decades can be seen as the time of consolidated state socialism when the turbulence of the years after the Revolution of 1956 had already subsided and the new status quo was found, lasting more or less undisturbed until the system change in 1989. This period is also when the Party started to lay more emphasis on the woman question and developed a more nuanced comprehension of the relating problems.

In order to understand the Party’s stance and perception of gender equality, discourse analysis will be conducted on two sorts of primary sources in this paper. After an introductory literature review in the first section that sets a clear background of socio-historical context, reports made for the Political Committee about the political, economic, and social position of women will be analyzed in the second part of the thesis. Finally, ten articles dealing with women’s emancipation that were published in a major ideological journal of the Party will be studied in the last chapter. These sources will offer an insight into both the theoretical underpinnings as well as the practical effects of several policies enacted by the Party with various degrees of success for the promotion of women’s equality.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

<sup>4</sup> Heather A. Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study* (Leiden: BRILL, 2012), 211, accessed January 2021, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=999443>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 212.

## 1. Literature review: Laying the foundations for primary source analysis

The subsequent sections will detail the perspective of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, or MSZMP) regarding women's emancipation and the rhetoric surrounding the issue. The viewpoints expressed in official Party documents and in articles published in the ideological Party journal *Társadalmi Szemle* will give a relatively varied picture about the attitude and theories of Hungarian socialism in relation to problems specific to women. The main concerns of the Party seem to have been achieving full employment of women and at the same time assuring that their participation in the workforce do not inhibit women from having children. In order to realize these two aims simultaneously, the state experimented with different measures, with varying success. There are some aspects, however, that are missing from the official documents – things that the authorities were either not aware of, or which were not acknowledged openly by the government due to propaganda.

Therefore, before going deeper into the topic, first the general socio-historical conditions need to be sketched out briefly. In this part of the paper, insights from scholarly literature will be reviewed that will serve to contextualize the primary sources analyzed later. The studies used here were published between 1994 and 2014. These historical sources, written with the benefit of hindsight and the neutrality of researchers having no personal attachment to the socialist state, will provide a more objective overview of the emancipatory efforts of the MSZMP in Hungary. They are also instructive in answering the question of why the overall communist objective of liberating women from oppression eventually remained unsuccessful. Scholarly literature highlights and calls our attention to concerns and issues that might be overlooked in primary sources, while primary sources substantiate and provide material for the claims researchers make. Thus, it is through bringing together insights from academic sources and the understanding gained through the reading of primary sources that the complete picture reveals itself.

One of the most interesting points of contention among scholars is the debate around the nature of the gender regime that was imposed by the socialist state. There is disagreement about whether the rhetoric and policies of the Party tried to force women into identifying as workers first and mothers second – or on the contrary, if they reinforced traditional gender roles. First, most studies agree that there was a gradual change in the pattern how state socialism envisioned gender relations. The first stage, which coincided with the phase that Zimmermann refers to as “catching-up industrialization”, stretched from the time the socialist party came to power and established the one-party system in 1949 until the late 1960s. This period was characterized by strong efforts to introduce gender equality in all areas, and the main focus was on bringing more women into the labor force and the public sphere in general. As the labor force participation rate of women almost doubled – rising from 35 % in 1949 to 64 % – by 1970, and the labor market became nearly satisfied, the pressure to procure more workers to join the labor force let off somewhat, and the government started to pay more

attention to family policy and demographics.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the image of the fierce vanguard communist woman gave way to the ideal of the socialist mother.<sup>9</sup>

However, it will also become obvious from the documents and articles analyzed in the next two chapters that women in socialist Hungary could not avoid the double role of being a worker and a mother at the same time. Arguably, the pressure coming from the authorities to take on the double burden increased from the 1970s in line with the increasingly low birth rates.<sup>10</sup> Still, some argue that work was presented to women as their primary calling, as their ultimate moral purpose, and as necessary to become equals to men.<sup>11</sup> Such policy objective was implemented by making all social benefits, including childcare allowances and family benefits, dependent on participation in economic production – thus, if a woman wished to apply for childcare benefit, she had to have been employed for at least one year previously.<sup>12</sup> The message seems to be clear: you are a worker first; any other role you might take on can only come after you have fulfilled your duty to the state and the people.

However, the issue is more complex. Gillian Pascall, for example, argues that “by the 1980s the official conception of gender relations was entrenching difference rather than equality.”<sup>13</sup> Differences between the sexes were more readily accepted as natural, instead of being constantly attacked as residues of outdated capitalist schemes: “while the material effects of inequality (women’s double burden) were deplored, the divisions themselves – far from being seen as socially constructed – were increasingly talked of as natural, even desirable, by planners and populace alike, as a reaction to the extremism of earlier years.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the articles that appeared in the *Társadalmi Szemle* point in this direction, too: in 1951, a key concern of the author was the “inadmissibly low rate of women among tractor and harvester drivers” at 5 %, while in 1967, it is emphasized that there are some aspects where women and men differ biologically and psychologically.<sup>15</sup> What is more, the minister of labor prohibited employing women for activities that were considered as overly exerting women’s bodies – such as driving a tractor.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, it is also suggested that not only did the state retrace its policies in regard to claiming complete gender equality, but that it did not even really attempt to ease the double burden weighing on women. In the 1950s, it seems evident that taking care of household

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Zimmermann, “Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism,” *Aspasia* 4 (January 2010): 1–25, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2010.040102>.

<sup>9</sup> Mária Neményi and Júlia Szalai, “The Social Construction of Women’s Roles in Hungary,” *REPLIKA*, 1996, 85, accessed December 2020, <https://www.replika.hu/system/files/archivum/replika%20si96-09.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Gillian Pascall and Anna Kwak, *Gender Regimes in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>11</sup> Lynne Haney, “From Proud Worker to Good Mother: Women, the State, and Regime Change in Hungary,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 14, no. 3 (1994): 121–22, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346683>.

<sup>12</sup> Zimmermann, “Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism.”

<sup>13</sup> Pascall and Kwak, *Gender Regimes in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Edit Varga, “Nők a Termelésben (Women in Production),” *Társadalmi Szemle* 6, no. 6 (1951): 464, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1951/?query=BKMK1%3D%28n%C5%91%29&pg=479](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1951/?query=BKMK1%3D%28n%C5%91%29&pg=479).

<sup>16</sup> Egon Szabady, “A Nők Helyzetének Néhány Problémája (Some Problems of the Situation of Women),” *Társadalmi Szemle* 22, no. 4 (1967): 76, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1967/?query=szabady&pg=473](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1967/?query=szabady&pg=473).

chores was considered as the woman's task exclusively. For instance, a so-called housework day was introduced in 1953 – it was one unpaid free day per month, available to employed mothers with at least two children under the age of fourteen. The reason for this extra leave was “the interests of maintaining good housekeeping.”<sup>17</sup> In 1962, the Central Statistical Office still counted on men's incidental participation in housework as “assistance” only.<sup>18</sup> Compared to such bleak beginnings, it was quite some progress when the childcare allowance (gyes) was introduced in 1967 that allowed women to take a break from work for two and a half years.

Yet, although women's double role was acknowledged, many researchers find little evidence of true willingness on the part of the state to actually induce some change in the unequal division of labor within the family. Robila, for one, writes: “patriarchal views of women were maintained since they were primarily responsible for childcare and household duties. While both spouses were expected to work, the woman was also expected to assume housework and childrearing responsibilities.”<sup>19</sup> Sz. Oláh and Fratzczak also find that “despite high female employment rates for several decades, and relatively high level of gender equality in the public sphere, the division of family responsibilities remained rather traditional and was even reinforced by public policies in Hungary and Poland, similarly to other Central-East European countries.”<sup>20</sup> Takács agrees that although socialist ideology promoted a “modernization” of women's role – meaning they were encouraged to leave the home to work – the tasks of the traditional housewife were not omitted from the new ideal: “the ‘gender gap in the socialist analysis of women's condition’, obscuring the specific oppression that derived from women's centrality in (biological) reproduction and the patriarchal relations that structured social life, remained a characteristic feature of this period.”<sup>21</sup> Zimmermann shows that linking social benefits to paid employment should be seen as a matter of principle for the state, as well as a strategy to incentivize work, not necessarily as the proof that the worker role of women eclipsed their role of mother.<sup>22</sup>

What can account for the fact that eventually traditional conceptualizations of gender roles and family life prevailed in the later state socialist era? The idea was, as will become apparent from the articles in Chapter 3, that the bulk of unpaid work would be removed from the home and catered for by either various social institution (such as kindergartens and canteens) or be resolved by household devices (washing machines, hoovers, etc.). Zimmermann argues that this solution did not materialize “due to conscious economic policy decisions aimed at rapid catching-up industrialisation.”<sup>23</sup> Developing the consumer goods industry and service sector were simply not prioritized by the government. Thus, although it was frequently talked about, the conditions to alleviate the double burden of women were not eventually realized. The

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<sup>17</sup> Zimmermann, “Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism.”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Mihaela Robila, “Families in Eastern Europe: Context, Trends and Variations,” in *Families in Eastern Europe*, ed. Mihaela Robila, vol. 5, Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 6, accessed December 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1530-3535\(04\)05001-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1530-3535(04)05001-0).

<sup>20</sup> Livia Sz. Oláh and Ewa Fratzczak, “Becoming a Mother in Hungary and Poland during State Socialism,” *Demographic Research* Special 3 (April 2004): 218, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2004.S3.9>.

<sup>21</sup> Judit Takács, “Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State-Socialist Hungary in the 1970s,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 22, no. 1 (2015): 171, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2014.983426>.

<sup>22</sup> Zimmermann, “Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



division of household chores between men and women remained the same, with a steady 75% of housework done by women in 1985 just like in the mid- 1960s.<sup>24</sup> Probably the official rhetoric, promising a convenient solution that would have relieved each member of the family from housework, did not encourage men to take a larger share of it.

There might have been other objective reasons for labor division within the family as well. In the late 1960s, Hungary slightly orientated away from the Soviet Union, and it tacitly introduced some elements of a decentralized market economy. Due to this political and economic loosening Hungary became “the happiest barracks of the Soviet camp” which meant that the standard of living was one of the highest among countries in the Eastern bloc.<sup>25</sup> However, this opportunity came at a price, as people had to work overtime in the second or hidden economy of private production which accounted for as much as 20 percent of the national product.<sup>26</sup> According to Tóth, an attempt to optimize this activity in the second economy is the source of the (retention of) unequal division of labor within families: “While men were more likely to possess skills that were useful in the second economy, women became responsible for managing the family, and representing the family in the outside world.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it is plausible that the relative underpayment of women as compared to the earning of their husband discredited any claims that men should take a more active part in household chores, working against changing the traditional family model.<sup>28</sup>

If there is one thing all historians agree on, that is surely the statement that gender equality in socialist Hungary was an external imposition, virtually forced upon the population by the state. Although the Central Committee did not use the same words scholars use, but it shows from the report drawn up about women’s situation in 1970 that the Party was aware of the reluctance of not only men, but also many women, to accept gender equality for what the Party claimed it to be: an inevitable step on the path towards the complete liberation of the people. The contradictions inherent in the gender politics of the state are illustrated perfectly by the debate about the ideal woman in the women’s magazine *Nők Lapja* (run by the national council of women) in 1970:

[The debate] was centred on expectations towards modern – i.e. working – women, while positioning them in a conservative family context. This debate revealed that while normative expectations about ideal femininity had gone through a certain degree of modernisation, especially regarding the increasing participation of women in paid employment, the prevailing ideal of family life, including the unequal division of domestic work, remained largely unchanged.<sup>29</sup>

The conclusion seems to be that, in effect, the Hungarian socialist state endorsed neither the role of worker nor the role of housewife as women’s primary occupation. Instead, it became more and more evident that – at least for the time being – women had to fulfill both these roles in equal measure.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Takács, “Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State-Socialist Hungary in the 1970s,” 162.

<sup>26</sup> Andorka, *A Society Transformed*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Olga Tóth, “The Hungarian Family,” in *Families in Eastern Europe*, ed. Mihaela Robila, vol. 5, Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 122–23, accessed 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1530-3535\(04\)05008-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1530-3535(04)05008-3).

<sup>28</sup> Oláh and Fratzak, “Becoming a Mother in Hungary and Poland during State Socialism,” 214.

<sup>29</sup> Takács, “Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State-Socialist Hungary in the 1970s,” 167.

## 2. The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's outlook on the woman question

There were three major instances between 1970 and 1989 when the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party explicitly focused on the issue of women's emancipation. First, an extensive report was presented to the Central Committee in early 1970 about the economic, political and social status of women. This was discussed as an item on the agenda by the Central Committee in February 1970. The report, along with the presenter's speech and the decree made at the session, was also subsequently published as a booklet. In 1972, the issue was revisited shortly in a briefing, but a broader consideration happened only in 1979 when the issue came on the agenda of the Central Committee again. A review was presented there regarding the main experiences from the execution of the 1970 declaration. This new report was approved and a new resolution called for the continuation and intensification of the kind of work that had been done up to that point. With that, the matter was left to rest for another ten years.

Then in 1989, the Political Committee was presented with an overview about the main questions of the status of women and the women's movement, made by the National Council of Hungarian Women, an organization directed by the Party itself. This last document is much less optimistic and more self-critical in tone than the previous ones, and it draws the conclusion that the progress made during the 1970s had stopped and even retracted in certain aspects. This chapter will first describe the concrete problems concerning the situation of women identified in 1970 and the measures proposed to remedy them. Then, it will analyze the progress made by 1979. Finally, it will be possible to draw the balance and see which aspects of the Party's policy to uplift women was more successful and which aims they failed to achieve.

### *a. 1970.*

It was within the 1970 report that the position of women was debated in the Central Committee for the first time since World War Two. The text examines the status of women from three angles: political, economic, and social. This order seems to reveal the priorities of the Party as the emphasis lays throughout very much on the political, ideological education of women and the need to engage them more actively with state socialism. This outlook derives from the Party's conviction that state socialism is the only system capable of the complete emancipation of women, and that equal rights for women can only materialize in so far as "the Party, the working class, the working people pushed forward in the fields of political, economic, cultural life."<sup>30</sup>

Although the report acknowledged that some advancement had been made, such as the incorporation of equal political rights for women in the Constitution or their increased

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<sup>30</sup> 1970. február 18-19. (kibővített ülés)+(288. f. 4/104-105. ö. e.), 1970, HU-MNL-OL-M-KS 288, Box 4, Folder 104-105, Pártiratok, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Budapest, Hungary, accessed December 2020, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonyvek/adatlap/493?search=n%C5%91k&term=eyJxIjoiblx1MDE1MWsiLCJmcSI6eyJkY19pZCI6eyJkNmJhZjY1ZTBiMjQwY2UxNzdjZjcwZGExNDZjOGRjOCi6IjI2NCJ9fSwic29ydCI6InNjb3JlIiwieYXEiOiIiLCJhcVR5cGUiOiIifQ==&curr=3>.

participation in the labor market, the report uncovers many shortfalls as well. These were traced back to two groups of reasons, namely as deriving from either economic factors or from factors of consciousness. The main problems were found in the following categories: the prevalence of outdated attitudes to gender equality, the limitation in economic possibilities, the level of women's general and political erudition, the deficit of their public activity and interest, but also the burden of women's "double vocation," which meant taking care of the household and their family along with their job, and the prejudices they had to face.<sup>31</sup>

In relation to consciousness, the past lifestyle conception of bourgeois ideology and religious thinking were established as the central culprits for the continuation of women's oppression. The fact that matters of mental attitude as well as personal relationships were very much part of the private sphere obviously made it rather difficult for the MSZMP to control and amend these. Nevertheless, they committed to resuming the communist theoretical education – which was considered to have worked well before – "in order to convince the population of the rightness, social fairness, and necessity of women's equal rights and equal status."<sup>32</sup> The only viable solution, supposedly, was total cooperation involving the whole of society. The work, however, had to start right at the doorstep, as the presenter of the report addressed the shortcomings of the Party in his speech: "our words and deeds do not coincide with each other" because the official line is not enforced systematically.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding more tangible problems, the most prominent of these was the failure to adhere to the principle of "equal pay for equal work" in practice. Women earned less than men in equivalent positions, and they more often worked in sectors with a low pay rate such as the textile industry.<sup>34</sup> Women were also conspicuously underrepresented in leadership positions. We read a kind of glass ceiling phenomenon between the lines: although the number of women fit to fulfill higher positions was growing, promotion nevertheless "stands in front of them almost as an inapproachable, impregnable castle."<sup>35</sup> Although 65 % of women of working age was in employment – which was regarded by the MSZMP as a huge improvement – the drawback of this was that many of these women had to tackle the double vocation of taking care of the household along with working a full-time job. Given the still somewhat rudimentary state of the social and service networks, this was no easy task. Although the family had allegedly become more democratic, the bulk of household chores and childrearing fell on women's shoulders; the average working woman was estimated to perform another 30 hours of housework weekly.<sup>36</sup>

In the resolution which concluded the debate, the Central Committee decided that local measures were required first and foremost to promote women's equality, but also that the Party should assume direct leadership in dealing with the issue. It decreed that women's committees have to be established on all levels so that women's interests would be

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<sup>31</sup> Women were shown to perform a constant 75 % of housework from the 1960s through the 1980s. See Susan Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism," *Aspasia* 4 (January 2010): 1–25, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2010.040102>.

<sup>32</sup> 1970. február 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism."

<sup>35</sup> 1970. február 18-19.

<sup>36</sup> Lynne Haney, "From Proud Worker to Good Mother: Women, the State, and Regime Change in Hungary," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 14, no. 3 (1994): 120, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346683>.

represented and advocated for in all executive bodies. For a similar reason, a system of *nőfelelősök* (representatives responsible for the matter of women) were also to be established within the Party. Furthermore, attention had to be paid when making five year- and long-term plans to the following: the principle of “equal pay for equal work”; further increasing women’s employment; developing services and childcare facilities more quickly and with taking into account the needs of women; enforcing adherence to the social norms at the workplace (not explained further); reducing night shifts in textile factories if possible; and supporting single mothers and families with multiple children financially.

*b. 1972 and 1979.*

The Party leadership was informed in 1972 about the effects of the 1970 resolution and about the experiences gathered during its implementation. This briefing speaks about some improvement, but it also mentions many aspects where more substantial progress lagged behind. Among the positives, it lists that the Party gained more control and that more female members were admitted into the MSZMP. The deliberate preparation of women for leadership positions had also started, and an increased proportion of women were appointed to group leader and forewoman posts. The number of women attending Party schools and evening universities grew, too.

However, these achievements seem to be more of a silver lining beside the bulk of problems where little to no progress was made. For example, the document states that women’s promotion to higher management positions was virtually zero, that the majority of Party organs was not proactive, that the *nőfelelősök* were not only overburdened but often lacked special knowledge and were oblivious to what their exact task was. Treating gender equality and its realization as a societal issue did not become common even within the Party itself. In terms of the economy, most measures taken were of a one-time nature, such as trying to compensate for the systemic pay gap with a one-off supplement.

The report of 1979 could look at a longer period to evaluate the impact of policies over the past decade. It starts by stating that “dealing with the status of women is more goal-oriented, more purposeful, there have been significant results in the practical implementation of women’s equality.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, improvement happened in many fields – yet, almost all achievements are followed by a “but”. For example, women’s employment had reached an unprecedented 78 %, and the family became more socialist in character – but women had a disproportionately bigger burden of household chores. Also, their working conditions and pay inequalities ameliorated, but there were still many deficiencies. Women filled leading positions more often and their political awareness improved, but progress was considered to have been slower than what would have been possible, and little diversification was achieved in women’s professional orientation. The state provided significant financial support to

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<sup>37</sup> 1979. október 16.+(288. f. 5/783. ö. e.), HU-MNL-OL-M-KS 288, Box 5, Folder 783, Pártiratok, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Budapest, Hungary, accessed December 2020, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonyvek/adatlap/1387?search=n%C5%91k&term=eyJxIjoiblx1MDE1MWsiLCJmcSI6eyJkY19pZCI6eyJkNmJhZjY1ZTBiMjQwY2UxNzdzJjcwZGExNDZjOGRjOCi6IjI2NCJ9LCJmZGF0ZSI6eyJyYW5nZSI6IlsxOTc5LWTEwLTAxIFRPIDE5NzktMTAtMzFdn19LClJzb3J0Ijoic2NvcmluLCJhcSI6IiIsImFxVHlwZSI6IiJ9&curr=1.>

families through the welfare system, but childcare institutions remained overcrowded and combining motherhood with full-time work proved challenging.<sup>38</sup>

The new decree in 1979 ordered that the woman question should be more organically incorporated into daily political work. It also prescribed a more decisive action against outdated views that recognize gender equality only in words. Another priority was the further improvement of women's working conditions and their general, political, and professional education, along with the development of services and the expansion of the network of childcare facilities. The validation of "equal pay for equal work" and placing more women into managerial roles were once again emphasized as deserving extra attention when designing policies.

c. 1989.

In 1989, the National Council of Hungarian Women (Magyar Nők Országos Tanácsa, MNOT) provided the Political Committee with a final synopsis "about the main questions of the situation of women and the women's movement."<sup>39</sup> This document would read almost like the very first report in 1970 for its objectives are remarkably similar, if there was not an explicit acknowledgement of the general failure to achieve the goals specified in that decree nineteen years earlier. The tone of the text is remarkably sober, almost self-deprecating. It starts with the observation that "the experiences of recent years did not confirm the permanence of favorable changes," and it speaks of a serious relapse.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it does bring forward a number of improvements. Among these are a further increase in women's employment (which witnessed another five percent growth and now stood at 83 %) <sup>41</sup>; a constant rise in the level of women's education; the expansion of the social support of child-rearing; and the democratization of families.

These developments, however, almost seem to be ascribed to good luck instead of attributing them to the official policies, due to the derailment of the Party's main efforts. As the paper sums it up succinctly: "Despite the improvement, women's equality has not really become a societal issue."<sup>42</sup> Additionally, it states that women's social problems are played down within the Party, which results in the issue to be pushed to the periphery of political work. The

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<sup>38</sup> While in 1970, only 53 % of children attended kindergarten, this rate increased to 85 % by 1979. Judit Takács, "Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State-Socialist Hungary in the 1970s," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 22, no. 1 (2015): 167, accessed December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2014.983426>.

<sup>39</sup> 1989. április 5.+(288. f. 5/1061. ő. e.), HU-MNL-OL-M-KS 288, Box 5, Folder 1061, Pártiratok, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Budapest, Hungary, accessed December 2020, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonyvek/adatlap/756?search=n%C5%91k&term=eyJxIjoiblx1MDE1MWsiLCJmcSI6eyJkY19pZCI6eyJkNmJhZjY1ZTBiMjQwY2UxNzdzjcwZGExNDZjOGRjOCi6IjI2NCJ9LCJmZGF0ZSI6eyJyYW5nZSI6IlsxOTg5LTAxLTAxIFRPIDE5OTA tMTAtMzFzIn19LCJzb3J0Ijoic2Nvc mUiLCJhcSI6IiIsImFhVHlwZSI6IiJ9&curr=1>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> According to Frey (1997), 69% of women were in employment in 1990. Cited in Olga Tóth, "The Hungarian Family," in *Families in Eastern Europe*, ed. Mihaela Robila, vol. 5, Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 128, accessed December 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1530-3535\(04\)05008-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1530-3535(04)05008-3).

<sup>42</sup> 1989. április 5.

proper representation and protection of women's interest are still unresolved, so is the problem of opinions and practices that negate women's equality. The document refers to the degree to which women's equality is realized as one of the essential signifiers of socialist democracy, like Marx did – and maintains that “our system has to gradually create the economic and ideological conditions for women's complete human equality.”<sup>43</sup>

The Political Committee agrees in its position with the MNOT completely in recognizing that the once dynamic pace of development halted, even retracted during the 1980s, and that women are afflicted by increasing burdens. It supports the revitalization of the women's movement on a more diverse and bottom-up organizational basis. This focus on a differentiated incorporation of the interests of women's various groups and strata is a novel element in these documents. The Political Committee concludes by calling for the reconsideration of the principles and tools laid out in the 1970 decree with regard to women's emancipation – back to square one, apparently.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Viewpoints regarding women's issues in the *Társadalmi Szemle*

The *Társadalmi Szemle* ("Societal Review") was a monthly sociological journal closely associated with the Hungarian socialist state. It was founded originally in 1931 by the then illegal Communist party in Hungary, but it was banned soon thereafter. It was re-started in 1946 by the (now legal) re-formed Communist party, and from then on it ran until 1998 with only one brief interruption from 1956 to 1957. In the state socialist period, it was the official ideological journal of the MSZMP and its predecessor, the MDP (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, or Hungarian Workers' Party) between 1957-1989 and 1948-1956, respectively.<sup>44</sup> The journal published articles on various sociological topics that were of interest to the Party and to the development of state socialism in general. Among these, some pieces concern women's issues as well and these provide us with a new angle to study the socialist party's outlook on women's emancipation.

After an extended search for articles with the Hungarian word for "woman" (*nő*) in the title, ten articles, which were written about women's position in state socialism in the period 1946-1989, were selected for the purposes of this paper. These articles range in time from 1951 to 1986, while the bulk of them was published in the late 1960s and 1970s. This distribution illustrates when attention for women's problems was at its highest, but the articles also reveal what issues were considered most pressing at the time they were written. For example, the first piece in 1951 mainly deals with the challenge of how to bring more women into production as a step towards the completion of the socialist transformation, whereas the last articles from 1986 worry about the devaluation of family life and the rigidity of work organization. The following section will briefly summarize these articles in order to give a picture about the development and transformation of the woman question in state socialist theory.

#### a. 1950s.

The only piece from the 1950s which focuses on women is an article titled "Women in production" (1951). Why this novel attention paid to women's issues is made clear in the introduction: the Party congress established that women constitute one of the three main new sources of labor supply, along with workers reorientating due to the mechanization of agriculture and the youth. The author also asserts that the greatest challenge would surely be posed by bringing women and girls into employment, but at the same time she maintains that this is unavoidable for the realization of socialism as well as the only way to create complete equality for women. The article notes the low proportion of women in the workforce, providing only 21,5 % of those employed.<sup>45</sup> It also details how capitalism exploits and oppresses women in a double manner as not only have women to work, they are also

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<sup>44</sup> "Társadalmi Szemle 1931-1998," Arcanum Digitális Tudománytár, accessed December 2020, <https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/collection/TarsadalmiSzemle/#>.

<sup>45</sup> Edit Varga, "Nők a Termelésben (Women in Production)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 6, no. 6 (1951): 463, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1951/?query=BKMK1%3D%28n%C5%91%29&pg=479](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1951/?query=BKMK1%3D%28n%C5%91%29&pg=479).

subjected to male supremacy. As such, Marxism sees the only remedy in the dismantling of private property.

If the pace of engaging women in productive activity is wanting, one crucial reason is accountable for that. Not too difficult to guess, this reason is believed to be retrograde thinking, rudiments of capitalism in people's minds that hold the "double slavery" (referring to women's oppression both by capital and by men) a natural law.<sup>46</sup> It is worth noticing that the double slavery of capitalism and the double burden existing in socialism that the report of the Central Committee in 1970 mentioned are quite similar, as both of them derive from the situation where women have to fulfill responsibilities both outside and inside the home. At the root of both is the fact that housework remained almost completely the woman's task, no matter how much state socialism agitated against it. What is clear, however, is that collectivization alone cannot solve the ingrained social habit of unequal sharing of household chores.

In fact, it transpires in the 1951 article that thus far not much had been done to alter the "outdated" mode of thinking. It mentions that this "philistine" mindset is found sometimes even among Party functionaries. Furthermore, companies prefer employing male workers in the case of equal payment.<sup>47</sup> The institutions and services that could alleviate the burden of housework are also lacking. Ironically, the article asserts at the end that participation in building socialism cannot overshadow women's familial and motherly calling. On the contrary, "we demand that women spearheading production set an example in child-rearing and attending to their familial role as well."<sup>48</sup> That is a bar set high, not only for women but also for the state to muster up the resources for creating the necessary conditions that would facilitate living up to that ideal.

#### *b. 1960s.*

In the 1960s, more attention was paid to women's issues, especially to their education and employment patterns, but also increasingly to the ways in which the challenge of coordinating work and family could be tackled. A 1965 article studies "the vocation of woman and girls entering the workforce."<sup>49</sup> We read here for the first time about a problem that was starting to emerge and which would recur multiple times: the underrepresentation of girls in vocational schools and the disparity between the portion of men and women in positions requiring vocational training. Part of the reason for this disparity was found again in traditional thinking which questions women's capability of performing skilled industrial and agricultural work. Another argument against employing women altogether was the assumption that female work is not economical. The working conditions were also discouraging: multiple shifts, deficient hygiene and equipment in the workplace, not to mention the lack of sufficient provision regarding services and childcare institutions (e.g., nursery schools).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 470.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 472.

<sup>49</sup> Zsuzsa Ortutay, "A Nő Hivatása És a Leányok Munkába Állása (The Vocation of the Woman and Girls Entering the Workforce)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 20, no. 10 (1965): 38–43, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1965/?query=ortutay&pg=1134](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1965/?query=ortutay&pg=1134).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 39.



The article also points to an increasing awareness concerning the problem of low birth rates.<sup>51</sup> There seems to be no place in state socialism for the view that a woman should or could choose between either taking up a job or staying home and having children. The state could not miss out on any of the functions of women, be it production or reproduction. The author makes it clear that it is impossible to forego the potential national income which could be generated by one half of the population, while it is also imperative to take care that women bear children. Thus, women must be able to reconcile the two. The solution proposed: supporting families financially and with institutions that point toward the socialization of the family household.<sup>52</sup> Gradually, such conditions have to be created that allow women to meet both their “extraordinarily important” roles. It is also a matter of altering people’s worldview, supposedly; “it must be recognized that a woman bringing up her child is at least as important a member of society as the one who works a paying job.”<sup>53</sup>

A 1969 article paints a similarly gloomy picture of the hardship women had to bear. It confirms that women’s vocational knowledge is insufficient and therefore they tend to occupy jobs in the more labor-intensive sectors. Furthermore, the double burden makes women less likely to be promoted because they are less capable of keeping up with recent developments in their trade due to their familial responsibilities.<sup>54</sup> According to the survey of the Central People’s Control Committee cited in the article, working women spent 35-40 hours per week to cater for the family and home; of this time, only 10 percent is devoted to children, while grocery shopping and cooking costs almost 50 percent, and the remaining 40 percent is taken up by cleaning and washing.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, women were still not liberated from the double slavery/burden irrespective of the political and economic system. But it shows that Hungarian socialism was beginning to recognize that the problem goes deeper than what could be remedied by transforming the relations of production.

This was also the time when state socialism itself was shifting toward a more tolerant state and a more open economy.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps it was this turning to a softer Party line that allowed such sentences to appear in the articles as the suggestion that perhaps not every woman does the housework because she has to, that perhaps it is precisely her paying job that she regards as a “forced obligation.”<sup>57</sup> Or perhaps it was a sign that the Party line itself was growing more conservative. Ideally, household work would be taken care of by service enterprises outside the home, although this remained a far-fetched wish. For the time being, if retail shops better

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<sup>51</sup> Egon Szabady, “A Nők Helyzetének Néhány Problémája (Some Problems of the Situation of Women),” *Társadalmi Szemle* 22, no. 4 (1967): 77, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1967/?query=szabady&pg=473](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1967/?query=szabady&pg=473); Pascall and Kwak, *Gender Regimes in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Ortutay, “A Nő Hivatása És a Leányok Munkába Állása (The Vocation of the Woman and Girls Entering the Workforce),” 40.

<sup>53</sup> Szabady, “A Nők Helyzetének Néhány Problémája (Some Problems of the Situation of Women),” 78.

<sup>54</sup> Judit Kovács, “A Nők Körülményeinek Alakulása a Munkahelyen És Otthon (The Development of Women’s Circumstances at the Workplace and at Home),” *Társadalmi Szemle* 24, no. 6 (1969): 54, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1969/?query=kov%C3%A1cs%20judit&pg=632](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1969/?query=kov%C3%A1cs%20judit&pg=632).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>56</sup> Olga Tóth, “The Hungarian Family,” 122; Judit Takács, “Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State-Socialist Hungary in the 1970s,” 161–62.

<sup>57</sup> Kovács, “A Nők Körülményeinek Alakulása a Munkahelyen És Otthon (The Development of Women’s Circumstances at the Workplace and at Home),” 57.

accommodated the time schedule of working women with opening hours, that would already have meant considerable help.

c. 1970s.

The first article from the 1970s, published in 1971, mostly sums up the decisions made by the Central Committee in 1970. Although not adding much to the existing knowledge, it does make some interesting observations. For instance, it points out a new tendency regarding gender distribution among occupations. The earlier trend whereby women mostly worked physical jobs and men occupied intellectual fields was being replaced by a new pattern. Now men tended to fill leadership positions or jobs requiring more education in both industrial and white-collar sectors, while women were left with physical and office jobs that required little training or education.<sup>58</sup> The following statistics show this tendency, quoted in an article from 1974: in ten years, the number of skilled manual laborers grew by 284,000 – out of that, about 35,000 were women. In the same period, the number of laborers trained on the job increased by 227,000 – and 185,000 of them were women.<sup>59</sup>

The problem of the dual role of working mothers subsequently comes to the fore again in 1975. This time, the institution of childcare allowance (gyes), which was introduced in 1967 in order to incentivize having children, is also problematized for its exclusion of fathers.<sup>60</sup> The author suggests that it is faulty to compensate only the mother with social benefits as the intention is to reform the role of the father to participate in child-rearing more.<sup>61</sup> Although the advantage of social benefits that favor women – who are more overburdened – is evident, they also reproduce the unequal sharing of work associated with the household and the family. Consequently, the only viable solution would be to approach from both sides: not only women need to be provided with equal opportunities at work, but a shift in emphasis must also take place in men's life, with more attention to be paid to their father/husband role. This change, the author states, could realize the gender equality spelled out in the Party's program of the "socialist lifestyle and ethics."<sup>62</sup>

Although it is obvious that the private sphere cannot be changed as quickly as the public sphere, a study about "women in work and in the family" claims that women's equality in the family materializes more slowly than in other fields of society, while the private sphere lags further behind the public sphere in the case of women's position.<sup>63</sup> We discover interesting inequalities between man and woman within the family. First, the husband's education level is

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<sup>58</sup> Judit Kovács, "Tények És Tendenciák a Nőpolitikában (Facts and Tendencies in Women's Politics)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 26, no. 12 (1971): 85, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1971/?query=kov%C3%A1cs%20judit&pg=1290](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1971/?query=kov%C3%A1cs%20judit&pg=1290).

<sup>59</sup> Pető, "Ipari Szakmunkásképzés És Női Egyenjogúság (Industrial Vocational Training and Women's Equality)," 59.

<sup>60</sup> Takács, "Disciplining Gender and (Homo)Sexuality in State-Socialist Hungary in the 1970s," 164.

<sup>61</sup> Júlia Turgonyi, "A Nő És a Munka (The Woman and Work)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 30, no. 10 (1975): 36, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1975/?query=turgonyi&pg=953](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1975/?query=turgonyi&pg=953).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>63</sup> Zsuzsa Ferge, "A Nők a Munkában És a Családban (Women at Work and in the Family)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 31, no. 6 (1976): 39–40, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1976/?query=ferge&pg=620](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1976/?query=ferge&pg=620).

usually higher than that of his wife. Second, given that women in general have a lower rate of income, this often increases the pay gap between husband and wife.<sup>64</sup> According to the writer, this pattern reinforces the division of housework by making women feel that their (paid) work is inherently inferior to their husband's work, and therefore they must make up for the deficit through doing all the work around the household. At the same time, this also consolidates how society perceives the role of work and family in the lives of men and women.<sup>65</sup>

Childcare allowance is argued to have the same effect of reinforcing the traditional view – accepted by many women and men alike – which holds that taking care of the home is the woman's task.<sup>66</sup> Socialization is also responsible for carrying on traditional gender roles inadvertently, and this involves not only the family but also schools and other elements of the public sphere.<sup>67</sup>

#### *d. 1980s.*

In the late 1980s, women's employment resurfaced in the Party journal, this time with more pessimistic observations. In the last two articles examined, most attention was paid to the disadvantageous effects that women's participation in the labor market caused. One of these negative impacts was the loosening up of family bonds that led to an increased number of divorces and more children living in institutions or broken families or having problems of socialization.<sup>68</sup> Also mentioned is a rushed, restless lifestyle.<sup>69</sup> The article states that the full employment of women had many unexpected and unwanted consequences, probably because it happened too quickly but also because it surpassed the level which is "desirable socially-personally and rational economically."<sup>70</sup> A relatively innovative solution is put forward this time, namely the idea that work should be organized in a more flexible manner which includes alternatives to full-time employment, such as part-time work or working from home.

Finally, the last article – written as a commentary on the previous one – argues that the rigidity of the social organization of work is accountable for not only social difficulties but it is also one of the reasons for the low efficiency of labor.<sup>71</sup> Whether substantiated or not, if viewed from this perspective, the heroic progress of state socialism that increased women's labor participation from 35 % to almost 70 % in forty years certainly appears like a gigantic own goal.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Zimmermann (2010) writes: On a scale from below 1,000 forints to over 5,000 forints, among urban families investigated, sixty-five percent of men earned over 800 forints more than their wives, and a further twenty-three percent were paid between 100 and 800 forints more than their wives.

<sup>65</sup> Ferge, "A Nők a Munkában És a Családban (Women at Work and in the Family)," 41–43.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49.

<sup>68</sup> Tóth, "The Hungarian Family," 125.

<sup>69</sup> Júlia Molnárné Venyige, "Nők a Változó Társadalmi Munkamegosztásban (Women in the Changing Social Division of Work)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 41, no. 8–9 (1986): 48–49, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1986/?query=venyige&pg=792](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1986/?query=venyige&pg=792).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Zsuzsa Orolin, "A Nők Rugalmas Foglalkoztatásáról (On the Flexible Employment of Women)," *Társadalmi Szemle* 41, no. 10 (1986): 101, accessed November 2020, [https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle\\_1986/?query=orolin&pg=1014](https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/TarsadalmiSzemle_1986/?query=orolin&pg=1014).

<sup>72</sup> Susan Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism."

To conclude, a gradual change in attitude to women's emancipation can be observed over time. While in the 1950s, the primary concern of Party theoreticians was bringing more women into the productive process, the focus shifted toward the problem of low birth rates during the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, women's reproductive function became more prominent. At the same time, a more nuanced understanding of women's situation is evident from the articles published later which suggest that more factors were taken into account when considering social policy issues. Finally, the negative effects of women's full employment were starting to come to the fore more emphatically in the late 1980s, perhaps reflecting a more general loss of confidence in socialism as the remedy for all social problems.

## Conclusion

The materials studied above delineate an interesting case of government policy surrounding the issue of women's emancipation in socialist Hungary. The documents produced by or for the Party, such as the encompassing 1970 report studied in Chapter 2, show that there was a certain anxiety within the Party to transform how society regarded women. Gender inequality was identified as a twofold problem; first, it was seen as an ideological obstacle due to residues of "capitalistic thinking". Second, the material side of the issue was also realized, for example the failure to enforce the principle of "equal pay for equal work," or the difficult position women faced because of their double burden as full-time workers and housewives.

Accordingly, a number of steps were taken to promote equal rights and equal opportunities, and in some respects quite significant progress was made. Resulting positive changes were the expansion of the network of childcare facilities and the increased educational level of women. Still, in many other instances the effect of the taken measures remained unrealized. This is evident from the observation that women's social problems were consistently overlooked and the fact that the unequal division of labor within the household remained unchanged throughout the years. By 1989, the Party had to admit that eventually the goals set out in 1970 were only sporadically achieved.

The opinions expressed in the articles taken from the Party journal that were examined in the last chapter similarly show a gradual loss of optimism among those involved in policy making and social research. From the triumphant rhetoric of the 1950s when women were celebrated as one of the main new sources of labor supply, they got to the point where women's full employment was proclaimed to be the reason for loosening family bonds and decreasing labor productivity. Nevertheless, it can be seen as a positive development that over time, women's position in society and the scope and variety of problems they faced became better understood due to the prolonged attention the woman question received. Even if this perhaps only revealed a broader palette of problems awaiting solution which the system and the state was unable to provide.

These articles also point out the flipside of otherwise beneficial measures, for example, they bring out the potential of childcare benefits geared toward mothers to reinforce traditional perceptions of gender roles. The later articles raise attention to these disadvantageous effects of previous policies, and they conclude that several unexpected and unwanted consequences also resulted, while many of the problems the government aimed to alleviate prevailed.

A general conclusion seems to suggest itself: arguably, a certain level of economic development would have to be reached before the issue of gender equality could have been addressed with the hope of actually attaining significant progress. The education level would also have had to increase and the financial pressure on families and women in particular would need to be relieved to such an extent that gender equality had become a desire and a realistic expectation both within and without the family.

The Hungarian socialist state pursued a policy of catching-up development not only in economic terms but also in the field of gender regime. However, it lacked the resources to enforce the strict principles it spelled out, and therefore the woman question was not, could not be, prioritized effectively. Ideological commitment proved insufficient when enacting the required policies necessitated significant material resources as well.

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