

# Women in the Building Era of Czechoslovakia 1945–1948: “Two-Year Period Unfeasible without the Participation of Women!”

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## KEY WORDS

Social Policy — Two-Year Economic Plan — Women’s Employment — Women’s Organizations

The consequences of World War II made their mark in the society under the poor economic and social conditions. The war destroyed the infrastructure, industry, agriculture and primarily affected the population. The Czechoslovak Republic (hereinafter as CSR) stood on the new social foundations on which it wanted to build a state guaranteeing social security for all citizens. The government supported the idea of planned economic and social life, and the transition from pre-war liberalism. The nationalization of a large number of key economic enterprises and the adoption of principles of economic planning strengthened the position of the state that was in charge of the means of production and human resources. Through social policy, the state intervened in the management and protection of work which ranked among the most important tasks in the people’s democratic regime.

The study focuses on the issue of employment of women or inclusion of women in the work process in Czechoslovakia (with emphasis on Slovakia) shortly after World War II. The selected period of 1945–1948 is a breakthrough, because fundamental changes of the political and socio-economic system occurred here. Inclusion of women into the work process was related to planned economy which was fully reflected already in the Act on Two-Year Economic Plan of 1946. In this study, I focused on this Act because it was “the most radical” in the context of women’s work. I also try to capture the initiative proposals and actions of governmental and social nature which attempted to introduce two-year plans into practice and thus promote its successful fulfilment. The activities of women’s organisations, which actively interfered in the management of labour and tried to help women in their “new role”,<sup>1</sup> were also interesting.

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1 Why the new status of women? In the period of the Slovak Republic in 1939–1945, the idea of returning women to the family was promoted due to the authoritarian state policy. The government favoured a housewife and presented women leaving their jobs as a patriotic sacrifice. It also argued by support for family life or finding jobs for men. “Women, who left their jobs, made a big sacrifice for the benefit of the nation, their previous work was excellent and no one except a few insignificant cads-demagogues disparaged it.” This is how the situation was assessed by the women’s magazine *Nová žena* [New Woman] after a year of practical experience with the policy of the State towards employed women. For more information see: Marína Závacká, „Nová žena“ so starou prachovkou. Prejavy občianskeho

## WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

A breakthrough in the status of women occurred after World War II, when their inclusion in the work process and broader social life was a patriotic duty. It was a fundamental social phenomenon supported by post-war government already in the first Košice Government Programme: “The Government will make every effort to ensure that all men and women capable of work have the opportunity to work and earn according to their performance. For women, the principle of equal pay for equal work will apply. [...] Consistent equalization of women in all spheres of political, economic and cultural life will take place. A general voting right of men and women over 18 years of age will be introduced.”<sup>2</sup>

The change in state policy and the related change in the status of women in the society also affected women's organisations which were restored or newly created after World War II. Especially two organisations or women's movements focused on women's issues in Slovakia. The first one was the Živena<sup>3</sup> Association (it published the *Živena* magazine), which had a long tradition, and the other one was the newly created Sváz slovenských žien<sup>4</sup> [Association of Slovak Women — hereinafter as SSŽ]

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vzdoru na stránkach časopisu Katolíckej jednoty žien 1939 a 1940. In: Gabriela Dudeková et al. *Na ceste k modernej žene* (Kapitoly z dejín rodových vzťahov na Slovensku), Bratislava 2011, pp. 385.

2 Program československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích [online]. Available at: <<http://www.blisty.cz/2005/4/1/art22429.html>>

3 The Živena Association operated from 1869. It was the oldest women's traditional association in Slovakia which actively started its operations in the postwar period. In September 1945, at its first General Assembly, it declared that it would ensure fair compensation for women's work, establish suitable homes and food for self-employed women. Živena also promised the establishment of recreational homes for working women, care for the health of all working women regardless of whether they work at home, in the field, in a factory, in an office or as cultural workers. It wanted to work with counselling centres for mothers and children, purchase travelling baskets with equipment for newborns (children's clothes, diapers, soap, talcum powders, etc.) from voluntary donations and publish a brochure on correct care for a small child. In addition, it wanted to carry out many activities in the field of social, folk and education, and cultural work. For more information see: Valné zhromaždenie Živeny, *Živena* 35, 1945, No. 4–6, pp. 125–130.

4 The SSŽ Association was on the other hand a new post-war organisation. It was more politically active and the Communist Party promoted women's work through it. It declared the opposite in its statutes — that it is non-political organisation. “Sváz slovenských žien [The Association of Slovak Women] is a top state-wide organisation of Slovak women regardless of political affiliation, social status and religion. [...] Its members are members of both our political parties and unorganised women. It is the National Front of all Slovak women — workers, farmers and working intelligence.” The program of the Association is based mainly on the active participation of women in the rebuilding of Slovakia, it promised them a proactive involvement in the introduction of social reforms and the implementation of new social amenities (e.g. establish-

(it published the *Nová cesta* Magazine from 29 September 1945 — 24 December 1946) which also had the support of the Communist Party of Slovakia (hereinafter as KSS). At the national level, there were associations operating mainly in Bohemia, namely Rada československých žien [Council of Czechoslovak Women — hereinafter as RČŽ] and Národná fronta žien [National Front of Women — hereinafter as NFŽ] also with support of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (hereinafter as KSČ). Czech historian, Eva Uhrová, writes about four main points, on which the women's movements in Bohemia focused in the postwar era. However, her conclusions can be generalized because in Slovakia the activists also focused mainly on the following points: 1. Social program of the state, particularly care for mothers and children, 2. entry of women into the public sphere in a broader sense as in the interwar period, 3. the need to include domestic work and care for children in the social context, 4. equalization of women in the family.<sup>5</sup>

In connection with women's work, the International Labour Office published a study in 1946 entitled *The War and Women's Employment — The Experience of the United Kingdom and the United States* (Studies and Reports, Montreal, 1946) which inspired also Czechoslovak experts in social policy. In the specialised journal *Sociální revue* [Social Revue], Czech expert Jiří Fischer wrote in a series of several articles entitled *Ženy do pracovního procesu* [Women in the Work Process] about the successful management of the women employment policy in Great Britain while he based his work on the above study. The study proposed the most appropriate uses of female labour and adequate resources that were supposed to make it more effective. It also confirmed the ability of women to work in such fields which were typical for men, such as mining, construction, transport and other. However, they had to pay attention to equality before the law. Even measures were also used to increase the efficiency of work, i.e. the division of women into mobile (mostly single women) and immobile (women with commitments) which helped with the correct choice of employment. Women with commitments were able to work half-day or full-day shifts or at home or near their residence. In other cases, measures in the form of relocation of a smaller enterprise to a location with sufficient workforce were implemented or enterprises leased spaces where they opened their branches. Qualifications of women were inc-

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ment of nurseries, kindergartens, social facilities). In addition, it promised women to initiate in the Government the removal of pay differences, women's right to education and their inclusion in the social space in the political, economic and cultural areas. In its program, the Association also focused on work in the village, with its activities it wanted to elevate the Slovak family in the social, economic and cultural spheres: "We support the removal of the gap between a female worker, a farmer and an intellectual, we support the elevation of the Slovak village and removal of extensive contradictions between the village and town." Blanka Svoreňová, *Svaz slovenských žien*, *Nová cesta* 1, 1945, No. 1-2, pp. 12.

5 Eva Uhrová, *Národní fronta žen a Rada československých žen — dva proudy ženského hnutí v českých zemích a jejich zájem o sociální a právní postavení žen*. In: Zdeněk Kárník — Michal Kopeček (ed.), *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, vol. IV., Prague 2005, pp. 96-97.

reased through vocational training directly in factories or training centres organised by state authorities.<sup>6</sup>

Social measures included building nurseries, kindergartens, laundries, ironing shops, canteens and other. The post-war shortage of nurseries was addressed by a system of baby-sitters, i.e. several mothers agreed and one of them took care of other children in her home. In addition, there were nurseries also directly in the enterprises. Other helpful measures included shopping which proved to be a serious problem for working women. It would happen that women often did not manage to do their shopping because the stores were already closed. One of the many proposals was to issue shopping vouchers that would give female employees a preferential right in shops. However, the best solution proved to be granting leave of absence for shopping. The response of enterprises was positive and they really granted half or full day off to women once a week. Some enterprises had so-called official shoppers, who collected shopping lists, and did the shopping for working women based on their orders. In his conclusion, the author of articles Jiří Fisher said that the above measures made work easier for women and thus led to a reduction in absenteeism from work, an improvement in work morale and better job performance. “Measures to make shopping easier finally stabilized the inflow of workforce in all enterprises that implemented such measures.” At the end, Fisher recommended that even Czechoslovak experts should be inspired by these British measures when creating the conditions of employment of women in Czechoslovakia, especially when the Government was preparing the Act on the Two-Year Economic Plan which clearly appealed to the increase in labour productivity.<sup>7</sup>

## STATE POLITICAL INTERVENTIONS IN WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT

At the end of 1946 in connection with the planned two-year plan, the Ministry of Social Welfare (hereinafter as MSS) asked representatives of women’s movements to form a women’s commission<sup>8</sup> from their ranks that would cooperate with the Ministry and this way help create suitable conditions for working women and jointly address their problems. “Some sort of autonomy of women was created this way in which all conditions would be controlled by the women themselves.” Representatives of RČŽ, Central Council of Trade Unions as well as heads of individual departments of MSS discussed this request already on 4 September when one of the first meeting was held. In addition to the requirement of forming a women’s commission, the central theme was “a woman in the national mobilization of work” as said by the Secretary of MSS Alois Jedlička at the meeting. However, an interesting speech was delivered by Jiří Fisher, who emphasized the principle of voluntary participation in

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6 Jiří Fischer, *Ženy do pracovního procesu*, Sociální revue 21, 1946, No. 11, pp. 246–247.

7 Ibid.

8 The tasks of the Commission were the following: finding women for work, cooperation, i.e. the Commission was supposed to control employers and all decisions related to women and monitor working conditions under which women worked.

connection with the mobilization of workforce and “to also create conditions from the work opportunities that every working man had secured decent housing, decent financial conditions, etc.”<sup>9</sup>

However, at the above meeting, Fisher focused mainly on the issue of women’s employment while he had the following questions for the discussion: what is the right age for a working women, can we stay at the level of the decree on general labour duties, or should we go higher (include even women over 40 in the work process)? Will we approach women in the voluntary sphere or will we implement a certain work duty? How many women can we get for the work process? How will we use the entire reservoir of women? How do we create conditions to make women happy to work — work, wage and tax issues? For which sectors is female labour suitable? Can we ask women to move to the place of work? Will we give them the option of a half-day work shift? Will we ensure mechanized household for women? How will we help them take care of a child?<sup>10</sup>

The most discussed issue in the period of the preparation of the two-year economic plan, of course, was the mobilization of women and their inclusion in the work process. Milada Horáková, a representative of RČŽ, welcomed the inclusion of women in the work process but she required that they are included in all sectors and thus even in the leading position where a man could be replaced by a woman. She emphasized the constitutional establishment of female labour which should be a guarantee for women against subsequent dismissal because: “Then their organisation in the family and status in social life collapses. We want a legal guarantee that every Czechoslovak citizen really has the right to work and that this right can be exercised. We want a guarantee that the inclusion of women in the work is not only temporary, for a year or two, but permanent.” Her colleague Julie Prokopová also agreed with this requirements, however, she talked about the lack of job opportunities mainly in Slovakia and about the need for social facilities for women that were supposed to make their everyday life easier. She also pointed out the disagreement between the ministries that were supposed to participate in their establishment: “When establishing laundry rooms, we needed to build a greater number of washing machines, but the Ministry of Industry did not release the necessary metals to us and we had to place great pressure for the Ministry to even take into account those machines that had already been decreed by the Ministry of Agriculture.”<sup>11</sup>

A few days before the adoption of the Act on the Two-Year Economic Plan, another meeting with the participation of female members of RČŽ and NFŽ was held at MSS. The Minister Zdeněk Nejedlý introduced it with these words: “I warmly welcome you, I am very glad, I am an old witness and participant in all these former women’s struggles and battles, I am a fellow and I can even say a friend of Terezie Nováková, one of the first pioneers of the conscious. Since then, I have always been on this side and

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9 National Archives (hereinafter as NA) Prague, Fund (hereinafter as f.) Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (hereinafter as MPSP) 1945–1951 box (hereinafter as b.) 665, Minutes of meeting held on 4 September 1946.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

I am very glad that today I can welcome you on this field in a completely changed situation.”<sup>12</sup> Women discussed various issues and submitted concrete proposals for improvement as well as simplification of female labour. For example, they discussed half-day working hours, the qualification possibilities for women, suitable occupations, for example, light industry, working conditions before and after giving birth, the availability of social facilities as well as social insurance. Work at home was also discussed: “We are asking to consider establishments and headquarters that would concentrate this industry and to have establishments of home work established in every location where women can participate. We do not want home work to take place in households because it exhausts women and children are employed.”<sup>13</sup>

The result of these autumn consultations was the *Memorandum of Inclusion of Women into Production*. Specific occupations suitable for female labour were proposed in the Memorandum, specifically the metals industry, the field of precision mechanics (e.g. manufacture of telephones, radio devices, medical devices, meters, in watch making and other), in services these were the occupations of ticket collectors on trains, trams, ticket inspectors, gatekeepers, post women, telegraphers, shop assistants, and waitresses and other occupations. Further, they requested the state in the Memorandum to establish such measures that would help women take care of the family (for example, manufacture of washing machines and other machines that would result in the simplification of work in the household). They demanded the building of canteens, factory cafeterias, laundry rooms, ironing rooms at a price affordable to all women: “It will also be necessary to build enterprises for order in households and cleaning institutes in every industrial city that would ensure perfect cleanliness in schools, offices, homes and this work would be performed only by those women who have time only a few hours a day. This would include part of the women and other employed women would have assistance in the household.”<sup>14</sup>

## TWO-YEAR ECONOMIC PLAN

On 25 October 1946, the Parliament approved Act No. 192/1946 Coll., on the Two-Year Economic Plan for the Recovery and Construction of the Economy and Increasing the Living Standards in Czechoslovakia for the Years 1947 and 1948 (specifically for the period from 28 October 1946 to 28 October 1948) which was prepared by the Central Planning Commission headed by Klement Gottwald.<sup>15</sup> The plan assumed the completion of the recovery of the economy and increase in industrial production by 10 % compared with the pre-war situation (1937). A total investment amount of CSK 22.14

12 NA Prague, f. MPSP 1945–1951, b. 665, Minutes from the meeting held on 16 October 1946.

13 Ibid.

14 For more information see: Návrh na zaradenie žien do výroby, Sociální revue 21, 1946, No. 11, pp. 307.

15 Slovak interests were represented by four out of seventy members, namely: for DS J. Stanek and A. Matura, for KSS J. Bránik and J. Púčik. Miroslav Londák, *Otázky industrializácie Slovenska 1945–1960*, Bratislava 1999, pp. 36.

billion was set for Slovakia, i.e. 31.6 % of state-wide investment, of which 6.8 billion for the development needs of industry and craft, which was 26.79 % of the total investment of the state in industry. For Slovakia, the two-year plan meant a preparatory stage of industrialization and to the Slovak society it was presented as the greatest patriotic duty. The industrialization of Slovakia was supposed to guarantee the same level of economic activity and standard of living in both parts of the country and building of Slovak industry within the Czechoslovak economy.<sup>16</sup>

In the two-year plan, the government set bold tasks especially in the industrial area. Their fulfilment required national mobilization of workforce and their inclusion in the most important and needy sectors that were of essential importance for the two-year economic plan. These were mainly the mining, textile and construction industries. It was assumed that approximately 270,000 persons, of which 47,000 in Slovakia, would be transferred to industry<sup>17</sup>. For this objective, the Government established specific measures that were supposed to be adequately adjusted to the situation in Bohemia and Slovakia. Human resources were seen in particular by the transfer of persons from public administration, banking, insurance, administration and other offices to more essential sectors, qualified workers were supposed to return to their original occupations, inclusion of adolescents and previously unemployed persons in the work process, increasing the number of working women, the allocation of persons with reduced working capacity, re-emigration of countrymen and organisation of work competitions. The mobilisation was supposed to take place on a voluntary basis and in the event of labour shortages the Government could use measures resulting from the work duty (Decree on General Labour Duty No. 88/1945). “This means that the general work duty should not be established and that police resources should be used only in extreme and exceptional cases, this will be the case mainly for persons who constantly avoid proper work.”<sup>18</sup>

The success of the two-year plan was supposed to largely depend also on the amount of mobilized female workforce because women represented a large unused reserve for the state. “Insufficient numbers of employees will be supplemented from unused reserves. The main such reserve are women who are not involved in the work process or are not sufficiently utilized in terms of the needs of the overall national

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 34–40.

<sup>17</sup> The allocation of the workforce was as follows: in mines and smelters the employment was supposed to increase by 1,000 persons, in energetics by 2,000 persons, in the metal industry by 15,000 persons, in the chemical industry by 2,000 persons, in the ceramics industry by 6,000 persons, in the paper and pulp industry by 2,000 persons, in the wood processing industry by 7,000 persons, in the textile and clothing industry by 8,000 persons, in the leather and rubber industry by 1,000 persons and in the nutrition industry by 3,000 persons. Miloš Hrušovský, *Hospodársky rozvoj Slovenska v dvojročnom pláne, Výstavba Slovenska 1, 1946*, No. 3, pp. 2–5.

<sup>18</sup> Bratislava Slovak National Archives (hereinafter as SNA BA), Fund (f.) State Planning and Statistical Office (hereinafter as ŠPŠÚ) 1945–1951, inventory number (i. no.) 772, box (b.) 28, *Mobilizácia pracovných síl pre uskutočnenie dvojročného budovateľského plánu [Mobilization of workforce for the Implementation of the Two-Year Building Plan]*.

economy. We mostly rely on the inclusion of women who are still in households.”<sup>19</sup> However, despite the joint meetings with the women’s organisations, the Government maybe more specifically but not more extensively proposed measures related to employment of women. Women were promised good job opportunities near their residence with the possibility of free choice of employment, removal of pay differences between men and women. Married women were promised half-day working hours. Women were supposed to get assistance with taking care of their households by the newly built social facilities such as nurseries, kindergartens, cafeterias, laundry rooms, ironing rooms and the manufacture of new household appliances that were supposed to make their household chores easier. Opening hours in stores were supposed to adapt to the needs of working women.<sup>20</sup>

The adoption of the two-year economic plan was supported by the women’s movements (mainly organisations that were supported the Communist Party, KK) that organised the first national manifestation Convention of Women in Prague 25–28 October 1946 on the occasion of the adoption of the two-year plan. By the Convention, they supported female labour and motivated women, who were not involved in the work process, with the active participation and support of government officials — President Edvard Beneš, Prime Minister Klement Gottwald, Chairman of the House Josef David and others — who delivered the main speech. “The convention is held at a really suitable and happy time. (...) The day of your meeting is significant because at the same time it falls on the time when our Constituent National Assembly approved a large act on our two-year economic plan. All these factors constitute a kind of framework for your meeting and convention and also give this framework its state-wide and national importance. The two-year economic plan is not only a summary of plain production, control and investment figures, but it is also a prerequisite for a joyous and happy life for all of use and mainly for you — women. And therefore, it is quite understandable that women want to participate fully in this great building work and the Government is aware that without women we cannot fulfil the two-year plan.” These initiative words were said by the then Prime Minister to gain popularity with women.<sup>21</sup>

The convention supported female labour and planned economy which was supposed to eliminate unemployment but mainly to induce a positive attitude to the two-year plan among women. Working and non-working women were addressed to contribute to the fulfilment of the two-year plan and better family conditions because “this, the two-year plan” was supposed to guarantee “better family conditions” to the women. Papers that were presented at the Convention concerned, for example, the participation of women in the two-year economic plan and the building of the republic, institutions of the republic and utilization of women in political and economic life, Slovak women in the public, cultural and social life, women in the culture of the

19 Jiří Fischer, *Ženy do pracovního procesu*, Sociální revue 21, 1946, No. 11, pp. 246–247. See also: Bedřich Levčík, *Národní mobilisace práce*, Sociální revue 21, 1946, No. 11, pp. 276–279.

20 Collection of Laws and Regulations of the Czechoslovak Republic 1946, Act No. 192 of 25 October 1946, on the Two-Year Economic Plan.

21 Prvý celoštátny manifestačný sjazd žien, *Nová cesta* 2, 1946, No. 19, p. 3.

nation, care for mothers and children, population policies and other papers.<sup>22</sup> The Convention was concluded by their joint promise in which the present women agreed to perform the tasks arising from the two-year plan.

However, the Slovak side was not completely satisfied with the Convention — mainly the activists from the *Živena* Association. They criticized the Czech side, because according to them the Convention did not give space to a single paper that would address any of the fundamental issues regarding the involvement of women in the two-year plan. Slovak speeches were allegedly only in the form of papers about work done while the representatives of Czech women raised important questions — specifically which way the Czechoslovak women should and will go in the future, and other questions. Although in the *Živena* magazine the author said that the delegates were very well prepared for the Convention.<sup>23</sup> However, this view was not shared by women associated in SSŽ, who wrote very positively about the Convention in their magazine *Nová cesta* and urged Slovaks to become actively involved in the restoration of Slovakia, while motivational slogans were not missing, for example: “Two-year plan unfeasible without the participation of women”<sup>24</sup> or “We want to build a world full of beauty and enjoyment of life for our children”<sup>25</sup> and others.

The next step in the promotion of female labour or in the support for the two-year plan was the establishment of the Sbor pre sociálno-politické otázky žien a ich začlenenie do pracovného procesu [Board for the Socio-Political Issues of Women and their Integration in the Work Process] in the Decree of MSS of 7 December 1946. This was a novelty in state administration, i.e. that: “Engaging the public in the participation in the work of the Ministry is a complete novelty.” The Board would meet about once a month and it was held at MSS in the presence of the Minister or his deputies and women’s movements from Bohemia and Slovakia. It basically followed the meetings that took place before the adoption of the two-year economic plan and the aforementioned decree only made these meetings official. The Board dealt with legislation, the inclusion of women in the work process, population issues, wage policy, the issue of nurseries, kindergartens, women and apprentice homes, it also addressed health and social issues as well as recruitment and training of socio-medical personnel. Discussions in the Board very often included the work mobilization of women. They discussed several possibilities of their inclusion in the work process that they proposed to distinguish from three angles, i.e. purely female work sectors,<sup>26</sup>

22 Program manifestačného celoštátneho zjazdu žien. Československá žena 2, 1946, No. 43, p. 3.

23 Zora Jesenská, Poznámky k účasti Sloveniek na sjazde čl. žien v Prahe, *Živena* 36, 1946, No. 11/12, pp. 236–244.

24 Prvý celoštátny manifestačný sjazd žien, p. 3.

25 Valné shromaždenie a celoslovenský zjazd odbočiek SSŽ. *Nová cesta* 2, 1946, No. 8, p. 5.

26 For example, the following sections: metal — precision mechanics, energy — accounting or contact with consumers, distribution — sales persons, operation of automatic machines, offices — telegraph, telephone, radiotelegraph. NA Prague, f. MPSP 1945–1951, b. 665, Zápis o schůzi Sboru.

work areas, in which women should be prioritized<sup>27</sup> and areas where working women would be in a certain proportion to men.<sup>28</sup>

Until the end of 1946, the Slovak side was also represented in the meetings by members of SSŽ, who were also involved in the discussion and talked about the situation in Slovakia. Since the beginning of 1947, Slovak women were not represented in the Board, or they did not participate in it respectively. It could also be due to the fact that in early 1947 the women's movement SSŽ prepared *Memorandum o začlenení žien do dvojročného hospodárskeho plánu a o vytvorení vhodných sociálnych podmienok pre ženy* [Memorandum on the inclusion of women in the two-year economic plan and on establishing suitable social conditions for women]. This Memorandum was signed even by the women's movement Živena, ROH and Spolok vysokoškolsky vzdelaných žien [Association of University Educated Women] which they addressed to the Povereníctvo sociálnej starostlivosti [Commission for Social Care] (hereinafter as PSS). Based on the submitted memorandum, PSS formed the Women's Commission<sup>29</sup> as an advisory body to PSS. It was basically a similar association as Sbor pre sociálno-politické otázky žien a ich začlenenie do pracovného procesu [Board for Socio-Political Issue of Women and their Integration in the Work Process] in Bohemia.

The role of the Commission of PSS was: 1. To submit initiative proposals regarding issues of the integration of women in the work process, 2. to monitor the development of social policy in terms of women and to submit initiative proposal in this regard, 3. to enforce requirements of women at competent authorities, 4. to inform about the iniquity of women and ensure remedy. It also had wide powers and the possibility to establish suitable working conditions for women. It saw its primary task as care for economic, social and cultural improvement in the status of Slovak women and compliance with their equality in practice.<sup>30</sup>

## REALITY AND EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WOMEN

Despite governmental or societal support, employment of women in the post-war era struggled with many organisational and social problems that persisted even in the late communist period. Discussions at MSS are interesting in this context but these

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<sup>27</sup> Proposed areas: metal — radio mechanics, revolvers, metal furnishings, manufacture of clocks, energy — warehouses, offices — cashiers, ticket inspectors, production of food and foodstuffs — factories for sweets, soap, office ancillary works — unless occupied with persons with reduced working capacity. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Work areas: socio-medical staff, textile — clothing, metal industry — conveyor assembly, galvanizing, presses, offices — office workforce, wood processing industry — toy production, production of musical instruments, some sections of the paper and graphics industry. Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> How did the Women's Commission work in Slovakia? This question was answered by the fund of the Povereníctvo sociálnej starostlivosti — Commission for Social Care which is still not processed in the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava, where it is stored.

<sup>30</sup> Mária Kassová, Správa ústrednej tajomníčky o činnosti Živeny, SSŽ za minulý rok, Živena 37, 1947, No. 7/8/9, p. 264.

issues were permanently discussed by the Komisia pre mobilizáciu pracujúcich [Commission for the Mobilization of Workforce], which submitted a proposal for the improvement of the working conditions of employed women based on the reports from the State Planning Office, district offices for workforce protection as well as women's organisations on 30 October 1947 to the Office of the Prime Minister, the General Secretariat of the Economic Council. The submitted report described the substantial insufficiencies in the employment of women which also resulted in the reduction in the number of working women and their return to households in the first half of 1947. The established policy for employment of women often failed to meet the promises that it gave to them.<sup>31</sup>

Period	As of 1 March 1946			As of 1 June 1946			As of 1 June 1947		
	Total	Index	%	Total	Index	%	Total	Index	%
<b>Women employed in industry in Slovakia</b>	24,935	100	20.2	33,218	133.2	22.1	43,786	175.6	23.5
<b>Women employed in industry in Bohemia</b>	283,950	106.8	26.9	294,086	110.7	27.5	319,429	120.2	28.3

**TABLE 1:** Employment of Women in Slovakia and in Bohemia

Source: SNA BA, f. ŠPŠŮ 1945 — 1951, i. no. 771, b. 27.

In the overall assessment for the specified period, i.e. from March 1946 to June 1947, the number of women working in industry in Slovakia increased by 78.2 % and in Bohemia by 20.5 %.

The aforementioned report stated that the relocation of industrial enterprises was insufficient because they failed to secure jobs for all women in their place of residence. The half-day work shift did not succeed among workers and they still preferred working at home, which was also absent. Even reassignment of single women and subsequent filling of positions by married women faced resistance either of the affected persons or of employers and works councils. The most staffed sectors in Slovakia included the textile industry, production of iron, clothing, food and chemical industries. The least attractive sectors were the gas and water industry, distilling, mining and glass industries. In Bohemia, popular sectors were the textile, metal-working and clothing industries, and the unattractive ones included agriculture, domestic services and auxiliary work.<sup>32</sup>

In the area of social services, which were supposed to assist women in everyday life, measures regarding purchasing were accepted. The Ministry of Trade and Industry proposed to shorten opening hours in grocery stores on Fridays by one hour and extend them on Saturdays by one hour, or to ensure that one store stays open in

<sup>31</sup> SNA BA, f. ŠPŠŮ 1945–1951, i. no. 771, b. 27. Správa o včleňovaní žien do práce.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

each city part and its employees would get compensatory time off. Sellers were supposed to reserve goods for afternoon shopping. Another means was shopping based on orders delivered to the house. This operation was called “shopping in the bag”. In addition, bulk shopping and preferred shopping for women based on a license issued by the works council were considered. It did not work in practice.

<b>Grocery stores</b>	<b>Morning opening hours</b>	<b>Afternoon opening hours</b>
<b>Monday — Thursday</b>	7:30 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.	3:00 p.m. — 6:00 p.m.
<b>Friday</b>	7:30 a.m. — 12:00 p.m.	3:00 p.m. — 7:00 p.m.
<b>Saturday</b>	7:30 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.	—
<b>Other stores</b>		
<b>Monday — Thursday</b>	8:00 a.m. — 12:00 p.m.	2:00 p.m. — 6:00 p.m.
<b>Friday</b>	8:00 a.m. — 6:00 p.m.	
<b>Saturday</b>	8:00 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.	

**TABLE 2:** Opening hours in stores

Source: Provisional National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic 1945–1946, issue no. 414. [online]. Available at: <www.psp.cz>.

Problems also occurred during the establishment of social institutions, such as the promised nurseries, kindergartens and laundry rooms. Children of working mothers and children from numerous families had a preferential right to attend nurseries. The facility was supposed to be adapted to the working hours of mothers so that they could drop off the child at least half an hour before the start of working hours. In connection with their management, they pointed out mainly insufficient equipment.<sup>33</sup> Construction of new nurseries and kindergartens also continued very slowly, and therefore the construction of corporate nurseries was also considered.<sup>34</sup> Some suggestions also came from the women, for example, for temporary merging of nurseries and kindergartens which was supposed to at least partially resolve the lack thereof. In addition to that, they requested night nurseries for working mothers at night “but even so it will be examined why the mother puts the child in the nursery overnight”.<sup>35</sup> However, this suggestion did not resolve the lack thereof and the above institutions were absent even in the late communist period. Historian Natálie Veselská conducted research on women’s employment in the communist period and said about

<sup>33</sup> At a meeting on 4 September 1946, the trade union superintendent Dr. Vrána suggested that nurseries should be under the supervision of doctors who also worked in counselling centres for mothers and children. He stressed the Soviet model, according to which ill children were supposed to be placed into special boxes, thereby protecting healthy children. NA Prague, f. MPSP 1945–1951, b. 665, Minutes from the meeting held on 4 September 1946.

<sup>34</sup> SNA BA, f. ŠPŠÚ 1945 — 1951, i. no. 771, b. 27. Správa o včleňování žien do práce.

<sup>35</sup> NA Prague, f. MPSP 1945–1951, b. 665, Minutes from the meeting held on 4 September 1946.

the issues of kindergartens: “The never realized ideal plan was to establish collective houses with shared canteens, nurseries and kindergartens for children of working women in every factory. However, the reality was different. The number of spots in nurseries and kindergartens were insufficient, and therefore many working women had troubles ensuring care for their offspring during a work shift.”<sup>36</sup>

In January 1947, the *Živena Magazine* announced a poll in which it asked its readers whether a Slovak woman should give priority to employment or take care of the household and “watch over the family fireplace.”<sup>37</sup> Editors published twenty two responses while they noted that “the interest in the poll was unusually great. Here, people and especially women are only very little used to responding to such a poll, we have received responses from Slovak women from the entire Republic, even from men. It is obvious that we touched upon a sensitive topic.”<sup>38</sup> The poll respondents used the poll to point out many shortcomings as well as the positive aspects of women’s work. The poll showed, however, that four readers<sup>39</sup> support employment of women and eighteen women voted against women’s work.<sup>40</sup>

They also wrote about the need for social inclusion and insights about the functioning are interesting.<sup>41</sup> When evaluating them, there were three categories of wo-

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36 Natália Veselská, *Ženy a profesie v reálnom socializme*. In: Gabriela Dudeková et al. *Na ceste k modernej žene (Kapitoly z dejín rodových vzťahov na Slovensku)*, Bratislava 2011, pp. 431.

37 Specific wording of the poll questions was as follows: 1. Whether a woman should pay attention mainly to the family and spend only potential free time performing public work? 2. Whether as much home work as possible should be transferred onto various institutions (nurseries, public cafeterias, laundry rooms, promising institutes for managing apartments etc.) so that she can work outside the house, in factories, offices, etc. as much as possible? See *Živena* 37, 1947, Issue 1/2, pp. 49–55.

38 Ibid.

39 Opinion of a respondent regarding employment of women: “I am a mother of 6 children. My husband is a handicraftsman, I am 43 years old and work. When I was a young mother, I had two young children and a third one in life, I worked, there were no nurseries or kindergartens back then. I had to give her to older people to take care of them and I went to work from six in the morning until seven at night. Work makes every woman noble. The author also criticized women who did not work and highlighted those women who managed to “stand next to the trough, a machine and oven (...) and the men will commend you that you are a hard-working, diligent woman and do you house work in the evening and in the morning.” Slovak Sister, *Karlovy Vary*. See: Ibid, pp. 49 — 55.

40 Opinion of a respondent regarding employment of women: “A woman — mother belongs to a family like salt to bread. And this mainly applies at the times when families disrupted by the war and affected morale require that a woman brings these values back to the usual condition. The respondent wrote about the hard position of a woman in the family who sometimes had more work than a man. “Why should she do the work intended for men and exhaust all her energy? And whether a man, when he comes back from work, does house work? There are only few of those. They rest.” Oľga Lazárová, Bratislava. See: Ibid.

41 The respondent responded to the functioning of such facilities as follows: “The family definitely does not suffer because of women’s work. I have already tried a shared kitchen —

men — women from workers' families, who voted for the establishment although they were forced to work due to bad financial situation.<sup>42</sup> The second group included women who did not agree with placing children into social facilities and saw them only as a disruption to the family. Those were mostly women from the higher class: "No educated woman, if she has children and must also work for money, considers this situation to be healthy, on the contrary — she sees it as a shame for her children." The last group included women who recognized the need for nurseries, or social facilities respectively, but on the other hand, they suffered greatly since they were away from their child.<sup>43</sup>

The poll, which was posted by the *Živena* magazine, had a really great response. However, the editors published only some views of women, and therefore it cannot be said that the majority was against women's work. As already mentioned above, mainly women from working class families had a positive attitude towards women's employment for whom it was a change to improve the financial situation of the family. In the two-year plan, the state promised to women various advantages in the form of the above social facilities, wage equality, insurance, favourable working con-

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dull food, mostly without desserts, only meat dishes (easier to prepare) so it happened often that we left the dining room hungry. We had shared laundry rooms but almost all of us did our laundry ourselves after work because torn pieces made of underwear and clothes were brought to us from the shared laundry room. (...) A nursery is a good idea but it can never give what a mother and a home can." Alžbeta Augustovičová, Piešťany. See: *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Opinion of a respondent regarding the need to establish social facilities: "I am a daughter in a working class family. Besides me, my mother gave birth to and raised four children. My father, a factory worker, earned very little over his lifetime, it would hardly suffice to feed our always hungry throats. (...) Do you know what my childhood and the childhood of my siblings was like? Until we were four — five years old, we did not leave the house except Sundays. Our father left early in the morning and our mother shortly after. She made coffee for us kids, not made of coffee beans, split it into small cups, cut a small piece of bread for each of us, kissed us and the entire day, until she came back, we were in bed, or we climbed down and played in a room that was hot in the summer and cold in the winter. The respondent also asked women, who disagreed with nurseries and kindergartens, whether they could even imagine what sense such facilities had for working class families. "You reject nurseries and kindergartens. Do you know that for me and my siblings kindergartens or nurseries would have been the longed-for paradise? Did you know that walks and learning poems were our unrealizable dream? (...)" Eva. See: *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> The view of the respondent was as follows: "I have a several months old son. We live as if in a very tight corset, in which it is barely possible to breathe. I get up at 4:30 in the morning to clean the apartment a bit, I make breakfast for my son — and, besides, I want to enjoy him a little bit because then I only see him in the evening — and to get to work on time. It is eight kilometres to the enterprise where I work (I cannot get any closer). We work from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon so I come back in the evening in a great hurry to manage to buy something, to prepare dinner for my boy and pick him up from the nursery. (...) If I could only spend at least half a day with my son! He is very focused and smart and also very grateful for every hug — I see it as a tragedy that cannot be with him." M. P. Prague. See: *Ibid.*

ditions and other things, which were supposed to help them cope with the role of a mother, wife and woman in the work process. On the other hand, there were women who did not work whether due to good financial situation or the belief that a woman belongs to the family. The new state policy after World War II was unacceptable. They saw it as a social evil mainly against children: "A generously minded woman-mother prepares a warm and cozy home for her family and love to the fellows will flourish in their heart. Mothers, avoid helping to destroy your families. After all, what happens to a child without education and mother's love? Pariahs of humanity, homeless wanderers, hunted animals."<sup>44</sup> They also saw the building of social facilities as major negatives for the society: "No paid help can replace the mother to the child and a woman in the household. I would never allow my children to be educated by a less intelligent woman than me, and I would not subject them to various directions."<sup>45</sup>

About a year later, in April 1948, the journal *Sociální revue* evaluated the life of women involved in the work process in the two-year economic plan. The author asked how women lived, whether the 8-hour work shift applied, or whether a working woman, who took care of her family, could live a cultural life? She answered all questions negatively. As she mentioned, the majority of employed women faced another "working hours" in the household, i.e. cooking, washing, ironing and other chores after working hours (according to the source, women worked 12 hours and more instead of 8-hour work shifts, K.K.). A woman with such a work load was not able to be interested in public events, culture, did not have time for books, newspapers, visit to the theatre or cinema. She considered insufficient care for children during the absence of the mother to be the worst fact. The author also pointed out the issue of nurseries and kindergartens which were mostly 15–20 km from the workplace. Therefore, women had to carry the children to such institutions on crowded buses and trains. As a solution, she proposed the establishment of residential homes where mothers would place their children. She also called for the active participation of women in the works council where they were supposed to publicly speak about their needs. "She had to be able to plan and say where these mechanisms should be. They have to establish self-help cooperatives for spreading all work in the household."<sup>46</sup>

State management of employment of women in the period 1945–1948 required the introduction of many social measures that would make the daily lives of women easier. The status of women in the post-war society was an extremely debated issue because work mobilization affected women who cared for their family until then. Mainly women's organizations were active themselves in this area. Government officials also took welcoming steps, for example, invited women to attend the discussions at MSS, or even PSS. Advancement of the status of women was also based on contemporary modern trends, which, however, were not the main motivator of interest in the so-called women's issue in Czechoslovakia. In the building era of the Czechoslovak government, the economic policy was prioritized for obvious reasons and the social policy was contributory in the rebuilding of the country affected by World War II.

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44 Ibid, pp. 54.

45 Ibid, pp. 52.

46 Eva Buchlerová, Úkoly slovenských žien. In: *Sociální revue* 23, 1948, No. 4, pp. 141–142.

The social policy helped them meet the set objectives resulting from the two-year economic plan and therefore failed to adequately meet the promises which they made to working women. This often led to their dissatisfaction even when leaving the job. Women complained about inadequate working conditions, insufficient equipment in social facilities, canteens, missing laundry rooms, etc. Despite the above-mentioned discussions, government officials in many cases remained at the level of promises and the issue of employment of women was problematic even in the late communist period.

Historian Elena Londáková wrote in her study<sup>47</sup> that even after February 1948 the unbalanced and random approach of ruling political elites was characteristic for the women's issue because it was often used purposefully politically, or it was secondary to the current and narrowly utilitarian economic needs of the state. She further wrote that the social status of women did not particularly improve either. Even in the communist period, women received half or lower wages than men and in pregnancy they did not have legal protection against dismissal. An unqualified employee could not be certain about the duration of their working time, although formally the constitution guaranteed eight-hour working time.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, in the then society after 1948, the policy regarding the status of women gained a new dimension whose task was as follows: "To follow, among other things, serious and important interests: to break down the previously established bonds of the civil society, to gain influence over families as carriers of unwanted traditions for the communist regime and to ensure the interiorization of a new ideology associated with the concept of so-called new man and a new socialist way of life."<sup>49</sup>

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47 Elena Londáková, *Vývoj ženskej otázky na Slovensku po roku 1945*. In: Zdeněk Kárník — Michal Kopeček (ed.). *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu* sv. V. Prague 2005, pp. 194.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 195.

49 Natália Veselská, *Ženy a profesie v reálnom socializme*, pp. 424.