THE CZECHOSLOVAK WOMEN'S UNION (1950-1990)

A UNION FOR THE WOMEN, A UNION FOR THE PARTY?

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the history of the Czechoslovak Women's Union (CSWU), the only mass women's organization in socialist Czechoslovakia, which existed between 1950 and 1990. The central research question of the thesis is "what was the CSWU, and what did it do as an organization?" The existing historiography of the CSWU is mainly based on the archives of the Communist Party and it focuses on the directives the Communist Party gave to the CSWU, thereby producing an account of the CSWU through the "lens of the state" and/or Party. Using the "close reading technique," this thesis gives an analysis of some of the extensive archival material of the CSWU itself, and thereby challenges the prevailing historiographical narrative of the CSWU as being merely or primarily a "cog" in the socialist state apparatus. The main findings of this work are, firstly, that the CSWU in important ways was a continuation of the interwar socialist women's movement in Czechoslovakia, rather than "the end of all free association of women." This continuity is also shown also in the contextualized biographies of five CSWU leading women, whose international and local involvement in the women's movement, as well as their involvement in the anti-fascist resistance has been neglected by historians until now. The second finding of this thesis is that the international activities and connections of the CSWU with the global left women's movement, particularly with the Women's International Democratic Federation, were a strong aspect of the CSWU's identity as a women's organization. Thirdly, archived correspondence between the CSWU and its member base from the 1980s shows that women from across Czechoslovakia found a platform for solidarity in the CSWU. As a women's organization, the CSWU was actively involved in bettering the lives of women and in lobbying for their interests in the Government. Hence, I conclude that the CSWU was a Union not for the Party, but for women.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC – Action Committee / akční komise

CC CPS – The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia / Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa

CBWM - Central Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement /

CPC – The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia / Komunistická strana Československa

CP – The Communist Party / Komunistická strana

CWC - Central Women's Committee / Ústřední vybor žen

CSWU – Czechoslovak Women's Union / Československý svaz žen

CC CSWU – Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union/ Ústřední výbor Československého svazu žen

CWU- Czech Woman's Union / Český svaz žen

CNF – National Council of Women in Romania

CSNSP - Czechoslovak National Socialist Party / Československá strana národně socialistická

CW – Council of Women / Rada žen

NWC – National Women's Council / Národní rada žen

SWU- Slovak Women's Union / Slovenský Zväz Žien

MNOT – National Council of Hungarian Women / Magyar Nök Országos Tanácsa

NWF – National Women's Front / Národní fronta žen

UNDFW – The United Nations Decade for Women

IWY – International Women's Year

IWD – International Women's Day

WIDF – Women's International Democratic Federation

Litvajová, she was a *terrible* communist," my mother reminisces. "I remember her. Your father never liked her. She walked around with her nose in the air, a very cold and unpleasant woman. Thought herself special. But we had to be polite, keep up appearances. It's a shame she is dead. I can't remember when she died. I am sure she would have liked to talk with you about communism. She was a *great* communist.

Mária Mrázová, Jelšová 3, Bratislava, March 2015, 15:35

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Slovakia, when any category of unions and organizations from the socialist period is discussed in high-schools or indeed in public discourse in the media, be it pioneer movements or labor unions, we are taught to think of them as *pro forma* puppet offshoots of the Communist Party with very little, if any "agency" and with the promotion the socialist agenda as an end by the means of oppressive Government institutions. Not only are socialist organizations and movements considered to not have been helpful for people, they are also often perceived as imposed. Women's unions and organizations are, of course, no exception.

I will first provide basic information about the existence of the Czechoslovak Women's Union.[1] In 1950, the merging of the *Rada československých žen* (Czechoslovak Women's Council) and the *Slovenský Zväz Žien* (Slovak Women's Union) led to the creation of the *Československý svaz žen* (Czechoslovak Women's Union/The Union). The CSWU belonged to the mass socialist organizations of the National Front. The CSWU was established as the only legal state women's organization in Czechoslovakia. In 1952, the CSWU was restructured and a Czechoslovak Women's Committee was also formed – which then coexisted alongside the

[1] For charts with overviews of the organizations history and its wider relations, see page 41.

Czechoslovak Women's Union. While the CWC was a committee of 80 women members and was part of the state structure, the CSWU organized independently of the National Front. They organized women with the aim to discuss and resolve women's issue and to help them cope with the "double burden" of work and housework, and also sought to involve women in politics and state administration.

In 1967, the CSWU was officially reinstated as the one and only state women's organization of socialist Czechoslovakia. The CSWU was also involved in the Women's International Democratic Federation, and CSWU Chairperson Helena Leflérová is listed as one of the ten WIDF vice-presidents in 1961.[2] In 1969, the CSWU became a federative Union of the *Slovenský Zväz Žien (*Slovak Women's Union) and the *Český Zvaz Žen* (Czech Women's Union. In 1974, the CSWU and its Central Committee were reestablished as the umbrella organization that coordinated the activities of the CWU and the SWU. This structure persisted until the dismemberment of the CSWU in 1990, when the Communist Party lost its majority in Parliament and ceased to exist shortly thereafter. The CSWU was an engaged participant in the international left feminist movement. The Central Committee of the CSWU participated in the International Women's Year and in the United Nations Decade for Women. A Czechoslovak delegation was sent to the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and also to the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, which was held in Copenhagen in 1980.

In 1990, the CSWU ceased to exist. The successor of the CSWU, The *Český svaz žen* (Czech Women's Union) exists until this day, and operates as a "non-governmental, non-profit association," with Marie Kabrhelová, the former chairperson of the CSWU, as its honorary chairperson.[3] I will discuss her activities in the CSWU in Chapter Four. The Slovak Women's

[2] http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/view/1664817 [Accessed 3/4/2015].
[3] http://www.csz.cz/rubrika.php?id=1 [Accessed 2/2/2015].

Union became the *Demokratická Únia Žien Slovenska* (Democratic Union of Slovak Women) in 1990 was renamed to *Únia žien Slovenska* (Union of Slovak Women) in 1997. They currently have an estimated 12,000 union members, but are registered as an *občianské združenie* (civil association) within the new, democratic and apolitical administration.[4]

In this thesis, I would like to revisit the CSWU and its historiography, and ask what kind of organization the CSWU was, what they did for women, who were its chairpersons and how the CSWU's activities were connected to the women's movement in Czechoslovakia preceding the CSWU. Instead of understanding mass socialist women's movements as mindless "transmission belts" in a one-party state, this thesis argues that the CSWU was a continuation of the political leftist women's movement that had roots more than twenty years before the *putsch* of the Communist Party in 1948.[5] I will also argue throughout the thesis that the CSWU advanced the position of women in Czechoslovak society not in spite of their commitment to socialism, *but because* women's emancipation was a key tenet of socialist thought.[6]

Methodology and Primary Sources

The history of the CSWU has been written about by Denisa Nečasová.[7] She has drawn on source material in the files of the *Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa* (Central

[4] The official website of the *Únia žien Slovenska* (Slovak Women's Union), at http://www.uzs.sk/ [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[5] Nanette Funk has described mass socialist women's movements as "transmission belts" in her study "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism" at http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/06/27/1350506814539929.full.pdf+html [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[6] I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Francisca de Haan for this inspiring formulation. Bhaskar Sunkara has written for Al Jazeera America 29 January 2014 'In Defense of Pete Seeger' about the deceased American communist activist Pete Seeger. "It's not that Seeger did a lot of good despite his longtime ties to the Communist Party; he did a lot of good because he was a Communist. [continued]This point is not to apologize for the moral and social catastrophe that was state socialism in the 20th century, but rather to draw a distinction between the role of Communists when in power and when in opposition." http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/276-74/21767-focus-in-defense-of-pete-seeger-american-communist [Accessed 20/5/2015].
[7] Denisa Nečasová, "Women's 'Organizations in the Czech Lands, 1948 – 1989" in Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová, ed. *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – CCCP), on magazines (mainly *Vlasta*, the most widely published women's magazine in socialist Czechoslovakia, and *Rudé právo*, a daily published by the CP). In her account of the history of the CSWU, Denisa Nečasová has mainly analyzed the minute meetings of the holdings of CC CP (the Central Committee of the Communist Party) and the directives of the *Ústřední akční výbor Národní fronty* (the Central Action Committee of the National Front) towards the CSWU.[8] Even though she claims to also have used archival material of the women's movement, what she used was material from the Women's Committee of the Communist Party, which is in the Communist Party holdings of the National Archive Prague.[9] Her material is therefore focused on the plans, programs and directives of CP that were given through the Women's Committee of the CP to the CSWU. Directives were given by the Central Committee of the Communist Party to mass organizations through the Action Committees of the National Front, whose work was to make sure that all organizations are in ideological coherence with the Communist Part of Czechoslovakia. It follows from her choice to use the CC source material that looking for information about the women's movement in the archives of the CP instead of the women's movement itself will then produce an account of the movement through the lens of the CP and will inevitably reduce it to a subject that only takes orders from a larger power structure.

When doing my research, I have mainly drawn on un-inventoried archival material of the *Ústřední výbor Československého svazu žen* (Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union – CC CSWU) in the National Archive Prague (NAP). There are 113 boxes in the collection of the CC CSWU.[10] They contain collections of plenary session transcripts,

[8] Ibid. 74 – 81. Denisa Nečasová, who has been the only historian to address the history of the CSWU, has written that her work "provides a more detailed description of the fundamental links between women's organizations and the CP leadership." I am going to argue and show throughout this thesis that it is her focus on the links with the CP, instead of the links of the CSWU with Czechoslovak women and with the international community, which renders her conclusions biased and incomplete.
[9] Ibid. 74
[10] See Appendix.

conferences, WIDF congress transcripts, reports, CC meeting minutes and more. Each box is labeled accordingly to the content of the collection, though the material in the boxes themselves is disorganized. The material is vast and largely untouched. The scope of the archive itself (with a lot of material about the CSWU's international activities) is an argument for the relevance of the organization.

I have chosen to use CSWU archival material which contains Czechoslovak women's movement conferences from 1956, 1959, 1963 and 1966, boxes pertaining to the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), WIDF conferences between 1975 and 1987, and also a box titled "the queries and complaints of the workers, 1981-1989."[11] I am going to clarify my use of the material on CSWU conferences between 1956 and 1966 when discussing the historiography of the CSWU in Chapter Three. There specifically, I am going to argue against Nečasová's claim that there was no mass women's organization in Czechoslovakia between 1952 and 1967 by presenting conference reports from that period which clearly show that the CSWU was organizing on a national, mass level between 1952 and 1967. I will give a brief analysis of the CSWU's involvement in the WIDF and the UNDFW in Chapter Five using mainly reports on conferences/congresses that the CSWU took part in. In doing so, I hope to give an account of the dimension of the CSWU as a member of the global left-feminist movement that was involved in trans-national activities in the Cold War setting. Finally, I am going to respectively address the complaints and queries of Czechoslovak women who wrote to the CSWU. By looking at personal testimonies of women and at how the CSWU responded and communicated with them, I hope to present the CSWU in a different light – as an organization that was primarily interested in helping women. Hence, the CSWU was a Union

[11] NAP, Holdings of the Czechoslovak Women's Union. box 9 - Celostátní konference, box 75 - Stížností a podněty pracujících, dekada OSN pro zeny Mexico 1975, Mezinarodni rok zeny 1975, Mezinarodni rok ditete 1978, Konference OSN Kodan., box 82 – byro a svetove kongresy MDFZ 1975,1979,1981,1983, 1985, 1987.

for women – not a Union for the Party. Also, the material will help me to understand how Czechoslovak women perceived the CSWU and what it was capable of.

In addition to material in the archives, I have also collected oral testimonies of former associates and people who remember the women who worked in the CSWU and what they did. I have spoken to Vica Šurinová, who was editor-in-chief of the fashion magazine *Móda*. The editorial board of *Móda*, like all other women's magazines, was under the supervision of the CSWU. There were a number of magazines published by the CSWU but that is another topic. I have asked her about how she perceived the "ideological committees" and also how, according to her, the role of the CSWU and the "committees" was thought of in the magazine.[12] Secondly, I have interviewed Ľubomír Feldek, a Slovak national poet, playwright and former member of the CP and asked him how he remembered the CSWU and if he could recollect any memories on CSWU chairpersons.[13] Lastly, I collected brief interviews with five other elderly women who remember activities organized by CSWU. Because the history of Communist is so contested, people are reluctant to talk about, most respondents did not wish to be named. On this note, Francisca de Haan has written that "the current climate is so negative that … [continued] … many people are reticent to remember and talk about their former engagement or beliefs, what has aptly been called 'the silence of communists'."[14]

Using a combination of archival material and oral interviews, I had hoped to get a look at the CSWU not through the lens of the CP files – the main focus of this research is not on the CSWU's relationship with the CP and with how and when directives from the CP were given. Rather, the sources I have analyzed will enable me to see the CSWU from the "inside" of the organization, from the material produced by the women who were running the Union. My use

[12] "Ideological committees" were committees involved in the censorship of the media under the directives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.
[13] All interviews were conducted in Bratislava between March and May 2015.
[14] http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/help/view/the_womens_international_democratic_federation_widf_history_main_agenda_and_contributions_19451991 see footnote 24 [Accessed 20/5/2015].

of different sources is key to my hypothesis that the CSWU was there primarily to do things for women, rather than work for the interests of the Party. The Union's archives show that they were not only following Party directives, but also, and *mainly*, pursued their own activities independently of the CP. These activities were carried out on a national and international level.

Methodologically, I have mainly relied on textual analysis, a close reading of my sources to give an analysis of what the main goals and activities of the CSWU were. According to Brummett, the close reading method is "the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a deeper understanding of its meanings."[15] My research is also qualitative. In the words of sociologist Charles C. Ragin, "the qualitative approach is well-suited for the difficult task or representing groups that lack voice in society."[16] When relating to the interpretation offered by Nečasová on the structural changes and activities of the CSWU, I have deployed comparative textual analysis of my own sources with Nečasová's interpretation of her own findings in the archives.

Thesis Structure

In the First Chapter, I will introduce the theoretical framework necessary for understanding communism as an ideology and how communist and left-feminist thought deliberated the "woman question" in theory. The practical implementation of socialist and communist theory in addressing the "woman question" and women's organizations in the Soviet Union will also be introduced. Further, I will explain what the contemporary scholarly debates are on the role of women's organizations in the socialist state. To do this, I will discuss the merits of "totalitarian" and "revisionist" scholarship as well as on their "agency" and "activism." Lastly, I will also stress how recent existing research on the role of women's mass socialist organizations is.

[15] Barry S. Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading* (Loss Angeles: Sage Publications Inc., 2010), 3.
[16] Charles C. Ragin, *Constructing Social Research* (California: Pine Forge Press, 2004), 83.

In the Second Chapter, I will present a brief history of Czechoslovakia in order to help to contextualize the Union as a continuation of the leftist women's movement that originated in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938). Further, I will show that the left-feminist movement in both of these periods was the one that was the most politically engaged in the struggle for women's equality. Moreover, the leftist women's movement was also closely connected to the Communist Party. Pro-women proposals for amendments in legislation were drafted by women who were almost without exception from the Communist Party. Finally, I will show that the "woman" was defined by the Constitution from the First Czechoslovak Republic mainly as a "mother" – which is in line with how State Socialism promoted women's identity between 1948 and 1989. The emancipation of the working class and of working class women, strongly campaigned for by the left women's movement in the in the First Republic and the interwar period, promoted the identity of the "emancipated worker" after 1948 and when women were included in the process of economic production after the Second World War. It follows then that much of what was promoted for women in socialist Czechoslovakia was not "imported" and imposed on Czechoslovak citizens by Soviet rule as of 1948, but had already been an integral part of how the "woman question" had been negotiated for three decades prior.

In the Third Chapter, I will discuss the historiography of the Union, particularly the work of Denisa Nečasová. In 2014, Nečasová published a brief account of the history of the CSWU. I will suggest that her account of the history of the Union is incomplete, and will discuss this based on the sources she used to explain certain activities and turning points in the history of the Union. As part of my analysis, I will also raise further research questions on aspects of CSWU history that have not been addressed by historians and that would deserve further scholarly treatment.

In Chapter Four, I will give contextualized biographies of the leading CSWU women. For this purpose, I have used a combination of sources. I have drawn on short biographies published in *Rudé Právo* between 1953 and 1990. Also, I have used the online archive of the plenary sessions of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.In writing the biographies, particularly those of Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, Gusta Fučiková and Helena Leflerova, I will support my argument that the women's movement after 1948 was a continuation of the pre-1948 women's movement up until 1990. They were members of Parliament on behalf of the Social-Democratic Party and the Communist Party in the First Czechoslovak Republic and were also involved in the anti-fascist resistance movement. I will use the information in the biographies to support my argument that the CSWU women leaders represent a continuation of the leftist struggle for women's liberation, which was closely linked with the liberation of the working class.

I will show that the CSWU leading women were also active in the international community of left women's organizations. The international activities of socialist Unions in Czechoslovakia and the international connections of many chairpersons' remains sorely under-researched. To provide a glimpse of some of the international activities of the CSWU, Chapter Five will give an account of the CSWU in the context of International Women's Year (1975) and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-85) and also of their connections with the Women's International Democratic Federation. My aim here is on the one hand to contribute to the historical awareness of the *international* dimension of socialist mass women's organizations activities and involvement, but also to show how the CSWU's involvement with the global women's movement was "nationalized," on the other hand. By "nationalized," I mean how the activities of the international women's movement in the 1970's and 1980's were translated by the CSWU and the CP for the public.

I briefly want to clarify my use of the terms "communism" and "socialism" in this thesis. When I refer to "communists," I speak either of the members of the Communist Party or individuals/groups who were ideologically convinced communists and part of the State apparatus (the meaning will be made clear in the specific context). When referring to the political regime in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989, I will use the terms "socialism" or "state socialism." While the Communist Party represented the ideology, the historical-materialist goal – the social order in Czechoslovakia was decidedly not "communist," but rather "state socialist."

CHAPTER 1 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to clarify the theoretical assumptions that helped inform and articulate the questions I have asked my sources. The discussion of the Czechoslovak Women's Union in this thesis will be framed within three main theoretical approaches. Firstly, in order to understand the idea of a mass women's organization in a socialist state more clearly, I will introduce the deliberation of "the woman question" in Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and left-feminist theory and practice. Secondly, I will introduce the debate between the "one-party model" and "revisionist" scholarship in order to show what the points of contention in the current scholarly debate the history of state socialism are. Thirdly, I am going to discuss how "totalitarian" and "revisionist" frameworks can be applied to the study of women's mass socialist movements. In conclusion, I will assess how the stated theoretical frameworks are applicable to the Czechoslovak case. The aim of this theoretical framework is to contextualize the main ideas that formed the communist ideological and intellectual background of the people involved in the Czechoslovak Women's Union, and also to introduce the way the agency of women's mass socialist organizations within the socialist state has been theorized and interpreted. In my own reading of the role of the CSWU in the state, I will opt for a "mid-way" approach to understand how the CSWU, as a state women's organization, made a difference for the better in the everyday lives of women in Czechoslovakia.

1.1 Socialism and "the Woman Question"

In this section, I will discuss how women's emancipation was negotiated in Marxist and left-feminist thought. What I mean when I say "woman question" throughout this thesis is the question of how to liberate women from legal, social and economic submission and oppression. Historian Donna Harsch writes in the introduction to her recent article on "Communism and Women":

> From the 1950's to the 1970's, many observers, and certainly communist leaders, believed that communism had successfully answered the woman 'question.' Every communist state, it was noted, *guaranteed women equal rights under the law; opened public institutions to women and encouraged their participation as citizens, workers and students; and implemented social policies that benefited women as mothers, whether married or single*.[17]

While Harsch's description of an "answered" woman question according to "many observers" gives a very positive view of socialism, this perspective, she adds, became less prevalent in the late 1980's due to "economic decline and political collapse" of Soviet states which led to the communist enterprise being seen as a failed project. These changes, however, "colored popular and scholarly opinion about every aspect of communism."[18] Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the "woman question" in the framework of Donna Harsch and use the above mentioned quote as a working summary of what the women's movement strove to achieve in its endeavors.

The resolution of the "woman question" in socialism was addressed in the very beginnings of communist theory. The writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, August Bebel, Vladimir Lenin, Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai will inform the following section of the theoretical framework. Their ideas on power relations in society constitute the basis for understanding how the idea of there being a "woman question" that was intrinsic to or separate from the "class struggle" was debated in communist thought. It would also be practically impossible to understand the language of socialism and of the CSWU without recognizing the political and historical meaning of the Marxist agenda. To quote socialist historian Mary Buckley, "whatever is taken from this corpus of ideas at any given point in time and what is ignored may vary to suit political priorities of the period, these texts nevertheless remain sources for inspiration, policy, official line and ideological justification."[19] An ongoing point of contention in the "woman question" debate in Marxist thought and practice, and one that is

[17] Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 488. Emphasis added by me.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 18.

of particular relevance to this thesis, was the question whether or not a separate women's organization was necessary in a socialist state.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were the first to theorize that only communism could bring about the liberation of women. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx contends that "the bourgeois sees his wife as a mere instrument of production."[20] Further, Marx pointed out the immorality of the capitalist system of production and considered the position of women under capitalism to create a situation in which women are prostituting themselves for their husbands.[21] What he meant is that because in bourgeois society, the woman is the property of the man and the bearer of children, the wife is prostituting herself for sustenance provided by the husband. Both Marx and Engels argued that the only way to liberate women from this power mechanism was to "do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production."[22] The also understood the family as a microcosm of capitalist oppression, the wife and the children substituting the position of the working class.

In comparison to Engels, Marx had given relatively less attention to the woman question, and even wrote in *Das Kapital* that, according to him, Engels and other writers had "exhausted the subject of the degradation caused by the capitalistic exploitation of women."[23] In 1884, Friedrich Engels published his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which has, according to Alena Heitlinger, "assumed particular importance in defining the Marxist position on the woman question."[24] His work is a materialist treatise on the history of family economics, in which he emphasized the role of private property, male inheritance

[20] See Chapter Two, "Proletarians and Communists," in Marx Karl and Engels Fridrich, 1848, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm [Accessed 3/5/2015].
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] See "Chapter Fifteen: Machinery and Modern Industry, Section iii" in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1, Book One*: The Process of Production of Capitalism (1867) retrieved from https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm [Accessed 4/5.2015].
[24] Alena Heitlinger, *Marxism, Feminism and Sex Equality in Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, 10.

and the monogamous relationship in enslaving women. Engels argued that, because the main function of the bourgeois family was to "produce heirs of undisputed paternity: monogamy was necessitated by a concentration of wealth in the hands of individual males."[25] Such "bourgeois" relations, he argued, led to moral decay and the prostitution of women. The only group of people free of these burdens, according to Engels, are the proletariat. Therefore, the enslavement of women could only be abolished with the dismemberment of the existing class differences. According to historian Alfred G. Meyer, "Engels, too, even though he was in favor of pressing for legal and political equality for women, had pointed out that the attainment of juridical and political equality would not liberate women from their proletarian status within the family."[26] True liberation, Engels argued, could only be attained by the full participation of all women in the system of production.

While Engels did write on power relations in the family, it was August Bebel who was more focused on women in socialism and who "fit the woman question into the larger framework of Marxist theory."[27] Bebel was a German working-class theorist of socialism. His book *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Women and Socialism), first published in 1879, is a critique of capitalism with a focus on the special position of women and their specific oppression. Bebel insisted that it is only to be intrinsically resolved together with the social question: "They who seek a complete solution to the woman question must," Bebel contends, "join hands with those who have inscribed upon their banner the solution of the social question in the interest of all mankind – the Socialists."[28] Like Marx and Engels, Bebel connected women's enslavement in capitalism to marriage, which he saw as a microcosm of capitalist

[25] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 23.
[26] Alfred Meyer, "Marxism and the Women's Moment," in *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy Atkinson, et al. (Hassocks, UK: The Harvester Press, 1978), 85-112.
[27] Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) 233.
[28] August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism* (NYL: Socialist Literature Cie, 1910) excerpted in Roddi, ed., The Feminist Papers, 502.

production, in which women constituted the working class. Buckley writes that "according to Bebel, bourgeois marriage was the result of bourgeois property relations, and "was defined by the right of inheritance, and amounted to marriage by compulsion."[29]

While the writings of Vladimir Lenin on the woman question were in line with the principal arguments made by Marx, Engels and Bebel, Lenin "devoted more attention to practical policy goals, related to the concrete tasks of agitating for revolution in Russia and then building socialism."[30] Even as he was politicizing women and trying to win them over for the class struggle, he argued that he would only continue doing so "as long as separate women's organizations were not the result."[31] According to Lenin, it was necessary to include women in the revolutionary struggle as they constituted at least half of the population. Mary Buckley contends that Lenin had stressed the importance of "complete equal rights for men and women and paid more attention to this than Marx or Engels."[32] In 1920, the German socialist feminist Klara Zetkin discussed the woman question with Lenin. According to Buckley, Lenin argued that "women's liberation required that women participate in 'common productive labor' and that public dining rooms, nurseries and kindergartens would enable them to do so."[33] Although Lenin rejected the concept of a women's movement that was separate from the Party, he said that "the Party must have bodies, working groups, commissions, committees, bureaus or whatever you like, whose particular duty it is to arouse the masses of women workers, to bring them into contact with the Party, and to keep them under its influence," adding that "we must train those whom we arouse and win, and equip them for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party."[34] Hence, the debate over whether or not there should

[29] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 22-23.
[30] Ibid. 25.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid. 26.
[33] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 26.
[34] https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1924/reminiscences-of-lenin.htm [Accessed 14/5/2015] For more on Klara Zetkin, see, Charles Sowerwine, "Socialism, Feminism, and the Socialist Movement from the French Revolution to World War II," in R. Bridenthal et al eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston etc.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 356-387.

be a women's organization in the state existed in the Soviet Union from the very beginning.

Women theorists on the woman question Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai made invaluable contributions to communist theory on the woman question. Both Armand and Kollontai were directors of the first Soviet women's organization *Zhenotdel*. They were amongst the first women to theorize women's liberation in socialism and, unlike their predecessors (with the exception of Lenin), they lived in the Soviet Union and were involved in its emerging women's movement. Inessa Armand was an activist of the international workers movement and women's liberation, and head of the *Zhenotdel* from 1918 to 1919. *Zhenotdel* was the women's bureau "attached to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and introduced at every level of the party hierarchy."[35] According to Russian anthropologist and historian Natalia Pushkareva, Armand had successfully made appeals to Lenin on the woman question. She contends that Armand might have had an impact on him recognizing, in 1918, that "it was necessary to devise new working methods to improve women's situation."[36] Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) was a political activist and the director of *Zhenotdel* between 1920 and 1922. In 1922, Kollontai's "unacceptable behavior in the Workers' opposition caused her to be removed to diplomatic work in Norway."[37] In her book *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union*, historian Mary Buckley elaborates on the legal emancipation of the Soviet woman in the late 1910s and 1920s and sees it as an attempt "to extend Marxist theorizing on the woman question."[38] Armand and Kollontai recognized that "special institutions were needed to reach, enlighten and mobilize women."[39] They theorized the reorganization of domestic life, as well as childrearing and domestic labor as key for the transformation of the

[35] Ibid. 253-57
[36] Natalia Pushkareva, "Armand, Inessa-Elizaveta Fiodorovna (1874 - 1920)" in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, eds, *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th centuries* (New York: CEU University Press, 2008).
[37] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 65.
[38] Ibid. 44.
[39] Ibid.

social order. As Buckley writes, "like Lenin, they [Armand and Kollontai] suggested that private domestic work should be replaced by communal kitchens, dining rooms and laundries."[40] They even went as far as to suggest that, under socialism, domestic housework would no longer be necessary, and will be replaced by "collective housekeeping."[41]

Alexandra Kollontai believed that one of the main threats to women in capitalism lay in the "individualistic code of sexual morality," which was intrinsic to the moral decay of capitalist society. Believing that independent women's groups and organizations could not muster sufficient support, Kollontai argued that the liberation of women was "integral to socialist revolution and considered the existence of a women's movement that is independent from the communist party as politically shortsighted."[42] Armand and Kollontai "drew a clear distinction between themselves and bourgeois feminists, because they believed that the working women shared common ground with working men, leaving the bourgeois woman alienated in principle from the cause of the proletariat."[43]

According to historian Elizabeth Waters, there are a number of reasons for structural changes in socialist women's organizations. Waters writes that "under the auspices of the Second International, two women's conferences had taken place, in Stuttgart (1907) and Copenhagen (1910)."[44] In the Third International, created in Moscow in June 1920, the Communist Women's Movement was formed. In June 1920, "twenty-one women representing nineteen countries met in Moscow for the First Communist Women's Conference."[45] In 1919, the Third International, "an organization with the declared aim of coordinating the global struggle of the proletariat and its allies to abolish class society and build communism," was

[40] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 45.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid. 33.
[43] Ibid. 53-4
[44] Elizabeth Waters, "In the Shadow of the Comintern The Comunist Women's Movement, *1920-43*," in *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism*, edited by Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, Marilyn B. Young (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1989), 30.
[45] Ibid. 29.

established.[46]

Presented at the first Communist women's Conference in 1920 were also the *Theses of the Communist Women's Movement*, which proclaimed "the International's commitment to the political equality of women and their social rights."[47] The second paragraph of the Theses also "traced the origin of the privileged position of men to the institution of private property and to women's isolation within the domestic economy and the family."[48] According to Waters, references to women in the Theses "as wives and mothers in the future society" strengthened the assumption that "despite the profound economic transformations that revolution would already bring, considerable distinction between the social roles of men and women would remain."[49] Importantly, Waters also elaborates that one of the biggest issues in of the 1920's communist women's movement was the isolation of women's sections in national parties from the parties themselves, which was allegedly said to "foster *feminist* and reformist deviationism." [50] In an effort to broaden "the appeal of the communist women's movement," Another important figure in the left women's movement was German activist Klara Zetkin. She was active in the German women's suffrage movement, and was one of the founding members of the Communist Party in 1918.[51] Zetkin strongly advised the International Women's Secretariat for "the creation of women's organizations that were outside the party and formally separate from it, able to spread the communist message beyond the small band of the faithful and bring together women from diverse social backgrounds and with a range of political allegiances."[52]

In order to tackle the gargantuan task of organizing women, the Women's Department

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid. 31.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid. 37.
[50] Ibid. 44.
[51] https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/z/e.htm#zetkin-clara [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[52] Waters, *In the Shadow*, 44.

of the Central Committee Secretariat, also known as the *Zhenotdel*, was established in 1919. Buckley discusses the numerous and complex obstacle facing the *Zhenotdel* in their daily work, such as a lack of interest on behalf of the Communist Part in reforming family life, unemployment and general instability in the country following the Civil War (1917-1922). Buckley also points out that, in the *Zhenotdel* hierarchy, only those who campaigned for women's rights "appropriately," i.e. in ideological coherence with communist ideals and the demands of the working class, could rise in the organizations' hierarchy, as well as those who were also working "in the interests of the Party."[53] In 1930, the Communist Party contended that the "woman question" has been resolved and decided to dissolve the *Zhenotdel*. Buckley contends that, in spite of its relatively brief existence of eleven years, "Kollontai maintained that it was on the initiative of the *Zhenotdel* that abortion was legalized" in Soviet Russia, and also that "commissions were set up to fight prostitution and to protect mothers and children."[54]

1.2 "Totalitarian" vs. "Revisionist" scholarship

In this section, I will introduce some of the main lines of thought of theorists of "totalitarian" scholarship, contested by "revisionist" scholars, who have opted for a more "bottom-up" approach to historicizing socialism and socialist women's movements. "Totalitarian" scholarship considers state socialist women's liberation to have been imposed on women, and criticizes the socialist state for maintaining what feminist philosopher Mihaela Miriou calls "State Patriarchy." The "totalitarian" approach to the history of socialist women's organizations is based on the presumption that women's interests were not at the heart of women's mass socialist organizations. Revisionist scholarship, such as that of Sheila Fitzpatrick, maintained that socialist society was in fact much more than an object of control

[53] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 62.
[54] Ibid. 102.

by the state.[55]

In "Revisionism in Soviet History", Sheila Fitzpatrick accounts for the "revisionist" movement (which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s) on Soviet historical writing and positions the "revisionist" perspectives as "challenging totalitarian mode scholarship."[56] She opposes the argument between the two schools of thought (the "totalitarians" and the "revisionists") to have been a "political slinging match" that cannot be understood outside the context of the Cold War. Rather than a new emerged body of evidence to invalidate existing research, Fitzpatrick understands the emergence of revisionism as a shift of paradigms from political to social history. In turn, post revisionist historians focused on cultural history in state socialism.[57] Fitzpatrick gives historians Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski as examples of the totalitarian approach.[58] Most of the existing historiography of Czechslovakia is also written from a "totalitarian" perspective, such as the work of historian Josef Korbel or Dušan Kováč. In short, the representation of the state socialism in Western historiography has been influenced by "a strong anti-communist bias.[59]

1.3 "Totalitarian" vs. "Revisionist" scholarship applied to socialist women's movements

The debate surrounding the "autonomy" of state women's mass organizations in socialism, and whether we can think of them as having "agency" will be discussed here. Part of my research inquiry was to determine how much "autonomy" the CSWU as a women's mass socialist organization enjoyed in socialist Czechoslovakia. Here, I am briefly going to discuss the debate between "totalitarian" and "revisionist" scholarship when applied to women's mass socialist

[55] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," in *History and Theory* 46, no 4. 2007.
[56] Ibid. 77.
[57] Ibid. 90-1.
[58] Carl J. Friedrich and Zbignew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956) in Fitzpatrick, *Revisionism*, 80.
[59] Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Womens's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia," *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 1.

organizations.

Romanian political theorist and feminist philosopher Mihaela Miroiu is an exemplary proponent of the "totalitarian model" applied to socialism and the woman question. In her 'Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism', she argues that Kollontai and the *Zhenotdel* were "promoters of women's emancipation for communist revolution, but not for women's autonomy and self-assertion" and that "the communist parties were intolerant towards any uncontrolled form of association."[60] Miroiu argues, namely, that socialist states never included "state feminism." She adds that although there were "unofficial islands of feminism", there was never a movement "related to *the personal is political.*"[61]

In "How Should we Name the Women-Friendly Actions of Socialism?," historian Krassimira Daskalova offers a critique of Mihaela Miroui's "Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism."[62] Daskalova's criticism holds numerous points. Firstly, she argues that Miroiu's analysis is faulty on the basis that she conceptualized "women's autonomy" one-sidedly. Using the example of voting rights in Western democracies after the Second World War, which were granted to women relatively late - "1944 in France and 1971 in Switzerland", as opposed to 1918 in the Soviet Union.[63] Miroiu relegates the established state crèches, kindergartens, schools, universities to a "logic of control over the entire population."[64] In her criticism, Daskalova raises the question how we can think of woman-friendly policies of state socialism, and concludes that "we do not pay enough to the historical complexity of social reality."[65] This complexity of everyday life under state socialism is also discussed in Basia Nowak's case study of socialist activism in "'Where Do You Think I

[60] Mihaela Miroiu, "Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism" in Forum: "'communist Feminism' a Contradictio in Terminis?" Aspasia 1, 2007, 199.
[61] Ibid, 200.
[62] Krassimira Daskalova, "How Should we Name the Women-Friendly Actions of Socialism?" in Aspasia 1 2007, 214 – 219.
[63] Daskalova, *ARMAND*, 216. For the latter, see Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 34-5.
[64] Miroiu, "Communism," 199.
[65] Ibid. 218 .

Learned to Style My Hair?' Gender and Everyday Lives of Women Activists in Poland's League of Women," Nowak examines some of the "programs and actions through which the League tried to help women" and shows "how the organization functioned on the ground," as well as what it offered to women.[66] Nowak paints a picture of a socialist women's organization whose main activities were organized for women on a local level. Her study, based primarily on archival and oral testimonies, demonstrates that socialist women's organizations could serve "both women and the party-state."[67]

In "Communist Feminism as Oxymoron, Reflections of a 'Second Wave' Feminist Historian of European Socialism and Feminism," Marilyn J. Boxer, as part of a forum on Miroui's challenge to "communist feminism", challenges the dichotomy of "autonomy" vs. "subordination," arguing that "if one defines feminism solely as a movement for autonomy for women, then much of that historians (in the 'West') have identified as feminist vanishes from sight."[68]

The scholarly debate on the agency of women's mass socialist organizations is very current. In "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism," Nanette Funk argues against the claims of Revisionist Feminist scholars who take a "bottom-up" perspective on official state socialist women's organizations. Funk argues that while these organizations enabled agency at certain moments, they also prevented women from taking agency on the same merit, and suggests that revisionist scholars disregard the complexity of agency, and asks the question who could be an agent, when and where, and also what kind of agents women could be.[69] She

[66] Basia A. Nowak, "'Where do you think I learned to Style My Hair?' Gender and Everyday Lives of Women Activists in Poland's League of Women." In Shana Penn and Jill Massino (eds), *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2009), 46.
[67] Nowak, "Where do You Think I Learned to Style My Hair," 58.
[68] Boxer, *Communist Feminism*, 243.
[69] Nanette Funk, "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism" at http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/21/4/344.full.pdf+html [Accessed 15/5/2015].

makes a number of points and seeks in essence to nuance the ways in which we can understand agency in a state socialist setting. Funk argues that in the research that has been done on "women's agency" in state socialism, "authors do not do not periodize and conceptualize the significance of the dates of women's agency."[70] Secondly, Funk argues that we distinguish between reactive, proactive, active and passive agency. Namely, Funk stressed that "proactive agency is acting because of one's own will, policies, commitments or initiatives, in contrast to reactive agency, acting because of the will of another."[71] In her conclusion, Funk points out that "women in post-socialism do not need to claim state socialist women's organizations were feminist to claim a feminist past in their own countries, though usually pre-1945."[72]

On the basis of the analysis of my material, I argue that the limited definition of agency as offered by Funk is highly inadequate. One the one hand, Funk calls for more critical nuance in the assessment of women's activities by historians as "feminist." Funk's definition is written from a view that is negligent of the "left-feminist" tradition. "Untangling the knot: A response to Nanette Funk" is a retort to Funk's criticism of revisionist scholarship by historian of socialism Kristen Ghodsee. The following passage, I found, sums up the flawed premise of Funk's argument and just why Funk's "definition" of "agency" is inadequate:

> Certainly no one denies that communist governments in Eastern Europe severely limited political freedom, but surely the very concept of 'women's agency' cannot require the freedom to act as one would have liked at all times and in all circumstances. Almost all states prevent me from acting as I would like (running red lights, not paying taxes, or downloading certain files from the Internet). Does this mean that one cannot enjoy meaningful agency in a context where some things that I would like to do are prohibited? In every extant political system there are some people who cannot act as they would like. This defines the social contract of all governments, communist or otherwise.[73]

[70] Kirsten Ghodsee, "Untangling the knot: a response to Nanette Funk" at http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/22/2/248.short [Accessed 12/5/2015] 348.
[71] Funk, "A very tangled knot," 349.
[72] Ibid. 357.
[73] Kristen Ghodsee, "Untangling the knot: A response to Nanette Funk," in *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 2 (2015): 248–52.

It follows from the above that women and women's organization must have had agency even in a one-party state like Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. Feminist historian Ellen Dubois writes that in "trying to establish, women's links with the past, she has "chosen to use the term 'feminism' in a broad sense, to mean a very large, long and complex tradition calling for the 'equality', 'elevation', or 'emancipation' of women, but often disagreeing within itself as to how to achieve that."[74]

In conclusion, the frameworks I have elaborated above have allowed me to articulate my research questions about the CSWU and to rethink how the Union has been defined as a women's organization. Instead of focusing on the ties of the CSWU with the CP, I have decided to approach the CSWU as an organization whose member base consisted of individuals who chose to dedicate themselves to women's liberation using the means of the Communist Party and the socialist agenda. In this thesis, I will use the definition of left-feminism as formulated by DuBois and quoted by Francisca de Haan: "by left-feminism, I also mean an understanding that the attainment of genuine equality for women – all women – requires a radical challenge to … society, the mobilization of masses of people, and fundamental social change."[75] I would like to suggest by all this that in order to have meaningful change in society, the most effective way to do it is with support of the state, outside of the state.

[74] Ellen DuBois – Woman Suffrage and the left - an international socialist feminist perspective http://newleftreview.org/I/186/ellen-dubois-woman-suffrage-and-the-left-an-international-socialist-feminist-perspective See footnote 8 [Accessed 15/5./014].
[75] http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/help/view/the_womens_international_democratic_federation_widf_history_main_agenda_and_contributions_19451991 See footnote 1 [Accessed 12/5/2014].

CHAPTER 2 – A HISTORY OF LEFT-FEMINISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

This chapter focuses on the longer history of left women's political activism in Czechoslovakia. Specifically, I will discuss the longer history of leading women's involvement with the CP in order to show that this did not suddenly emerge out of the blue under Soviet rule. More specifically, I will link the political involvement of the leftist women's movement in the First Czechoslovak Republic to the Communist Party in the first Czechoslovak State. In order to establish the necessary links, I will discuss the legal history pertaining to the "woman question" and the definition of the woman in the Czechoslovak Constitution from 1918. More precisely, I will discuss how the legislative constructed and defined the woman as the "mother" and the "worker." How women were treated constitutionally is related to the struggle for abortion and reproductive healthcare rights. I will also show that women's struggle for the legalization of abortion and more rights for the working class in the First Czechoslovak Republic was an important part of the political agenda of the Czechoslovak left women's movement. The narrative I will present here is based on my reading of the existing historiography of left women's activism in Czechoslovakia and their relations with the Communist Party. In my research, I have looked for continuities, rather discontinuities, in the women's movement before and after 1948, and I have found that the continuities decidedly outweigh the latter.

2.1 The Communist Party and the Women's Movement, 1918-1945

The first time that Czechoslovakia came into existence was on October 28th 1918 following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire directly after the First World War (1914-1918). The first president of the First Czechoslovak Republic was the Czech philosopher and politician

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who Heitlinger describes as "a supporter of women's equality."[76] Already in 1918, women in Czechoslovakia were granted voting rights. In 1919, "the marriage bar for women teachers and civil servants was abolished."[77] Historians generally agree that the Czechoslovak legislation on women was progressive for its time. Article 106 in the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1920 guaranteed "the privileges of sex, birth and occupation will not be recognized by law." Feinberg points out that this implied that "women now had the perfect legal basis from which to challenge government-sponsored forms of gender equality in its laws and institutions."[78] Article 106 was, however, in partial contradiction with Article 126, which was also new in the Constitution. The latter stated that "marriage, motherhood, and the family are under the protection of the law."[79] Contradicting the progressive Article 106, Article 126 institutionally defined the woman as a gendered subject in the patriarchal structures of the State and the family. As Feinberg put it, "Article 126 could easily be interpreted as giving constitutional sanction to laws that treated men and women differently as long as the goal of these laws was to strengthen established gender roles in the family."[80] While legal equality for women was voted on univocally, defining the woman as a subject that was disjointed from the family in legal terms, to some legislators, to pose a threat to the integrity of the newly independent Czechoslovak nation state.[81] At the time when the Constitution was drafted and passed, there were no women members of Parliament.

The immediate years after First World War were largely characterized by hyperinflation and general recovery from the war. The crisis peaked "in 1920, [when] the number of workers

[76] Alena Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism: Sex Inequality in the Soviet Union and in Czechoslovakia* (Chatham, UK: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979) 134.
[77] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 135.
[78] Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality; Gender, Citizenship, and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 35.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] for a detailed discussion on the drafting process and other constitutional ambiguities pertaining to the woman in the family, see Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 34- 40.

on strike was ten times higher than had been the average in the last two years before the war."[82] Socialist and communist ideals was already gaining popularity then, and, in the first Czechoslovak parliamentary elections in 1920, "socialists of all shades and nationalities gained 47.6 per cent of the total vote," though they "did not represent a united force," yet.[83]

By the time communists would take power in February 1948, in a series of events known as the February *putsch*, the CP already had a twenty-seven year tradition in Czechoslovakia.[84] The Czechoslovak Communist Party was founded in 1921 in Prague and joined the Communist International in the same year.[85] Upon its establishment, the CP immediately also founded the *Ústřední vybor žen* (Central Women's Committee), a women's cabinet of the Party, which "oversaw the activities of all women's commissions over time at all levels of the Party hierarchy."[86] Hence, the CP from the outset of their organized political activities included a committee of women designated especially for the treatment of the "woman question" as something that required attention, focus and action.

Heitlinger writes about the "Czech communist women's congress" that "preceded the founding of the Communist Party when a group of Social Democratic Party members left the party and organized a women's conference in March 1921 in Prague. The foundation congress of the Czech Communist Party only took place two months later."[87] The involvement of women in the CP was most significant of all the political parties in Czechoslovakia. Heitlinger has already shown that "of all the parties represented in the Communist International, the Czechoslovak communist Party had the highest percentage of women among its members."[88]

[82] Pavel Krejč and Jiří Machonin, *Czechoslovakia, 1918-1992: A Laboratory for Social Change* (Oxford: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1966), 59.
[83] Ibid.
[84] I will describe the putsch in more detail further on in the chapter.
[85] Wolchik, *Czechoslovakia*, 5.
[86] Denisa Nečasová, "Women's Organizations in the Czech lands, 1948-89; An historical Perspective" in ed. Havelková H. and Oates-Jindruchová L., *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism; An expropriated voice. (*New York; Routledge, 2014), 59
[87] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 53.
[88] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 53.

Unfortunately, she does not go into any more detail about the other activities of these women members. Not only did the CP continue to function in the interwar period but, by 1925, the CP was "the second largest party, with forty-one seats in parliament."[89] Historian of socialism Josef Korbel also emphasizes the strong role of the CP and writes that "after its founding, the CP of Czechoslovakia functioned without interruption during the interwar period, whereas [other] Communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans were outlawed."[90]

In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia was contending with emerging fascism in neighboring Germany. Historians Jaroslav Krejčí and Pavel Machonin analyze the role of the CP and socialist politics in the period, and write that communism in Czechoslovakia has a "long tradition, dating back to the time of the anti-fascist resistance and fully corresponded to the relatively broad social support given the communist party by democratically disposed people."[91] In the 1930s, Czechoslovakia continued to struggle with economic depression and had a 17% unemployment ratio in 1932.[92] The economic slump and social insecurity hit the female population the hardest. Heitlinger has written that "throughout the interwar period, female wages in industry were only a half or even a third of those earned by men."[93] Heitlinger has also shown that since women's suffrage was no longer an issue after 1918, the interwar left women's movement became very much focused on the struggles of the working class. On 8 March 1935 (International Women's Day), for example, "working class women filled Prague's largest hall shouting 'We want work! We want bread!'."[94] The left women's movement became a platform for solidarity with the poorest people in the working class – women.

[89] Josef Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia, Meanings of Its History*, (New York: London University Press, 1977), 71.
[90] Korbel, *Twentieth Century*, 71.
[91] Pavel Krejč and Jiří Machonin.Czechoslovakia, *1918-1992: A Laboratory for Social Change* (Oxford: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1966), 159.
[92] Dušan Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska*, 200.
[93] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 135.
[94] Ibid. 54.

However, it was not just poverty and unemployment that was the looming threat to Czechoslovak society. Since the creation of a separate Czechoslovak state, the Czechoslovak government had to contend with a large German population in the Sudetenland, which caused national and international friction, particularly with Germany. In 1933, when Adolf Hitler assumed his position as Reich-Chancellor, Konrad Henlein founded the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (Sudeten German Party) in Czechoslovakia, which, by 1935, "emerged as the single most popular party in all of Czechoslovakia."[95]

The annexation of the Sudetenland, the most German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, on October 1 1938 is known as *Mnichovský diktát* (the Munich dictate) because France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany drew up and signed the agreement without Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak representatives were not even invited to the Munich conference. After the agreement had already been made in Munich and brought forth to Czechoslovak President Eduard Beneš, he signed "reluctantly, rather than having to go to war without the support of his Western allies."[96] In March 1939, German forces invaded the Czech lands and established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia on March 15 1939. On March 14 1939, the first Slovak Republic was established as a "client state" of Nazi Germany under the Presidency of the Catholic priest and Nazi collaborator Jozef Tiso.[97] In September 1939, the Second World War broke out in Europe after Hitler's invasion of Poland. Under the leadership of Beneš, a Czechoslovak Government in exile was established in Paris and moved to the United Kingdom for the duration of the war. One of the future chairpersons of the CSWU, Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, whose involvement with the CP I will discuss in Chapter Four, was also a member of the Czechoslovak Government in exile.[98]

[95] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 161.
[96] Ibid. 161.
[97] Wolchik, *Czechoslovakia*, 13.
[98] John Crane and Sylivia Crane, *Czechoslovakia; Anvil of the Cold War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991) Chapters 9. – 12.

2.2 The Interwar Women's Movement 1918-1945

The women's movement between 1918 and 1945 was a plural movement, in spite of the fact that the left women's movement and women who were involved in the CP were the more politically active. In 1923, the *Ženská národní rada* (National Women's Council - NWC) was established in Prague by Františka Plamínková. Historian Květa Jechová tells us that this was:

> an apolitical organization of small unions and interest groups whose aim was to achieve that women's equality was guaranteed by the Constitution, was introduced into everyday practice, and that the Government administration would take into just consideration the particularity of a woman's life and a woman's motherly tasks.[99]

According to Jechová, the NWC coordinated the activities of hundreds of activists, mostly middle-class women. Historian Soňa Hendrychová writes that the NWC "coordinated the activities of various women's organizations in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia and represented over sixty women's associations with more than three hundred thousand members"[100] The leader and chairwoman of NWC was Františka Plamínková. In 1923, the young Milada Horáková also joined the NCW. Hendrychová argues that it was "under Plamínková's leadership [that] the Czechoslovak women's movement became further integrated into the international women's movement."[101] To mention but a few of her activities, Plamínková was Vice-President of the International Council of Women "from 1925 until World War II" and was also involved in the International Federation of Business and Professional Women. In 1924, the NCW became a member of the International Council of Women. Plamínková also became a Senator in the Czechoslovak National Assembly in 1925, through which she later sought to "convey the threat of German Nazism."[102] She even wrote a letter to Hitler in

[99] "Květa Jechová, Emancipace Shora Ženské organizace v českých zemích v druhé polovině 20. Století"retrieved at http://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1304/003-018.pdf , 2 [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[100] Soňa Hendrychová, "Plamínková Františka F. (1878-1942)" in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loufti (eds),*A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms; Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries.*(New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 438.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

September 1938 "to protest against his attacks on Czechoslovakia."[103] Plamínková was arrested an executed on 30 June 1942 as part of the reprisals for the assassination of Reich-protector Reinhard Heydrich.[104]

Czechoslovakia was liberated from fascism in 1945 by the Soviet army and the Third Czechoslovak Republic, under the leadership of former President Edvard Beneš, came into being. In 1945, Milada Horáková founded the *Rada československých žen* (Council of Czechoslovak Women) which, according to Feinberg, "she hoped would continue the legacy of the NWC."[105] In 1946, Horáková was elected deputy to the Constituent National Assembly and "submitted a range of law proposals and interpellations dealing with the position of women in the family and society."[106] The Council was abolished by the Communist Party in 1948. Dana Musilová writes that "after the Communist regime came to power, Horáková resigned from her position in the National Assembly and then joined the anti-Communist movement."[107] She was arrested on 7 September 1939 and, on June 27 1950, Horáková was executed as the only woman in "the Czechoslovak version of Stalinist show trials."[108] Musilová argues that Horáková had represented "a third generation of feminists in the Czechoslovak women's movement – a generation that first tried to complete the fight for actual equality between women and men and second to harmonize women's careers with their public activities and motherhood."[109] Feinberg argues that by killing Horáková, "the Communist government of Czechoslovakia was silencing her vision of democracy and the feminism that was so closely

[103] Ibid.
[104] Reinhard Heydrich was Deputy Reich-Protector of Moravia and Bohemia, a client State of Nazi Germany that existed between15 March 1939 and 11 May 1945. He was in power from 1941 to 1942. Czech partisans in Prague assassinated Heydrich on 27 May 1942. I will explain the reprisals for the assassination more in Chapter Four. See also David Kelly, *The Czech Fascist Movement, 1922-1942* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) 171-172.
[105]Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 190.
[106] Dana Musilova, "Horáková Milada (1901-1950)," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms; Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries,* ed. Francisca de Haan, et al. (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 180.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 216 – 220.
[109] Musilova, "Horáková," 180.

intertwined with it. With her death, the feminist hope for liberation via democracy was definitively silenced."[110] Other women, however, who were also involved in the women's movement and with the CP at the time, such as Hodinová-Spurná, in the CP Central Women's Commission, whose plans were to win more women over for the communist cause and inclusion into the economy and to relegate the bourgeois feminist movement.[111]

Feinberg offers a number of reasons for the influence of the CP in the interwar period and after the Second World War. She argues that they were mainly the "disorganization of other Czech parties after Munich and during the war, the CP's uncompromising resistance to Nazism at home, its bold vision for a new future that had no ties to the First Republic, and its association with the Soviet Union."[112]After a series of negotiations between the members of the former exile Government and the four Czechoslovak parties in Czechoslovakia, the *Košický vládní program* (the Košice political program) was accepted in April 1945 and after that, all parties came under what was called the National Front system.[113] "In 1946, half of the people elected to the National Assembly were women."[114] The implementation of the *Košický vládní program* also "explicitly promised that women would receive equal pay for work."[115] The new Constitution in 1948 also cleared away the ambiguities of the 1920 Constitution, and clearly stated that "men and women will have the same position in in the family and in society and they will have the same access to education, to all professions, offices and ranks."[116] As part of what was called the "national revolution"- a series of decrees by Edvard Beneš led to the gradual nationalization of the industrial sector and the establishment of courts to trial Nazi collaborators. These processes also involved a gradual expulsion of the Hungarian and

[110] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 216.
[111] I will discuss the political activities of Hodinová-Spurná in Chapter Four.
[112] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 192.
[113] "Three parties were socialist: the Communists, Social Democrats and Czech National Socialists. The centrist People's party was also present." For more details, see Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 193.
[114] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 220.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

German-speaking citizens of Czechoslovakia.[117] According to Feinberg, "as in 1918, the politicians of 1945 loudly declared that women's equality was a fundamental part of the people's democracy."[118] In the First Republic, however, it was clearly the Communist Party who had made an effort to deal with "the woman question" on a more substantial scale.[119] As I have mentioned previously, even though the NCW has addressed women's issues, it was largely a movement of middle-class women. On the contrary, the CP and the communist women who rallied at the Czech communist women's congress in 1921 spoke to the wider social strata of the Czechoslovak working class.

2.3 The Women's Movement and the Communist putsch; 1948-1950

As I will show, left women's movement between the years 1948 and 1950 underwent substantial transformation. On February 25 1948, a CP dominated government was installed.[120] Nečasová has written that after February 1948, "the Act on Volunteer Organizations" formally confirmed existing practice and use of the principle of democratic centralism to ensure that at the highest instance all organizations were subject to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and that their activities, staffing and the composition of committees at all organizational levels were decided upon by Party institutions."[121] This means that there could no longer be any political women's movement that was not socialist or communist in its essence.

In 1948, when the CP became the only Party in Czechoslovakia, all organizations were nationalized. In addition, the National Front *akční výbory* (action committees) were established in order to keep all organizations. In 1948, the *Národní fronta žen* (National Front of Women

[117] Ibid. 192-4.
[118] Ibid. 196.
[119] I will discuss exactly how the left women's movement and the Communist Party related to each other later on in this chapter.
[120] Nečasová, "Women's Organizations," 48.
[121] Ibid. 49.

– NFW) was founded, which "brought together women of all four political parties active in the Czech lands [at the time]."[122] The NFW ceased to exist in 1950, and after February 1948, all mass organizations fell under the control of the National Front. Feinberg has suggested that the "poisonous atmosphere of the early Cold War" made "the idea of [Czechoslovakia] acting as a bridge between East and West untenable."[123] The Communist Party *putsch* was arguably the result of these tensions, and it soon became evident that maintaining a democracy in Czechoslovakia, located in the midst of the East – West Cold was in Europe, was not a possibility. The complex process of the putsch involved a gradual solidification of the CP in Parliament and the eventual dissolution of non-communist parties.

2.4 Women's Citizenship, Motherhood and Abortion Politics in Czechoslovakia

In Soviet Russia, abortion was legalized "first in 1920, amid some controversy, [and then] made illegal in 1936 and again legalized in 1955."[124] Buckley writes that, in contrast to 1936, the restoration of legal abortion access in 1955 was minimally publicized in Russia, and argues that it was because "Soviet leaders did not want large numbers of women to resort to abortion instead of childbirth. The promotion of motherhood became a priority."[125] Havelková writes that in socialist Czechoslovakia, it was also the case that "women *retained* their traditional child-reading and home-making duties" in the socialist period.[126] It follows then that "worker" and "mother" were the two main gender roles constructed and ascribed to women and that these roles were inherited, historically, from the pre-1948 period.

Policies on women in the interwar period reflected the tendency to view motherhood and family as that which is most "natural" to women.[127] I want to call to attention that the

[122] Ibid. 75, footnote 24. The four political parties were the Komunistická strana Československa, Česká strana národně sociální, Československá strana lidová and the Česká strana sociálně demokratická
[123]Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 205.
[124] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 156.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Havelková, "Gender," 40. Emphasis added by me.
[127] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 35-6.

protection of motherhood as closely connected to the history of the struggle for legal abortion and the left women's movement in Czechoslovakia in the inter war period. Feinberg contends that "politically active women outside the socialist camp tended to disagree" with the demands for reproductive health rights made by the left.[128]

As I will show, the politically active women's left believed that safe, legal access to abortion was a means for family planning and of protecting working-class women in Czechoslovakia from post-war economic and social hardships. Historian Květa Jechová argues that "throughout the existence of the first democratic Czechoslovak state, women in different political parties united only once in solidarity, and that was with regard to abortion legislation."[129] Unfortunately, she does not specify when this took place. However, because we do know that the Communist Party boasted the most women in its ranks, we can make the connection that the socialist women in Parliament were the prevailing fraction in the campaign. According to Feinberg, the first proposal for an abortion bill was made by National Socialist MP Luisa Landová-Štychová in October 1920.[130] The bill was designed to replace the existing legislative, §144-148, under which abortion was "a felony punishable by up to five years of hard labor."[131] Landová-Štychová argued that "the harsh realities of postwar inflation, unemployment and housing shortages" were what made women consider abortions. Betty Karpišová, the editor of the Social-Democratic weekly *Ženské noviny* (the Women's News) and supporter of the bill, contended that "abortion was something all women should have access to and an issue that had special relevance for the working class."[132] In an endnote, Feinberg writes that "Landová-Štychová left the socialist party in 1922" and lost her seat in the National Assembly in 1923. Here Feinberg does not specify whether Landová-Štychová's loss

[128] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 133.
[129] Jechová, *Emancipace shora*, 1-2.
[130] Disambiguation: the *Československá strana národnosocialistická* (Czechoslovak National Party) was a left wing party and had nothing to do with right wing National Socialism.
[131] Feinberg, *Elusive Equality*, 131.
[132] Ibid.133.

of seat in Parliament was connected to the abortion bill. We do know, however, that she "was reelected to the National Assembly a year later as an MP for the Communist Party."[133]

Czechoslovak women's inclusion in the system of production led to a drop in the birthrates in the 1950's. Buckley frames abortion bans and motherhood promotion in states as "responses to future manpower requirements."[134] In socialist Czechoslovakia, abortion was legalized in 1958 under the "Act on the Artificial Interruption of Pregnancy."[135] According to Barbara Havelková, the "Act stipulated abortions could be performed for health as well as other important reasons, [such as] the age of the woman, number of children, loss of husband or his invalidity" and other.[136] Jancar writes that "in 1960, fees for abortion were abolished as discriminatory, but in 1963 were required again, in an effort to discourage the numbers demanding abortion."[137] To get access to abortion, women had to consult "abortion committees," usually comprising of a handful of doctors, who would act as "social workers" and decide for individual women whether or not an abortion was "necessary." In 1973, the legislation became even more restrictive, and remained that way until 1986, when "abortion committees" were banned and abortion was made unequivocally assessable to all. The examples I have given above are in support of the argument that the political drive for sex equality in Czechoslovakia was closely related to the struggle for liberation of the working class.

2.5 Socialist Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989

After the Communist Party took power in 1948, Czechoslovakia became increasingly centralized and all private property was gradually transferred into the hands of the State. This meant that private owners and businessmen soon ceased to exist – this included private

[133] Ibid. 248, footnote 3.
[134] Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 177.
[135] Havelková, "Gender," 35.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Barbara W. Jancar, *Women and Communism* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 143.

lawyer's offices, doctors and any other enterprises not organized by the CP. Over a relatively short period of time, everybody became an employee of the state. In spite of the political and economic centralization of Czechoslovakia in the 1950's, it was a very important point in the history of women's emancipation in the Czech and Slovak lands. The successful integration of women into the labor force in the early years of socialist Czechoslovakia is evident from the number of women working in agriculture counted in 1957, when 54.2 percent of who were women. In 1957, " all men under 65 and women under 60, except sick persons and housewives with small children, had to work."[138] Because statistical data only counted "all wage and salary earners" as "working," however, women who were doing housework or earning extra money on the side to make ends meet were not included in the collected statistical data.

The early 1960's witnessed an emerging economic crisis. Josef Korbel has written that "In 1962, the third Five Year Plan was abandoned altogether [as a result of the economic crisis]."[139] He also adds that in 1963, "industrial growth was below one percent, "and attributes the collapse of the economy to the rigidity of centralized planning and its control mechanisms.[140] In a joint effort of the Government to resolve the economic and social crisis, it began to look for ways to "humanize" socialism. The years between 1962 and 1968 saw a marked political, economic and social liberalization and internalization in terms of both politics and culture.

There, I will briefly introduce the terms "Prague Spring" and "normalization." The first half of 1968 was the time that the policy known as "socialism with a human face" was implemented by President Alexander Dubček. It was an attempt at democratization of the existing one-party regime. Not unlike the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the period of eight months known as the "Prague Spring" was also an attempt of the generation of new communist

[138] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 16.
[139] Josef Korbel, *Twentieth-Century Czechoslovakia: The Meanings of Its History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 171.
[140] Ibid. 171- 176.

politicians to move away from one-party politics in Czechoslovakia. The reforms and increased liberalization even led to the emergence of "unofficial political clubs." [141] The attempt at a long-term liberalization was unsuccessful, and, on 21 August 1968, thousands of Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia. The years after 1968 are known in Czechoslovak socialist history as the "normalization period" and the 1970s were marked by a return to centralized and even repressive politics.[142] By the initiative of President Gustav Husák, Czechoslovakia was made into a federation of the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic on January 1st 1969.[143]

In 1977, a group of dissident artists signed the Charta 77, a document that protested the breaching of human rights (as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights) in Czechoslovakia by the Communist Party. "Charta 77" became a dissident movement that lasted until 1989. A number of women were also persecuted because of their sympathies with the Charta. For example, Slovak writer Hana Ponická was ousted from the Slovak Writers Union for signing. In spite of the dominance of the CP in all spheres of life in the 1970's, or because of it, Czechoslovakia witnessed a great increase of women in politics.

As I have mentioned above, the 1970s and 1980s form a separate chapter of Czechoslovak history. Particularly the seventies and were characterized by the persecution of regime opponents in all spheres of social and political life. In the 1980s, Czechoslovakia underwent a process of democratization. The "liberalization process" was closely linked to the increasingly liberal politics of USSR after General Secretary of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985.[144] The end of the Cold War was heralded with the definitive separation of Czechoslovakia into two separate states – The Czech Republic and The Slovak Republic in 1993.

[141] Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska,* 296.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid. 301.
[144] Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska,* 308.

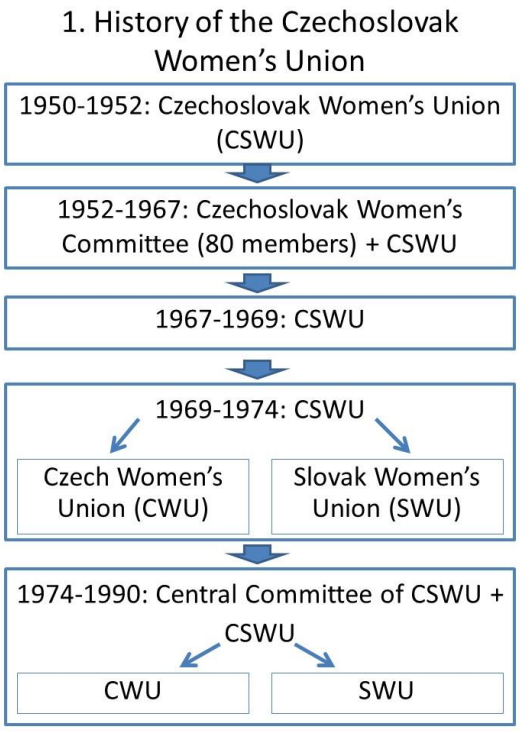
In this chapter, I have discussed the connections between left women's activism and the Czechoslovak Communist Party. I argue that the struggle for women's legal equality was striven for, in most cases, by leftist and socialist-oriented political parties and women who were members of socialist parties. The interwar period saw a contestation of the "woman question" on a political level that was defined mainly be the conflict of the communists and leftists with fascism.

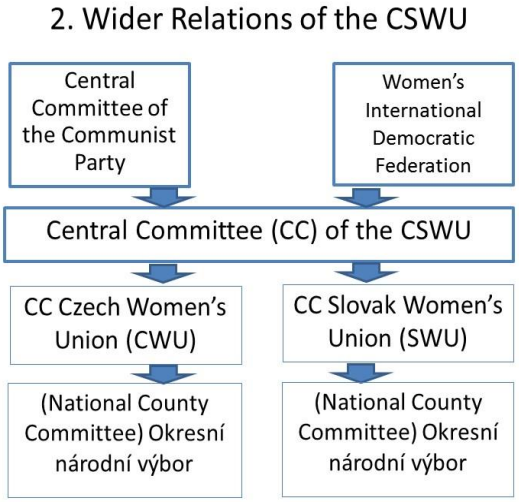
CHAPTER 3 – HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE CSWU

This chapter will discuss the historiography of the CSWU, with a focus on the recent work by historian Denisa Nečasová. A number of other historians have written more generally on women's position in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. In *Women and State Socialism* (1979), Historian Alena Heitlinger, for example, has dedicated a chapter to the position of women in Czechoslovakia in the period between 1950 and 1970 in but did not elaborate on women's organizations in the socialist period.[145] In *Women Under Communism* (1978), Barbara W. Jancar discusses the position of women in a variety of socialist states, such as the demographics of employment and education or the impact of social and economic developments in different adaptations of socialism on women. Jancar dedicated one paragraph to the Czechoslovak Women's Union. Jancar discussed a four-point program proposed by the CSWU in the 1970's (she does not give the date of issue of this supposed "program") to "solve the woman's question without taking women out of productive work and returning them to the home," though she does not specify what these "four points" were.[146] Historian Denisa Nečasová has written the most thorough, if brief account of the CSWU in her study "Women's organizations in the Czech lands, 1948-89" in 2014 and, in this chapter, I will mostly be discussing her understanding of the CSWU's structure and how she has understood the Union's relationship to the Communist Party. I will follow Nečasová's chronological structure and discuss how she interpreted her sources. Table 1. and table 2. contain a chronological history of the CSWU as understood by Denisa Nečasová and as understood my me.

[145] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 69-75.
[146] Jancar, *Women under Communism*, 174.

Table 1. The History of the Czechoslovak Women's Union, 1950 – 1990
Table 2. The Wider Relations of the Czechoslovak Women's Union





3.1 Analysis

Nečasová argues that 1950 presented a break with "the 100-year old tradition of informal associations, clubs and large women's organizations [of the Czech and Slovak Lands]."[147] As I have shown in Chapter Two, the left-women's movement represented the strongest tradition of large women's organizations in the Czech and Slovak more than thirty years before the women's movement was centralized into one organization in 1950. According to Nečasová, the decision to transform the character of the CSWU was "based on a decision by the Central Committee of the CP."[148] She also gives the following reasons for restructuring. Firstly, the "fusion" with the Slovak women's movement meant that there would be a united, centrally administrated women's organization in all of Czechoslovakia. Secondly, Nečasová

[147] Nečasová, "Women's Organizations," 56.
[148] Ibid. 62.

writes that there were "new organizational rules, containing many more practical and ideological needs of communist policy." Thirdly, the CP used the union as a means to mobilize women "for voluntary work." [149] What Nečasová argues is in line with what I have been able to find in the archives, although there is very little material on the early years of the CSWU in the National Archive Prague.

According to Nečasová, the second restructuring (1950-52) phase of the women's movement was executed "in secrecy" – though she does not make it clear why. Nečasová argues that "the Party was dissatisfied with the size of the membership base" and with the "level of engagement on the part of women who were not Party members." [150] Further, Nečasová argues that the CP wanted to dissolve the organization and regarded it as a "bourgeois relic" and, seeing as the CP already had a "women's department," Czechoslovakia did not need another women's organization. One of the main arguments of the CP was that, at the time, the Soviet Union also did not have a separate women's organization. Nečasová writes that the CSWU was "dissolved" and replaced by a "small central organization," the Czechoslovak Women's Committee with "small women's committees attached to the local national committees."[151] Nečasová argues that "there was no stable mass women's organization active for the entire 1948-90 period"[152] In her assessment, the four main organizations that were active in the period were the Council of Women (1948-1950), the Czechoslovak Women's Union (1950-1952), The Czechoslovak Women's Committee (1952-1967) and the "revived Czechoslovak Women's Union" (1967-1990)[153]

However, I have found that CSWU archival material shows that the principle female chairpersons of the organizations remained the same throughout the whole entire period

[149] Ibid.63.
[150] Nečasová, "Women's organizations," 63.
[151] Ibid. 64.
[152] Ibid. 63.
[153] Ibid. 61 – 6.

between what Nečasová has called the "Czechoslovak Women's Union (1950-1952)" until the "'revived' Czechoslovak Women's Union (1967-1990)."[154] In this thesis, I argue that what Nečasová refers to as the Czechoslovak Women's Committee (1952-1967) is a partial misinterpretation of the organization's structure and its relationship with the State and to the women's movement. In her analysis, Nečasová entirely omits the years between 1952 and 1967 from her account. "The period between 1952 and 1967 represents an absolutely unique era: except for the 80-member Czechoslovak Women's Committee, there existed no large women's organization in Czechoslovakia," she argues. Further, Nečasová writes that local women's committees cannot be understood as "local divisions of a greater whole."[155]

Archival material of the CSWU suggests that, in the period between 1952 and 1967, when "no large women's organization" existed but for the 80-member Czechoslovak Women's Committee, three conferences of the women's movement were held in Prague. The three *Celostátní konference československých žen* (National women's conferences) took place – in 1956, 1959 and 1963.[156] Among six leading women organizers were also Anežka Hodinová-Spurná and Gusta Fučiková. The resolution of the 1956 Conference included a report on the composition of the conference delegation –with an overall participation of 1,600 delegates from across the Czechoslovakia. What is interesting about this report is that the directory of participants lists 6% of the candidates as "entrepreneurs." Also, the report recommends that 40% of all Conference members be non-Party members and 50% women from factories and agriculture. Denisa Nečasová does not mention these organizational activities and conferences. I suggest that because Nečasová only draws on CP archival material and on directives given by the CP to mass organizations in the National Front and to the women's movement, she has made the assumption that there were no activities outside of what the CP was directly involved

[154] Ibid. 61.
[155] Ibid. 66.
[156] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 9.

in. I have found scant evidence of the CSWU's local activities during the Prague Spring and the first years of the "normalization." What that could mean then, is that there was a national women's movement that organized outside of the National Front state structure between 1956 and 1963. Further, the collection of archival material in Prague containing documents on the women's movement between 1950 and 1990 is titled *Fond Československého svazu žen* and also contain, for example, the documents of the Czechoslovak Women's Committee and all activities of the left-women's movement between 1950 and 1990.

According to Nečasová, all leadership of organizations and unions was staffed by the CP, which, at a glance, rendered any "bottom-up" autonomy useless. Nečasová does not specify how "self-governance" on a local level was carried out, and how local CSWU representatives were chosen, though she does acknowledge "the study of women's organizations [in Czechoslovakia] has not looked into the question of their [the Union's] activities on the local level."[157]

In Nečasová's understanding, the Czechoslovak Women's Union was reinstated in 1967, and "returned to the organizational form of 1950-2."[158] She argues that there were several reasons for the return to the original structure and name. Firstly, she argues that the Party was accused of "overlooking the growing disproportion between women's increased engagement in the workplace and their increased skills on the one hand, and their limited opportunities in life on the other."[159] In other words, the Women's Committee argued for a greater inclusion and mobilization of women into the workforce. Philosopher Nanette Funk quotes Heitlinger to make a point about 1967 Czechoslovakia, and how the Central Committee of the CSWU "argued for a separate women's organization, set up in 1967, but that it was closed after the

[157] Nečasová, "Women's Organizations," 73.
[158] Ibid. 66.
[159] Ibid. 66.

crushing of the Prague Spring."[160] Heitlinger does indeed write that the CSWU was "under the full control of the party." But she does not say that it was "closed."[161] I would like to suggest that claims as made by Funk and to a lesser extent by Heitlinger ignore the fact it would have been impossible to have a socialist mass organization that was organized outside of the state, and that the interests of women would have received even fewer attention were they dislocated as without political ties to the state.

A report from the 1967 CSWU Rally suggests that one of the intentions of the Union was to include more working women into the *volební komise* (Election committee - EC), members of which were nominated by Rally on the occasion. The newly mobilized women were people who "have organizational experience with the Party and in the Czechoslovak Union of Youths or in other Unions part of the National Front."[162] Out of 111 members of the EC, forty-five of them were "comrades from manual industrial, technical or agricultural production." The report adds that the inclusion of working women into the EC reflected the "growing overall professional qualification of our women."[163] This suggests that the CSWU was involved in making their own choices of who it includes in its ranks. The document did not say that it was subject to signature or approval of a CP member comrade. These examples, as well as the activities at the conferences between 1956 and 1963 also go against Funk's idea that official state women's organizations do not fit the model of "social movements as those without official power."[164] The example of the EC also puts into question the view held by Nečasová that "the CP determined the organization's basic objectives and decided who could hold leading positions."[165] Is the "bottom-up" inclusion of women into the CSWU without the

[160]Funk "A very tangled knot: Official state socialist women's organizations, women's agency and feminism in Eastern European state socialism" retrieved from http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/06/27/1350506814539929 351, [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[161] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 202.
[162] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Funk "A very tangled knot." 347.
[165] Ibid. 346.

desired approval of the CP not a sign of the Unions "agency" and partial autonomy? I suggest that historians have simplified accounts of the CSWU by focusing, somewhat narrowly, on CP directives, rather than what the Union did and organized for women outside of the National Front. By focusing on Party directives, they have not drawn a line between what the CP prescribed and what was lived and organized by the women's movement. I argue that another reason that activities of the women's movement in the socialist period have been ignored is that there are no comprehensive biographical accounts of the leading women of the CSWU and the women's movement after Milada Horáková in 1950. Nečasová, Feinberg and Jechová have all presented the execution of Horáková as the "end of the free association of women."[166] Nečasová has argued along similar lines that with the founding of the CSWU, women as a social group were given a more symbolic position within state institutions, "although their real influence was still limited."[167] Nečasová does not specify how women's influence was "limited," and she does also not say what they were able to influence. She also adds that the changes in structure and attitudes were only made possible by the "liberalized official discourse of the late 1960s."[168]

In 1969, as a result of the efforts of the CP chairman Gustav Husák and his cabinet, Czechoslovakia became a federation of the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic. This meant that the CSWU was also federalized into Czech and Slovak counterparts – *Slovenský zväz žien* (The Slovak Women's Union) and the *Český svaz žen* (Czech Women's Union). Both fell under the CC CSWU, its seat in Prague. Nečasová makes no mention of this in her study of the CSWU, merely stating that the Union was active "throughout the whole country, including Slovakia."[169]

[166] Ibid. 345.
[167] Ibid. 346.
[168] Ibid. 347.
[169] Ibid.

As the "normalization" period commenced after 1968, a "consolidation of the women's movement" took place, at least according to the pamphlet titled "The Progressive Women's Movement in Slovakia" published in 1984 by the CC SWU.[170] This is, however, at odds with my own findings. The political centralization of the 1970's normalization "politics" came across in the speeches of the 1974 Rally of the CSWU in Prague, when the CSWU was "restored" as a women's organization; according to the broadcast in the TV station *Česká televize,* Marie Kabrhelová was elected CC CSWU chairperson on this occasion, with Gusta Fučíková retaining the function of "honorary chairperson."[171] What this "restoration" meant was that the CSWU's position in the State was strengthened and that the CSWU would be involved in all activities of the women's movement in Czechoslovakia. In her speech, Fučíková stresses "the importance of a unitary women's organization." The TV station *Česká televize* (Czech television) broadcasted the main goal of the CSWU as "to actively participate in the political realization of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and to win all women over for this cause," and added that "socialism enables the woman to become a qualified worker, happy mother and active citizen."[172] Denisa Nečasová does not account for this rally and for the "reinstatement" of the CSWU in 1974. It is likely that the activities of the CSWU were halted or challenged by the "normalization" politics of the 1970s, when the government conducted *previerky* (check-ups) in an effort to assess the "ideological" conformity of individuals.[173] A 1974 broadcast by *Česká televize* states that "the aim of socialism is to liberate the women from enslaving housework, from the demeaning domination of men and from social and legal inequality with men in society."[174]

[170] Ženské hnutie na Slovensku 1918-1980, ÚV SZŽ, 1984. (The progressive women's movement in Slovakia, 1918 - 1980).
[171] http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10195164142-vypravej/bonus/7958-byl-ustaven-ceskoslovensky-svaz-zen-v-cele-s-marii-kabrhelovou [Accessed 14/5/2015].
[172] Ibid.
[173] Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska*, 172.
[174] http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10195164142-vypravej/bonus/7958-byl-ustaven-ceskoslovensky-svaz-zen-v-cele-s-marii-kabrhelovou "cílem socializmu je osvobodit zenu od zotrocujici domaci prace, od ponizujici

3.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, a discussion of Nečasová's historiography shows that there are is a number of unaddressed issues. Firstly, Nečasová has drawn on the archival material of the CP rather than on the archive of the Czechoslovak Women's Union. This means that she has only viewed the Union through the lens of the CP. One of the consequences of her use of CP archival material is that she has not taken into account the activities of the Union between 1953 and 1967. Although this is not a major part of my research, I have shown both in the Introduction and in this Chapter that the CSWU not only existed in this period, but also worked for women. Further, the CSWU as a left feminist organization did not just suddenly appear in 1950 without connections to the longer history of the left women's movement in Czechoslovakia. On the contrary, the Union's existence is connected to the longer history of the women's movement in Czechoslovakia (as discussed in Chapter Two).

Secondly, Nečasová does not mention the leading women of the CSWU in her account, and I will provide biographies of the five chairpersons of Union in Chapter Four, where I will also explain the reasons why their biographies matter.

Thirdly, Nečasová's account does not mention the international connections and activities of the CSWU, although the Union was in fact involved in the international women's movement. Their membership in the WIDF constituted an important part of their identity as a women's organization, and shaped their activities, including those in the UN. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Five.

Lastly, Nečasová's top-down approach has prevented her from noticing what the CSWU did for women and how it related to its member base. Using a sample of correspondence of ordinary women with the Union, in Chapter Six, I will show that many women approached

zavislosti na musi a od neplnopravneho postaveni v spolocnosti. Socialismzu zene umoznuje state za kvalifikovanou pracovnici, stastbou matkou a kvalitni obcankou." [Accessed 14/5/2015].

the CSWU for help and that, in turn, the CSWU office was engaged in trying to resolve the issues that mattered to women. In sum, my research will show that the identity and activities of the CSWU had many layers, both on a national and on an international level.

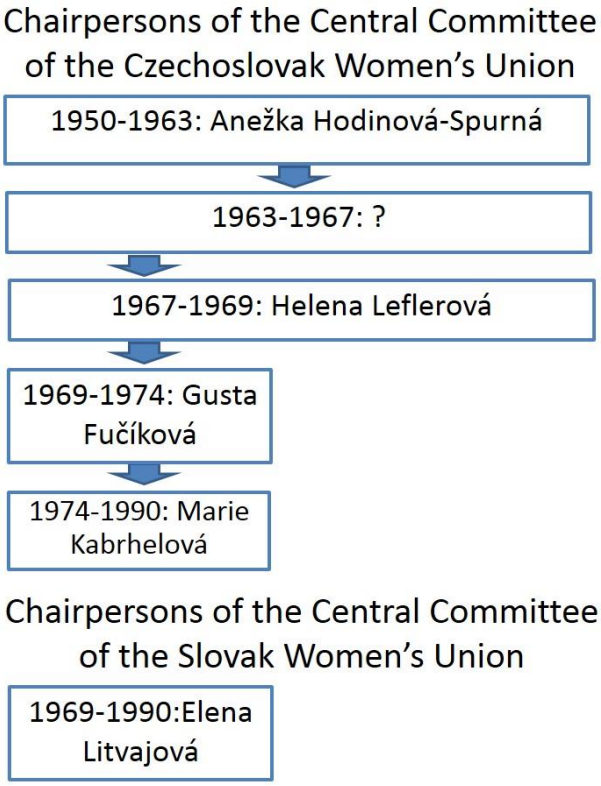
The activities of the Czechoslovak Women's Union outside of the "control" of the Communist Party are evidenced by the archival material of the Czechoslovak Women's Union, which Nečasová did not consult for her study. Nečasová does not discuss the regional and local activities of the CSWU, which renders her account narrowly focused on the Union's relationship to the Communist Party. Also, Nečasová makes no mention of the international activities and connections of the CSWU and its leading women in her account – and yet, 27 out of 113 boxes of the holdings of the CSWU in the National Archive Prague contain documentation of their international activities.

CHAPTER 4 - LEADING CSWU WOMEN

In this chapter, I will present biographical accounts of the leading CSWU chairpersons. Biographical information about them is not readily available and is often given without context. I have mentioned some of the events that the CSWU's first president, Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, was involved in in Chapter Two. In her account of the Czech women's movement, Feinberg mentions Hodinová-Spurná only in relation to the trial of Milada Horáková and the antagonism between the bourgeois and left women's movement in the 1940s. Unfortunately, Feinberg does not go further into other activities and dimensions of the Czechoslovak feminist left – she does not discuss who the women who remained in the women's movement after 1950 were. Historian Alena Heitlinger also vaguely claims that [as of February 1948, when the CP overtook Government], "the history of the socialist women's movement as defined by its relationship to the proletarian struggle for socialism, ended."[175] In the spirit of historian Chiara Bonfiglioli, who has written that "the experiences of women within communist parties and mass organizations remain unexplored," this chapter is going to present the biographies CSWU leading women.[176] This chapter aims to introduce five women who held high office in the CSWU – who they were, and what their place is in the history of the Czechoslovak leftist women's movement is.

[175] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 54.
[176] Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia." *Aspasia*, Volume 8 (2014) 2.

Table 3. Chairpersons of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union between 1950 and 1990



Sources: I have found information on the chairpersons of the CSWU across boxes in the National Archive Prague, mainly in boxes 71 and 72. I have also used newspaper articles from the Communist Party daily *Rudé právo* (see links in biographies to follow), as well as the open archive of the Česká televize (Czech television) at http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10195164142-vypravej/bonus/7958-byl-ustaven-ceskoslovensky-svaz-zen-v-cele-s-marii-kabrhelovou [Accessed 25/5/2015].

4.1 Anežka Hodinová-Spurná (12.2. 1895 – 1.4.1963)

Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, neé Zavadilová, was born on 12 January 1895 in Doubravice u Litovle, Czech Republic. She was born into a poor family and her father was a carpenter. In 1918, she joined the Czech Social Democratic Party, who split in 1921 over whether or not to join the Comintern, which resulted in the creation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In 1921, Hodinová-Spurná became a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.[177]

[177] Churaň, M.a kol. *Kdo Byl Kdo v našich dějinách ve 20. Století*, (Praha: Nakladatelství Libri, 1994) 174. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was established 14.-16.5.1921 in Prague, and joined the Comintern in the same year. See http://www.totalita.cz/vysvetlivky/s_ksc.php [Accessed: 12/4/2015].

In 1922, Anežka Zavadilová married Jozef Hodina and changed her name to Anežka Hodinová. She and her husband subsequently moved to Prague, where Hodinová worked briefly as a factory worker and became a member of the Communist Party.[178] During the fifth CP Rally in Prague in 1929, she belonged to the more radical fraction of the communists, along with Klement Gottwald and Jaromír Dolanský.[179] In 1932, she divorced Hodina and married the communist journalist Jindřich Spurný shortly thereafter. She changed her name to Anežka Hodinová-Spurná. An eccentric woman, Hodinová-Spurná became an outspoken Member of Parliament. On a number of occasions in Parliament, Hodinová-Spurná defended the right to housing and sustenance of the working class and women.[180] She was particularly active in parliament in the 1930's, and brought forth the following suggestions for legal amendments. Hodinová-Spurná proposed a law for the increased protection of tenants (14.12.1931), a law for the greater care and protection of pregnant women and newborns (21.2.1933) and a law on the maximum prices of bread, dough, sugar, fat, coal, and free heating gas and sugar for the unemployed (21.3.1935).[181] None of her propositions were passed. Hodinová-Spurná also became known in Prague for provoking incidents with the local police.[182] She could rely on her legislative immunity as an MP and would get the police to arrest her, using it as a way to check and publicize their often brutal behavior. [183]

I suggest that Hodinová-Spurná was deeply concerned with social inequality throughout her career in the women's movement and in the Communist Party. To give an example of her "activism" in the interwar period, Hodinová-Spurná publicly spoke at a worker strike organized by local representatives of the CP in the Czech city of Beroun in 1930. Upon

[178] I was unable to find any biographical information about Jozef Hodina.
[179] http://www.totalita.cz/vysvetlivky/s_ksc_org_01.php [Accessed 12/4/2015].
[180] http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/209schuz/s209005.htm Parliament session held on 24th October 1932 in Prague. [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[181] http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/rejstrik/jmenny/hd.htm [Accessed 12/4/2015].
[182] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 16, unspecified newspaper fragment,
[183] Michal Švec, *Komunální politika ve Velké Praze.Obecni Volby, Politicke Strany a Zvolené Orgány v Letech 1923-1938*, (Praha: Karolinum, 2012) 52.

its organization, however, the municipal council in Hořovice banned the strike so that it would not "disturb public peace and order."[184] The strike took place during a court meeting between fired workers of the *Pražsko-železářská společnost* (the Prague railway company) in Králový Dvoř and its owner. Anežka Hodinová-Spurná was arrested for speaking to the masses of workers on the main square of Beroun, despite repeatedly being asked by the police to stop speaking.[185] A year later, the *Imunitní výbor* (Immunity Committee) of the Parliament in Prague proposed (for the second time) that she be arrested for disobedience in Beroun. MP Dr. Oldřich Suchý, who was part of the team investigating the incident, testified that that upon being arrested, Hodinová-Spurná was rude to the police, calling them names such as "hlupák" (dummy) or "blbec" (moron).[186] In response to the accusation, Hodinová-Spurná retorted: "we, communist members of Parliament, will never ask you or any other authorities if they will allow us to speak to the workers, not if it is in their interest and in the interest of the fight against the *kapitál* (applause of the communist MPs)."[187] This incident is an example of Hodinová-Spurná's outspoken defense of the workers. Hodinová-Spurná's position on women's position in society was deeply connected with the rights and well-being of the working class and also with her stance on fascism. The following excerpt is an example of her speech in a session in Parliament on 19 May 1931. It also illustrates the contention between the CP and the CSSP.

> The rally of working women on May 10 (1931) showed whether the working women have faith in their *sociálfašist* leaders or their revolutionary leaders. The rally showed clearly that the hungry masses of working women, should they unite in their struggle,

[184] Translated by Kristína Kállay from "Pořádání táboru bylo však okresním úřadem v Hořovicích zakázáno, ježto byla důvodná obava, že by jeho konání mohlo ohroziti veřejný klid a pořádek, jakož i klidné rozhodování rozhodčí komise." http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/120schuz/s120004.htm [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[185] http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/120schuz/s120004.htm [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[186] http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/120schuz/s120004.htm[Accessed: 12/4/2015]. Oldřich Suchý was MP for the *Republikánská strana zemědělského a malorolnického lidu* (the Republican Party for Farmers and Peasants – later known as the Agrarian Party), see http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/rejstrik/jmenny/sg.htm [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[187] "*Nikdy nebudeme se my, komunističtí poslanci, ptáti vás anebo některých úřadů, jestli dovolí, abychom mluvili k dělníkům, když je to v zájmu jejich a v zájmu boje proti kapitálu. (Potlesk komunistických poslanců.)"* Located at http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/120schuz/s120005.htm [Accessed: 12/4/2015].

> can and will do away not only with its poverty, but also with your nonsense. (Applause of communist MP's)[188]

The above quote is exemplary of how Hodinová-Spurná connected the condescending treatment of women in the Czechoslovak Governmental administration to Hitler and fascism. On one occasion, Hodinová-Spurná criticized the alleged behavior of an unnamed judge in a court case her comrade Macháčková was involved in. Apparently, the judge said to Macháčková that she "would do better to mind her apron and her children, would be better off making lunch in her home, instead of mingling with politics."[189] Inferring this incident, Hodinová-Spurná concluded her point by stating that the judge's rhetoric towards Macháčková in the particular court case "documents the fascist world-view of the judge, which is no different from Hitler's position on women."[190]

Opposition to fascism was a strong thread in left-feminist activism. Historian Francisca de Haan has written that "a number of liberal, socialist and left-feminist women became involved in anti-fascist activism and organizing, aware of fascism's and Nazism's deeply racist and sexist ideology, hatred of the left, and generally violent nature."[191] In contrast, Alena Heitlinger writes that "the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the creation of a separate Slovak state in 1939 drastically interrupted all forms of political activity, including

[188] Brackets contained in source. Translated from "Vy nás sice můžete zavříti do kriminálu, můžete se ironicky usmívati, ale dělníci venku chápou velmi správně, kdo v zájmu jejich bojuje. 10. května sjezd pracujících žen ukázal, mají-li dělnické ženy důvěru v *sociálfašistické* vůdce nebo ve své revoluční vůdce. Sjezd pracujících žen ukázal velmi správně, že hladové massy dělnických žen pochopily, že jedině revoluční proletariát, jestliže se semkne v boj, může a také zažene nejen svoji bídu, nýbrž také vás se všemi vašimi pochopy. *(Potlesk komunistických poslanců.)*." Úterý 19. května 1931/Tuesday, 19· May 1931, 120. Schůze, located at http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/120schuz/s120005.htm
[Accessed: 12/4/2015].

[189] Translated from "kdybyste se raději starala o vařečku, o své děti, kdybyste si raději vařila doma oběd, než míchala se do politiky." and "… která dokumentují úplný náhled fašistického soudce, který se v ničem neliší od programu Hitlerova v náhledu na ženy" Středa 28. listopadu 1934/Wednesday 28th November 1934, both can be found at http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1929ns/ps/stenprot/349schuz/s349014.htm [Accessed: 12/4/2015].

[190] Ibid.

[191] Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda and Contributions, 1945–1991," in Women and Social Movements International—1840 to Present (WASI) online archive, Thomas Dublin, Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds.), accessed through CEU Library at http://www.library.ceu.huAccessed 15/5/2015] It would be interesting to find out if other women were also members of the exile government.

that among women. These were resumed only after the war."[192] What Heitlinger does not say is that shortly after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, when the CP was dissolved, Hodinová-Spurná left Prague to take exile in London.[193] As of 1941, she was a member of the *Státní Rada Československá* (Czechoslovak National Council), the first Czechoslovak exile government led by Eduard Beneš and Jan Masaryk in London.[194] While it was the case that official domestic political activity in the former Czechoslovakia was interrupted, Heitlinger's statement implies that after 1938, women active in the left-women's movement in Czechoslovakia ceased in their efforts. Hodinová-Spurná's activities in the exile Government, and whether or not she was in touch with the leftist women's movement in the United Kingdom during her stay, is a separate field of inquiry and is out of the scope of this thesis. Hodinová-Spurná returned to Prague in 1945 and continued to be involved in promoting communism and women's liberation. In February 1948, she was made head of the *Akční výbor Národní fronty* (the "Action Committee" of the National Front). Hodinová-Spurná was an MP of the Czechoslovak National Assembly from 30. 5. 1948 to 27. 11. 1954, and elected vice-chairperson of the Czechoslovak National Assembly on 10 June 1948.[195] In 1950, Hodinová-Spurná published a book called *Setkání s osvobozenou Čínou* (A Meeting with Liberated China), and it is her only known publication.[196] Unfortunately, the sources I was able to consult did not specify why and when Hodinová-Spurná travelled to China. In 1952 Hodinová-Spurná became the first chairperson of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union.

[192] Heitlinger, *Women and State Socialism*, 45.
[193] http://www2.holocaust.cz/cz/resources/recollections/zm16 [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[194] The exile government came into existence on the 21st of July 1940, and its political make-up was of non-communist politicians and party leaders in exile. Following negotiations with the USSR in 1941, representatives of the CSCS were also invited to join the Council. See, for example, J. Crane and S. Crane, *Czechoslovakia; Anvil of the Cold War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991) Chapters 9. – 12.
[195] See http://www.psp.cz/sqw/detail.sqw?id=1538&org=285, and http://archiv.ucl.cas.cz/index.php?path=RudePravo/1954/11/11/2.png [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[196] Hodinová-Spurná A., (1950) *Setkáni s osvobozenou Čínou*, Praha; Rada žen, Ministerstvo informaci a osvěty. The book has 70 pages and is currently unavailable in either the National Library of the Czech Republic (http://www.nkp.cz/) or the Academy of Sciences CR Library (http://www.lib.cas.cz/) As far as I am aware, it was her only published book. [Accessed: 12/4/2015].

In 1960, she was reelected as MP of the National Assembly of the CSSR, a post she held until her death in April 1963 in Prague at 67 years of age.[197]

4.2 Gusta Fučíková (28. 4. 1903 – 25. 3. 1987)

Gusta Fučíková, neé Gusta Kodeřičová, was a Czech and Czechoslovak leftist politician and women's rights activist. She was also a writer and publishing editor. Fučíková was born into a peasant family and her mother died when she was a child. In the interwar period, she was a student of the *Obchodní akademie* (Business Academy) in Prague, which she finished in 1921. Until 1938, she worked at the *Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty* (Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment) and in the *Mezinárodní odborový svaz* (International Trade Union). In 1938, she married Július Fučík, a Czech communist journalist and literary critic. Július Fučík wrote *Reportáži psané na oprátce* (Notes from the Gallows, literally translates into "notes written under the noose") during his imprisonment. In 1941, Fučík joined the Second illegal CC CP and joined the anti-fascist resistance movement. He was arrested on April 24 1942 by the gestapo, and sentenced to death in Berlin on 25th August 1943. Fučíková was arrested in 1942 and temporarily held prisoner at Petschek Palace in Prague before being transferred to the concentration camps Terezín and later Ravensbrück. During the German occupation, she became involved in Nazi resistance activity. Having survived the Second World War, Fučíková became a member of the Czech Communist Party and worked as a translator for the communist daily newspaper *Rudé právo*. She was politically deeply conscious and active, and spent more than twenty years working as an editor for the *Státní nakladatelství politické literatury* (State publishing house of political literature). She was a member of the Czechoslovak delegation for women between 1955 and 1967 and chairperson of the

[197] http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1945pns/rejstrik/jmenny/h.htm [Accessed: 12/4/2015]

Czechoslovak Council of Women from 1969 until her death. Fučíková was vice-chairperson of the Women's International Democratic Federation. From 1971 onwards, she was a registered party member of the CP, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In the same year, she began to list her CSWU chairmanship as her occupation. She received a number of significant orders for her outstanding work in developing Czechoslovak socialism, including *Řád práce* (Order of work) in 1963, *Řád republiky* (Order of the Republic) in 1970 and 1973 and the *Řád Klementa Gottwalda* (Order of Klement Gottwald) in 1983. Fučíková died on the 23 March 1987 in Prague.

4.3 Helena Leflerová (12.10.1921 – 26.2.1979)

Helena Leflérová, neé Puchmeltrová, was born on October 12th in 1921 in the town of Lidice, whose inhabitants were massacred in June 1942 by the Nazis as a reprisal for the assassination of Reinhardt Heydrich, Reich Protector of Bohemia-Moravia. [198] Helena was twenty years old then. She managed to escape the massacre, but was arrested and spent the rest of the war in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. After the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Third Czechoslovak Republic came into being in April 1945 and Helena returned to Lidice and married Franta Krejčír in the same year.[199] The Niagara Falls Gazette wrote of Leflérová as a "widow" in the May 28th 1948 issue.[200] She started to participate actively in political life. [201] She became chairperson of the *Místní národní výbor* (Local Municipal Office) in Nové Lidice and a member of the 'Commission for the reconstruction of Lidice,' which was rebuilt next to the former town after the war. Between 1948 and 1956, Helena worked for the Municipal Council of the CP, and also commenced her work as editor in the communist daily *Rudé Právo*.

[198] http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/lidice.html [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[199] http://www.lidice.cz/obec/historie/klikmap/049.html [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[200] http://fultonhistory.com/newspaper%208/Niagara%20Falls%20NY%20Gazette/Niagara%20Falls%20NY%20Gazette%201948%20may-Jun%20Grayscale/Niagara%20Falls%20NY%20Gazette%201948%20may-Jun%20Grayscale%20-%200154.pdf [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[201] http://archiv.ucl.cas.cz/index.php?path=RudePravo/1979/3/1/1.png [Accessed: 12/4/2015].

She was elected a member of the CC CPC at the eleventh (1958), twelfth (1962) and thirteenth (1966) CPC Rallies three times consecutively.[202] Leflérová is listed as one of the ten WIDF vice-presidents in 1961.[203] In 1967, she was elected chairperson of the CSWU and retained her position even after the federalization of Czechoslovakia in on January 1st 1969. In the same year, she was also awarded with the *Řád Republiky* (Czechoslovak Badge of Honor), one of the most esteemed political distinctions in her time.[204] Helena died of an unspecified illness in February 1979 at 58 years of age.

4.4 Elena Litvajová (8.6.1924 – 17.2.1999)

Elena Litvajová was born in June 1924 in Uhrovec, the birthplace of a number of politically significant Slovak nationals.[205] She was a Slovak communist and politician, a member of the National Assembly of the CSSR. Between 1942 and 1944, she was a worker in a factory in Uhrovec. Overall, she spent six years studying at the Political Academy of the CP in Prague. [206] In 1954, Litvajová became a member of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and a member of the council of the Women's International Democratic Federation.[207] From 1967 onwards, she was head secretary of the Slovak Committee of the CSWU and vice-president of the CSWU from 1979.

Litvajová retained her position as a prominent communist functionary until 1989. On October 16th 1989, she took part in the plenary session of the Central Committee of the

[202] http://www.upn.gov.sk/funkcionari-ksc-kss/zoznam-zjazdov.php [Accessed: 12/4/2015].
[203] http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/view/1664817 [Accessed: 3/3/2015].
[204] See number 204 at http://www.prazskyhradarchiv.cz/archivKPR/upload/rr.pdf [Accessed: 3/3/2015].
[205] for example Ľudovít Štúr, author of the Slovak language standard, and also Alexander Dubček, one of the group of political leaders who tried to reform the regime in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Following the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 and after a series of negotiations, he was forced to resign. See http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/uhrovec-tvorca-i-odporca-slovenciny-boli-z-uhrovca-[Accessed: 3/3/2015].
[205] archive stretli-sa-v-uhorskom-sneme/2483/feed/ or http://www.uhrovec.sk/historia.phtml?id3=46049 , [Accessed: 3/3/2015].
[206] (1950-1953 and 1963-1965) in L. Ďuranová., A. Šourková, A Táborecká., *Lexikón Slovenských Žien, (*Martin: Slovenská Národná Knižnica, Národný Biografický Ústav, 2003) 149.
[207] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75.

Communist Party, whose primary concern at the time was to intervene with the Velvet Revolution and how to deal with the increasingly liberalization of Czechoslovak politics. Slovak national poet and playwright Ľubomír Feldek told me in an interview that he remembers comrade Červen throwing an egg at Litvajová on May Day celebrations in Bratislava on SNP Square in 1989. "Her body-guards didn't do anything.[208] On October 16 1989, she still took part in the final plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.[209] In November 1989, Czechoslovakia saw the definite downfall of the communist regime. She left the CP in the same year. Elena Litvajová died in Bratislava on February 17 1999. Because Elena Litvajová was the only chairperson of the Slovak Women's Union and because of her many political activities, she is strongly associated with the CP and with the "normalization" period.

4.5 Marie Kabrhelová (4.5.1925 -)

Marie Kabrhelová, neé Marie Karásková, was a Czech and Czechoslovak communist politician. She was born in Opatov u Jihlavy, and was one of the five children of a local tailor. In her adult life, she became widely known for her membership in the CP and chairmanship of the Czechoslovak Women's Union. After the Second World War, she began to work for the CP in the city of Jihlava. She was transferred to Prague two years later and, at the age of 41, graduated from the Political Academy of the Communist Party in Prague. Marie was one of the central and most radically leftist functionaries of the CP in the normalization period. She was chairperson of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union from 1974 to 1990 and was also a member of the Czechoslovak Women's Committee between 1969 and 1974.

[208] http://www.upn.gov.sk/funkcionari-ksc-kss/zobraz-obrazok.php?plenarne_zasadnutie=180&osoba=850 , see also http://www.sme.sk/c/5097823/ako-nasi-komunisti-naposledy-oficialne-oslavovali-smena-7-november-1989.html [Accessed: 3/3/2015].

[209] Funkcionári KSČ a KSS, Plenárne zasadnutie ÚV KSS (16.10.1989) Elena Litvajová, available at http://www.upn.gov.sk/funkcionari-ksc-kss/zobraz-obrazok.php?plenarne_zasadnutie=180&osoba=850 [Accessed: 3/3/2015].

Kabrhelová was also a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions and the World Peace Council. During the Prague Spring, she belonged to the most conservative functionaries of the CP, which then led to a solid career in politics in the 1970s. In 1971, she became the secretary of the CSWU. Kabrhelová was ousted from the party in 1990 after the dismemberment of the CSWU.[210]

4.6 Conclusion

The lives of Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, Elena Litvajová, Gusta Fučíková, Helena Leflerova and Marie Kabrhelová matter for several reasons. Firstly, their life stories are a link in the chain that connects the pre-socialist women's movement with the CSWU, seeing as Hodinová-Spurná, Litvajová and Fučíková were also involved in the anti-fascist resistance movement. Secondly, because we know that Leflerova was also a member of the WIDF and that all CSWU leading women were members of international organizations, they are the women who facilitated the connection of CSWU as a women's organization with the global left women's movement. Thirdly, it was precisely because they were close to the CP in the state hierarchy that the CSWU leading women were able to do things for women. Finally, it is important to recognize that, unlike the prevalent view on state socialist functionaries suggests, the leading women of the Union were not just taking orders in order to hold privileged positions – rather, as I have shown, they were committed communists and left-feminists before and after 1948.

[210] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 79.

CHAPTER 5 - THE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CSWU

In the previous chapters, I have shown the historical association of socialism with the women's movement and with politics on "the woman question," and that the CP was, already in 1923, the political party with the most women in its ranks. Not only that, the CP of Czechoslovakia boasted the strongest female member base of all member parties of the Comintern. These affiliations in themselves suggest a strong international dimension to the CSWU and to the activities of its chairpersons. I will now discuss the CSWU in an international context. "The transnational or even global turn in scholarship since the 1990's has made scholars of women's movements increasingly aware of the many transnational connections in – if not inherently transnational character of – the modern women's movement since its beginnings around 1800."[211] Nečasová's account of CSWU history does not make any mention of the socialist women's movements' international activities. In the spirit of Raluca Maria Popa, I would like to discuss the "the transnational circulation of ideas and practices, particularly feminist ones" in socialist Czechoslovakia.[212] It is out of the scope of this thesis to treat the topic substantially. Because of this, the aim of this chapter is to establish and discuss some basic information about the international involvement of the CSWU, and also some similarities/differences with other mass socialist women's movements.

Socialism historian Raluca M. Popa argues that "it is generally believed that policies for improving women's status (in the former Eastern-Bloc) were subordinated to party interests [only]"[213] This view has remained unchallenged the historiography of the CSWU and the effects of what Francisca de Haan termed the "anti-communist hysteria" of the post-1948 years

[211] Francisca de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis and Krassimira Daskalova (eds) *Women's Activism, Global Perspectives from the 1890's to the Present*. (London: Routledge, 2013).
[212] Raluca Maria Popa, "Translating Equality between Women and Men across the Cold War Divide: Women Activists from Hungary and Romania and the Creation of International Women's Year" in Shana Penn and Jill Massino, ed., *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 59.
[213] Ibid. 60.

and Cold War era conjoined with feelings of guilt, shame, and reluctance to talk about the socialist years in other than derogative ways (and on reluctant terms). This has resulted in a narrative of the socialist women's movement as one that is isolated and out of touch with the international women's movement and international political struggle for women's liberation. In this chapter, I will discuss and introduce some international dimensions of the CSWU.

5.1 A Brief Literature Review

There has been a recent forthcoming of academic interest in the activities of national leftist and socialist women's movements engagement with the broader international community. A case study of women's organizations in socialist Hungary and Romania by Raluca M. Popa asks how "women and women's organizations from Europe translated that discourse for the public in their respective countries," focusing on the state socialist women's organizations of Hungary and Romania.[214] Kristen Ghodsee has written about the work of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (CBWM) and has shown that socialist women's movements were able to use their privileged relationship with the Communist Party to promote policies that actually helped women.[215] The CBWM, while not free of restrictions of what it could do by the state, was able to navigate around the superstructures and to successfully lobby for women on a number of occasions throughout its existence.[216] Methodologically, Ghodsee uses a combination of open-ended ethnographic interviews with women who were directly involved with the CSWM in the period between 1968 and 1990 and who attended some of the UN

[214] Ibid.
[215] Kristen Ghodsee, "Revisiting the United Nations decade for women: Brief reflections on feminism, capitalism and Cold War politics in the early years of the international women's movement" in *Women's Studies International Forum33 (2010) 3–12, retrieved from* http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kristenghodsee/files/un_decade_reflections.pdf [Accessed 10/4/2015].
[216] Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism" retrieved from http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kristenghodsee/files/ghodsee.pdf [Accessed 12/4/2015], 539.

Decade for Women conferences. She also deploys discourse analysis, draws on journals and other scholarly material and documents from various Bulgarian archives and even a private collection of a former CBWM member. Ghodsee emphasizes the underrepresentation of socialist women's mass organizations in published historical accounts of the UN Decade for Women. Despite the obvious and overwhelming presence of Second World countries representatives in the UN General Assembly from 1964 onwards, Western and Eastern scholarship has retained a confounded bias toward the important role of socialism and communism not just in the UN context, but also in political developments in the Third World that were influenced by leftist political and social thought. Ghodsee also looks at the preparations of the CBWM for International Women's Year."[217] Francisca de Haan has written about the Women's International Democratic Federation and its relationship with the United Nations.[218] She stressed how, in the Cold War setting, the WIDF became "a direct target of anti-communist policies."[219] Discussing the history and development of the history of the UN and the WIDF is, however, out of the scope of this thesis. Instead, I am going to focus on the CSWU and how they were involved.

5.2 The WIDF, the UNDFW and the International Involvement of the CSWU

Here, I will introduce some of the international activities of the CSWU. The CSWU was most involved with the Women's International Democratic Federation- an international women's organization established in Paris in 1945.[220] The WIDF, who enjoyed consultative status in the UN Social and Economic Council, lobbied to have a year in the UN dedicated to "women's

[217] Ibid.
[218]Francisca de Haan has researched the WIDF. See Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda and Contributions, 1945–1991," in Women and Social Movements International—1840 to Present (WASI) online archive, Thomas Dublin, Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds.), accessed through CEU Library at http://www.library.ceu.hu [Accessed 15/5/2015].
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.

issues" – which led to the institution of 1975 as International Women's Year. Devaki Jain writes that "many at the UN felt like this would be just another theme year among many and that not and that not much would come of it; previous theme years had accomplished little. But the IWY of 1975 proved to be a watershed in the history of women around the world."[221] Realizing that one year was not enough, the UN decided to make 1976-1985 the United Nations Decade for Women. The WIDF was "the largest and most influential women's organization in the post-1945 era."[222] The CSWU were also members of the WIDF, and CSWU Chairperson Helena Leflérová is listed as one of the ten WIDF vice-presidents in 1961.[223] The WIDF can also be credited with initiating the CEDAW which was adopted in 1979 and is considered to the first international bill of rights for women.[224] The most comprehensive research on the WIDF has been done by Francisca de Haan (2012, 2010).[225] In "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991" De Haan lists a selection of WIDF and WIDF-sponsored conferences, many of which the CSWU took part in and one of which was hosted by them in Prague in 1981.[226] Between 8 and 13 October 1981, Women's International Democratic Federation Congress took place in Prague. 131 Organizations from 116 countries took part in the conference. The WIDF was founded in

[221] Devaki Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN: a Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 67.
[222]Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda and Contributions, 1945–1991," in Women and Social Movements International—1840 to Present (WASI) online archive, Thomas Dublin, Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds.), accessed through CEU Library at http://www.library.ceu.hu [Accessed 8/4/2015]
[223]Bureau of the Women's International Democratic Federation, by Women's International Democratic Federation in World Congress of Women Convened by the Women's International Democratic Federation by Women's International Democratic Federation (Moscow, Moscow Oblast : Women's International Democratic Federation, 1963). page(s) 101-102at http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/view/1664817 [Accessed 3/4/2015]
[224] Popa, "Translating Equality," 60–74.
[225] See Francisca de Haan. Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organizations: The case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). " 2010, Women's History Review 19(4): 547 – 573 and also Francisca de Haan: "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991." 2012, Women's and Social Movements Online Archive.

Paris in 1945, and "was the largest and probably most influential international women's organization of the post-1945 era."[227]

5.3 "Domesticating" International Women's Year

I will now discuss how International Women's Year was mediated by the CSWU to the Czechoslovak audience. The year 1975 was declared by the United Nations as International Women's Year and in the same year, an international conference was held in Mexico City. "Equality, development and peace" emerged as the main topics and global objectives.[228] The World Plan of Action was adopted as a result of the conference. The socialist delegations contended that feminists from capitalist countries focused on the symptoms, rather than the underlying, economic causes of women's inequality.[229] Deciding that a year was not enough, the UN General Assembly declared 1976-1975 the UN Decade for Women immediately after the conference.[230] The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for Women (INSTRAW) were also established.[231] IWY and the UN Decade for Women created a space for the discussion, formation and dissemination of ideas on women's equality gender equality that was able to transgress the boundaries of the Cold War setting. While the IWY and the UNDFW undoubtedly created a sense of solidarity between women's movements, their conferences and meetings (especially those between the Eastern and Western Bloc) were also ridden with dissent and hostility.

[227] De Haan, "the Women's International Democratic Federation."
[228] Popa, "Translating Equality," 62.
[229] "they considered things like neo-colonialism, apartheid, racism and Zionism to be uniquely male forces in the world that could, through women's increased participation in international affairs, be challenged and defeated." at http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kristenghodsee/files/un_decade_reflections.pdf , 6.
[230] Ibid. 5.
[231] Arvonne S. Fraser and Irene Tinker. (ed) *Developing Power; How Women Transformed International Development* (New York: CUNY, 2004), 29 – 30.

I will now move on to discuss how IWY was accommodated and interpreted, or "nationalized," in Czechoslovak socialist propaganda and politics. Like in other countries, IWY was taken up by the Communist Party with great enthusiasm, if of a particular kind.[232] On March 11th 1976, the Central Committee of the CSWU published a *zhodnocení* (evaluation) of the role of the Union in the WIDF initiated IWY. [233] The report emphasizes the ways in which the IWY was promoted and accounted for in Czechoslovakia, and how the Central Committee of the Communist Party sought improve the status of women in Czechoslovakia.

The celebrations of IWY in socialist Czechoslovakia were not disjointed from other events – CSWU highlighted in their propaganda material that the IWY was an important part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of "the liberation from fascism."[234] Secondly IWY was "accounted for" by Czechoslovak state representatives at the seventhWIDF Congress and was conjoined with celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the WIDF.[235] The year 1976 was also the last year of the sixth consecutive five-year plan in Czechoslovakia. Implicitly, not only was the economic importance of women belabored in state propaganda, but the betterment of women's economic conditions to help them cope with the "double burden" became a central point of debate in the media. A high in the celebrations of the IWY was International Women's Day on March 8, 1975. Not only internal CSWU materials, but also published media testify that the final stage of the Year was *also* harnessed as a means to promote the fifteenth CPCS Rally (12.04.1976 - 16.04.1976).[236] In a report on IWY, one chapter on the growth of women's employment and 'involvement' during the IWY stresses that thanks to this concision of dates and themes, "[our] women were able to confront their social status achieved in the thirty years of socialist development with the position of women in developing countries, but also with the

[232] Popa, "Translating Equality," 59–74.
[233] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 113.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Functionaries of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia http://www.upn.gov.sk/funkcionari-ksc-kss/zobraz.php?zjazd=8 [Accessed 8/4/2015].

factual inequality of women living in capitalist states are confronted with."[237] This was how the international left women's movement was interpreted for Czechoslovak citizens.

The celebrations and "action plans" of the CSWU, while making economic advancements for women, remained highly politicized and state-centered. In their reports, the CSWU constructed IWY as a "homage" to the Soviet Union and socialist society and "everything it created for women," as well as "an expression of gratitude and loyalty to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia."[238] In her study of women's organizations in socialist Hungary and Roman, Raluca M. Popa writes that "rather than opening up debates on existing inequalities between women and men, IWY became 'nationalized.'"[239] This appears to also have been the case in Czechoslovakia.

I would now like to discuss briefly the participation of the women in the delegations that attended the conferences of the UNDFW. The Czechoslovak Commission for International Women's Year, set up in 1975, as was the case with most of the first delegations to Mexico, led by male members of the CP.[240] CSWU chairperson and CP Secretary Maria Kabrhelová was listed as the final Commission member, preceded by CP deputy chairman Matej Lúčan, CP Deputy chairperson secretary František Ondřich and CP member prof. Dr. Tomáš Trávníček.[241] Examples such as this seemingly underpin the perspective that all organized women's activities under Czechoslovak State socialism were subject to direct control and supervision by the CP. However, focusing on the gender make-up of the most upper power structures means omitting from consideration the hundreds of thousands of CSWU members in both the CSW and SWU who were active on a local level both before but particularly during

[237] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 73.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Popa, "Translating Equality," 73.
[240] One of the socialist exceptions was the CBWM delegation, ed by E. Lagadinova, S. Daskalova and L. Zhyvkova, though Ghodsee contends that most Western delegations were also headed by men. http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kristenghodsee/files/ghodsee.pdf [Accessed 15/3/2015] 57.
[241] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 118.

the UNDFW. For illustration, data on the overall member base of the CSWU published on 1.1.1981 was 946, 559 - 54 % of who were women not living in cities and 35, 9% of which were industrial and agricultural workers.[242]

For comparison, I would like to discuss the use of the word "feminism" by the CSWU. In a report on the conference in Copenhagen, the term "feminism" is used in the report once and, generally, the CSWU describe themselves as a *ženské hnutie* (women's movement) rather than a "feminist movement."[243] Raluca M. Popa writes that "the use of the term feminism by MNOT signals an attempt to claim legitimacy in the face of an international audience."[244] It seems that this was not the way the term was used by the CSWU. Rather, the term "feminist movement" is used to describe the "other" women's movements, usually associated in the West and with capitalism.[245] The historical and cultural connotations of "feminism" are reflected in contemporary public discourse and still today, overwhelmingly, feminism is connected in peoples mind's with something that is being imposed on "us" by the West. [246] In her analysis of the use of the term "feminism" by socialist organizations in Hungary and Romania, Popa argues that "communist parties still regarded feminism as a bourgeois ideology and were staunchly opposed to using the term."[247] Popa further writes that "in a debate of the Hungarian Politburo on the draft 'women's policy' (1970). In a debate of the Hungarian Politburo on the draft "women's policy"(1970) Politburo member Arpad Pullai declared that, although they were examining gender inequalities in Hungarian society, they were in no danger of becoming feminists."[248] While CSWU material does not describe feminism as a "bourgeois ideology," it

[242] More precisely, 23, 3% industrial workers and 12, 6 % employees of the agricultural industry. In the same year, the CSWU also boasted 11, 913 local clubs and 'organizations' (sewing clubs, book clubs etc.) *O Činnosti Československého Svazu Žen Mezi Sjezdy ČSSŽ*, 1984-1989, 60.
[243] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75.
[244] The MNOT was the National Council of Hungarian Women in socialist Hungary. See Popa, "Translating Equality," 59-63.
[245] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 116.
[246] Interview Marina Závacká, 8.4.2015 [Október 6. u. 19, Budapest].
[247] Popa, "Translating Equality," 61.
[248] Ibid.

refrains from referring to itself as a "feminist movement," using it, rather, to denote to "other" movements. But the negative connotations of feminism should not be interpreted as confined to communist propaganda. Hana Havelková's research shows that already in 1912, the Slovak nationalist *Národné noviny* (National Newspaper) associated feminism with radical, unseemly behavior such as that of the British suffragette movement. [249] The word "feminism" was used as a derogatory reference to obscene activities. I would like to suggest that just because the CSWU did not identify as feminists, it does not mean that their activities do not belong in the left-feminist movement discourse.

For the CSWU, IWY was also a further incentive to work more locally with women for women. Over the course of the five-year plan, for instance, the SWU initiated the *akcia Rozum do hrsti* "action plan," which is said to have culminated in 1975 with the national *V roce ženy pro ženy* (For Women in the Year of the Woman) action plan, and resulted in the opening of "45 after-school care centers, 47 youth clubs, 264 new preschool classrooms, 9 nurseries, a number of counseling centers for mothers and children; in some towns, public transportation for pre-school children was also arranged, all at minimal costs and thanks to the cooperation of locals"[250] The "nationalization" of IWY, through CSWU local promotion, instigated a sort of local women's "activism."[251] While it is true that the objectives of the CSWU were articulated to suit the Party, the chairpersons and CP were certainly not the only ones involved in the policy making process.

The UNDFW was also reflected in the way that education for women was promoted. The documents of the CSWU from the 1970s and 1980s connect the increased presence of women in the government and all sectors of the economy with novel opportunities in the social

[249] Gabriela Dudeková, "Radikálky alebo Konzervatívky? Nové výskumy v oblasti dejín ženského hnutia na Slovensku,". in ed. Jana Cviková, Jana Juráňová. *Histórie Žien. Aspekty písania a čítania*. (Aspekt, 2007). 85.
[250] Ibid. 63.
[251] Scholars have not yet found a language for the analysis of "activism under state socialism and a theoretical approach to analyze this political and social practice. Popa, "Translating Equality," 61.

system that enabled women to combine work and study in a more compatible way. Over the course of the UNDFW, the ratio of girls and women in education increased, although it is nowhere stated how this is the result of the UNDFW efforts, or how this had been lobbied for. In fact, in the words of a CSWU Report on the UNDFW, it was "not the United Nations Decade for Women itself," but rather the "decades of democratic and equal access to education that has allowed young girls and women to pursue education on all levels."[252] By the end of the UNDFW, the quotas of women in the education system in Czechoslovakia peaked. The amount of women studying at universities amounted to 44, 7 % of all students in 1984, with previous figures from 1974 showing a figure of 40, 8 %. The amount of technical and engineering graduates rose in particular from 17, 5% to 25, 6 % between 1974 and 1984.[253] The quota of women in local administrative institutions witnessed marginal increases in the respective sections and committees, 2 – 6 %.[254] Also, in 1985, young girls and women constituted 48, 8 % of youth union functionaries.[255]

I suggest that the CSWU was involved in the UNDFW mainly through its membership in the WIDF, and so the Union also took part in many events organized by the WIDF during the Cold War. One such event was hosted in Prague by the CSWU. The presence of international delegations in the Czechoslovak capital was written about in the media as a "major event" and "national honor."[256] On the occasion, fifteen women's organizations were admitted into the WIDF, and the CSWU stressed that members of "the Union themselves had encouraged the new members from Spain, Zambia, Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau to join."[257] The 1987 WIDF congress in Moscow was presented in the media by the CSWU to have been the "greatest

[252] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 111.
[253] Ibid.
[254] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 119.
[255] Ibid.
[256] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 119 – unnamed newspaper excerpt.
[257] Ibid.

event of the international women's movement since Nairobi."[258] Unlike the 4/1 ratio of men and women at the aforementioned conference in Copenhagen, the delegation sent to Moscow for the 1987 WIDF congress consisted of six Czechoslovak women. [259] I suggest that this could mean either that because the WIDF was a leftist women's organization, the CP put more trust in the delegates (even if they were women) or, that, more than ten years since Mexico, the CP had gained more trust in the CSWU female delegates and allowed them to travel to international events without due male Communist Party supervision.

In conclusion, the UNDFW was an opportunity for dialogue between the women's movements of the East and West of the Cold War divide. It seems that, like in Hungary and Romania, "the transformative message was recast in a national rhetoric of the achievements of the socialist state in advancing women's position."[260] Similarly, the national activities or "action plans" for which IWY was decidedly an incentive were driven my local women's interests and "activism," rather than the interests of the CP.[261] Paradoxes such as these is a reason why so many refrain from taking the language of communism to have been devoid of meaning, and why the international activities of the CSWU have been viewed with such superstition and reluctance by Czech and Slovak historians, most of who have experienced such propaganda in their own lives.[262]

[258] Ibid.
[259] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 73, (28.-29.6.1987) M. Kabrhelová, E.Litvajová, M. Němcová, L.Černá, S. Hýbnerová and E. Míčková. Zpráva IX. Kongress Mezinárodní Demokratické Federace Žen.
[260] Popa, "Translating Equality," 73.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Interview Marina Závacká, 8.4.2015 [Október 6. u. 19, Budapest].

CHAPTER 6 – "I HAVE ALWAYS LIVED HONORABLY:" WOMEN AND THE CSWU, 1981-1989

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the content of the letters of inquiry that were written to the CSWU by women from across Czechoslovakia between 1981 and 1989. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the period between 1968 and 1990 is known as the "normalization period." Legal historian Barbara Havelková refers to the "normalization" period as to the "era of the family." She sees the period in terms of a "re-tradtionalization" of legal discourse on family.[263] Nečasová wrote in 2014 that "current research findings do not allow us to analyze the extent of their [the CSWU's] practical activities."[264] In this chapter, I will address the "practicality" of the CSWU Central Committee through a close reading of letters that CSWU members from across Czechoslovakia addressed to the Union between 1981 and 1989. Using examples from 112 folders of individual correspondence between the CSWU and *women* who wrote to the Union about their problems in hope that the CSWU might help them.[265] I will discuss the problems that the women addressed the CSWU with and, where possible, establish what their economic and social background was and. I will argue that the letters reflect the frustrated political climate of 1980's Czechoslovakia and that women confided their troubles the CSWU as a last resort. The CSWU became a space for "solidarity" of Czechoslovak mothers and workers. In 1989, the CSWU published a quadrennial report on its activities since 1984, which also contains some information on the correspondence between women and the Union, such as how many letters were received and the nature of their content.[266] Most of them were addressed personally to Marie Kabrhelová.

[263] Havelkova, "Gender," 44-5.
[264] Nečasová, "Women's Organizations," 58.

[266] O Činnosti Československého Zvazu Žen Mezi Sjezdy ČSSŽ, 1984-1989. Praha, 16.-17. Června 1989. Za Účinný Podíl ČSSŽ na Přestavbe a Demokratizaci Společnosti.

Havelková has argued that "compared to the West, the law [in 1980's Czechoslovakia] facilitated women's access to the public sphere both earlier and more proactively," but adds that the legal provisions for men and women were "more gender-conservative."[267] The 1989 quadrennial report usefully divides received queries into seven categories: 1. *Sociální problematika* (social issues) 2. *Bytová situace* (housing situations) 3. *Pracovní a mzdové záležitosti* (Work and pay issues) 4. *Zdravotníctví a životní prostředí* (Health and environment) 5. *Majetkoprávní věci* (Legal procedures) 5. *Školství* (Education) 6. *Ostatní* (Other). The content often overlaps across two or even three categories. Upon receiving a letter, not only did the CSWU reply to the respondent but, in many instances, they also for forwarded the queries to ministries that would be responsible for their problem (ex. *Ministerstvo zdravotníctví* - Ministry of Health). Between 1984 and 1989, CSWU chairperson Kabrhelová or secretary Vacková were signed under the responses to the letters and were also responsible for forwarding them to other ministries.

6.1 Social issues

One of the prevailing issues for divorced women was belated or absent alimentation payment from the fathers of their children. The reason why many women looked to the CSWU for help was explained in their letters to the effect that legal proceedings have been stagnant, and the content of some inquiries suggests that these matters sometimes took months or years to resolve.[268] Another issue seems to have been the need for repeated submissions of the necessary documents before the respective lawsuits were addressed and resolved by the court. While the CSWU could urge legal authorities to get on with a shelved lawsuit, this was not always necessarily the case. It appears, based on the letters addressing ailments, that the ministries that

[267] Havelkova, "Gender," 48.
[268] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 74, Neumannova.

were responsible for dealing with such queries did often take an unhelpfully long amount of time to address cases.[269]

Such was the experience of Alena Neumannová from Prague, who wrote to the CSWU in February 1988. "I have not received ailments for my son in two years," she writes. Her son had recently undergone heart surgery and required special medical attention and care, which was consuming both time wise and financially. "Even though I did everything in my power and addressed all the responsible authorities," she continues, "at no point was my case taken up and nobody *bothered* to help me in this." In her stark note addressed personally to comrade Kabrhelová, she ironically concludes that she is aware "how much effort our socialist society makes towards the care of both ill children and single mothers," and that yet "the boy's very own father does not pay ailments for two years and everywhere, the door is closed to me" (*a přede mnou všude zavíraji dveře*).[270] A particularly formal, typewritten (most letters were written by hand) and meticulous letter was written by Anna Tomsová in 1988. Tomsová goes through pains to quote legal paragraphs explaining her case and asks that "as part of eliminating the excessive and pointless amount of bureaucracy" the responsible administration should consult her previously submitted applications from February 13th 1981 or October 1986![271] The question is, did Neumannová and Tomsová intend to take advantage of the liberal political climate of late 1980's Czechoslovakia in writing so honestly and sharply? The official stance of the CSWU on the nature of the complaints they received was somewhat different to how Neumannová and Tomsová felt. In the CSWU quadrennial report published in July 1989, The CSWU's official general statement on handling received correspondence was the following: "It is continuously the case that citizens do not always address the institution that is competent and responsible for their situation. Very often, simplified viewpoints of the complainers on the

[270] Ibid. Neumannova.
[271] Ibid. Alena Tomsová.

solutions to their problems are prevalent, as well as subjective interpretation of the legislation."[272]

In some cases the letters were vague and more emotionally charged than factual and constructive, such as that of Věra Doležalová from December 1989, who, demanding that the welfare for her disabled son be increased, provided no official documents from the doctor or school or the boy's personal information in the envelope. Whether women like Doležalová were expecting to send the relevant documents after a response from the CSWU we do not know. We can assume that many women were indeed ignorant of the formal and legal requirements, of which Věra Doležalová is an adequate example.[273] The quadrennial CSWU report from 1989 states that the overwhelming majority of letters were "illegitimate"(*neoprávnené*) i.e. that the queries and problems presented by the women were outside the social and political competence of the CSWU.[274]

Another common subject of inquiry was help and support for women who were disabled and elderly. For example, in March 1989, Zdena Čedíková of Česká Lipa, who had been on a disabled pension since the previous year, wrote to the CSWU requesting an increase in her pension. The letter, adressed by Zdena to the CC CSWU, was forwarded to the CC CWU Helená Toumanová, chairperson of the CWU at the time, replied to Zdena Čedíková, explaining that there were no grounds for increasing her pension. She suggests, in conclusion, that Mrs. Čedíková consider renting a smaller flat to save money on her rent. "As women, we are not indifferent to the situation of the large group of pensioners, disabled and not, who are forced to satisfy their life needs (*uspokojit životní potřeby)* from these low pensions, but as employees of the state, we are obligated to respect the existing legislative on social welfare and

[272]O Činnosti Československého Zvazu Žen Mezi Sjezdy ČSSŽ, 1984-1989. Praha, 16.-17. Června 1989. Za Účinný Podíl ČSSŽ na Přestavbe a Demokratizaci Společnosti [On the activities of the Czechoslovak Women's Union between CSWU rallies], 68.
[273] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75, Doležalová.
[274] O Činnosti Československého Zvazu Žen Mezi Sjezdy, 68.

it does not become us to assess their adequacy (*a nepřisluší nám posuzovat jejích úroveň*)."[275] Considering this example, we might assume is that many women thought the CSWU to have had more agency that it actually did have. Having said that, the letters suggest that the CSWU had indeed been helpful for women on many occasions. In April 1989, Milada Kelnarová of Příbor opens her letter to Kabrhelová stating that she is "turning to you [Kabrhelová] for help because I know that two women from our county have turned to you previously with their queries and that you have helped both of them."[276]

According to the contemporary legislation on social welfare, the age for pension leave was divided, depending on the person's occupation into three categories. Marik wrote that "the mentioned laws apply to all workers and makes no distinction between pensions of men and women." He goes on to say that "better conditions for women as fulfilled by the right to a pension at 57 years of age, i.e. three years earlier than men." According to the number of children, this number can decrease to 56 or even 53 years of age. In a final correspondence, CWU secretary Olga Vacková wrote to Žilinská explaining that there was nothing the Ministry would do about the CWU Raškovice inquiry. She adds that "even so, I spoke personally once again to the minister's assistant, with ing. Tomášek,[277] who promised to possibly reconsider our dissatisfaction with the state of the current social welfare system."[278] Vacková adds vaguely that the "economic situation" of the recent years has unfortunately not allowed this problem to be resolved for the benefit of women.

[275] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75, Čedíková.
[276] Ibid. Kelnarová.
[277] 'ing.' is the English equivalent of 'MSc.' He was an engineer.
[278] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75, Vacková.

6.2 Health and environment

As for health and environment, the cases are truly diverse in nature. Jaroslava Řidíčkova from Syrovice wrote a long, meticulous letter to Marie Kabrhelová about her elderly mother, who apparently broke her hip in the hospital as a result of poor attention from the nurse to the state of the chair (which seemed to have been broken) in her room in the hospital. In the opening paragraphs, she states vehemently that her mother "had always been a respectable women and had lived honorably," and that she trusts that therefore, her case be "taken seriously."[279] According to Řidičková, the hospital evaded all charges and the family was in no way compensated. There was nothing Kabrhelová could do for her.

Writing in March 1988, Jiřina Lenčová wrote that she needed help getting a disabled persons pension. Her letter suggests that she was perhaps physically incapable or had trouble making the necessary bureaucratic arrangements. Kabrhelová responded that they had forwarded her case to her local *Narodni výbor* in Mělník so that they may help her to make the arrangements. When all had been taken care of, Jiřina wrote a heartfelt thank you letter to the CSWU stating that "If it weren't for you, nobody would have helped me."[280]

6.3 Health and safety

One of the prevailing themes for many women was health and safety issues in the working environments of factories. An illustrative letter on that matter was sent to the CSWU on the 5th of December 1989 by Anna Biolková, the chairperson of the Trade Union Movement.[281] She wrote to the Central Committee of the CSWU regarding earlier pension leave for the 108 women employed in the local Raškovice factory. "A request of the factory ZV ROH AKUMA, Mladá Boleslav, factory number 2, alkaline accumulator production, regarding earlier pension

[279] Ibid. Ridličková.
[280] Ibid. Lenčová.
[281] The ROH (revoluční odborové hnutí).was the 'Revolutionary Trade Union Movement'

leave for workers who are exposed in the working place to *carcinogenic chemicals*." She makes immediate reference to her previous attempts to resolve the matter through the CWU in Raškovice. This time, she writes on behalf of the ROH. In her letter, she is adamant that their case be taken in to consideration and that this "discrimination" be contended with. She argues that "all 108 employees consider the reluctance of the government to grant them earlier pension leave a social injustice." The letter concludes with "we believe that in current times, when the door is being opened to democracy and the truthful iteration of legitimate requests, that you will handle our request accordingly."

CSWU secretary Gabriela Žilinská, then passes the query on to Peter Müller of the Federal Ministry of Work and Social Issues. Žilinská adds that she assumes that the time has come "when, from humane aspects, you will consider their appeal. I believe that we can find a beneficial solution to their situation, we are, after all, speaking of women and mothers."[282] In a comforting letter to Schönvická, Žilinská lets her know of the steps the CSWU had taken and concludes that she is "convinced and in complete agreement that the grounded queries of the women should be resolved to the benefit of their health." Žilinská also stresses that this query had already been sent to Vladimir Marik of the Federal Ministry of Work and Social Issues on the 5th of August 1986 – three years earlier – and had not been dealt with to their satisfaction. The appeal of CSWU member and possibly factory worker Anna Biolková had, in 1986, been turned down.[283]

In March 1989, the CSWU received a petition from the CC CWU in Benešov (Northern Czech Republic) complaining about the progressively worsening state of the local enviroment, particularly air pollution caused by inversion. The petition states that this had an impact on the health of the local population, particularly the children. "While the importance of the

[282] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75, Schönvická.
[283] Ibid. Žilinská.

environment is continually being stressed in the media, we can say from experience that there is minimal attention directed at environmental concerns in our region," the letter reads. "We beseech you as women, and most importantly, as mothers, to rectify the situation."[284]

The 1989 report section titled 'members of the women's union and their residence (*bydliště*) boasts about the accomplishment of the CSWU in terms of improving the state of the environment in towns and cities. The strong bond of Czechoslovak socialist society and the issues of the environment are stressed. But the word environment (*životní prostředí*) carries a different meaning in this context. For instance, caring for the *životní prostředí* was often meant as a reference to the activity of the beautification of the urban spaces of towns or cities. In this particular case, the problem seems to have been that the local authorities have neglected the local inversion patterns two kilometers from the city. We do not know how this problem was eventually resolved; the folder contained no additional correspondence.

6.4 Housing and education

In many cases women were complaining about their economic situations after divorce or when they moved to a different part of the country. They either couldn't get a job or couldn't send their children to school because there was no capacity (these inquiries came more frequently from rural areas). Contrary to Nanette Funk's claim that "promoting women's employment, if done only because of Party directives, makes one an instrument, not an agent or feminist," many women viewed unemployment as a major problem and approached the women's movement for help.[285] The fact that many women were either unable to find a job after they had moved away (this was particularly true for the rural areas) is a break with the prevailing

[284] Ibid.
[285] Funk, "a very tangled knot," 349. Retrieved from http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/21/4/344.full.pdf+html [Accessed 15/5/2015].

myth about Czechoslovakia which suggests that "back in the day, everybody had a job and was eligible for an apartment, we had more social and economic security."[286]

Whenever a housing allocation query was received, the formula of response of the CSWU was that "the CSWU is a civil organization (*spoločenská organizácia*) and therefore has no power to influence the allocation of a flat, nor finding you a job. Please speak the nearest CC NC[287] in the area of your permanent residence, they have an overview of the currently vacant positions."[288] In spite of the CSWU being a women's organization that was part of the state, they also had limited capacities. Correspondence sometimes suggests that the CSWU usually forwarded queries to the relevant ministries, but this is not always the case. Sometimes, the CSWU voluntarily attempted to intervene, or lobby, outside of its official field of influence. "In spite of this [that we are unable to help you], we have forwarded your request to our CC CWU, so that they may inquire at the CC NC Work force bureau about your possible employment."[289] Responding to a query from Bohumila Stehlíková, Plzeň, the CSWU also states that there is unfortunately nothing they can do, but that they have "discussed" her inquiry with CC NC in Plzeň, where the case has been forwarded to."[290]

Accompanying inquiries about judicial processes regarding child custody, a frequent theme was also apartment/flat allocation. The usual formula of response to women who inquired about housing was that the CSWU, unfortunately, does not exercise influence over the decisions of the ministries responsible for housing. They suggest that the plaintiff ought to address the institutions that are competent. Sometimes, the CSWU would forward the requests of the women to the relevant governmental institution. CSWU chairperson Oľga Vacková, in her letter accompanying the forwarded request of Jana Forgáčová to the Okresní národní výbor:

[286] Interview with Vica Šurinová [Bratislava, 4/3/2015].
[287] *Okresní Národní Výbor* – here as CC NC, abbreviated from Central Committee of the National Council. National Councils were local administrative unites of the state and were active on a municipal and country level.
[288] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75, Vitová, Kohoutková, Blahová..
[289] Ibid. Jana Vítová.
[290] Ibid. Stehliková.

odbor bytové hosporářství in Prague, thought that some requests should be given special attention. "Seeing as we are dealing with a worker *(dělnice)* and a single mother with an ill five year-old son, we ask for your stance on this matter and for your help."[291]

6.5 Gendering divorce

In many cases, women asked the CSWU to intervene in judicial processes, mostly regarding child custody or divorce. "The CSWU is a *spoločenská organizace* (civil organization) and does not have the power to intervene in judicial processes. We are sorry, but we cannot help you with your problem." Kabrhelová adds in her response: "we wish for you that the issue is resolved to your satisfaction and wish good health and happiness for both you and your children."[292] Marie Čadíková, for example, wrote an emotionally charged letter about the (according to her) unjust decision of the High Court in Prague regarding the custody of her children, which was granted to her ex-husband. Marie moved away from her husband to live with her boyfriend before she and her spouse were divorced. In the CSWU reply letter, stating that there is nothing the Union can do for her in this matter, vice-chairperson Oľga Vacková adds that "perhaps the decision of the court for the benefit of your husband was also influenced by the fact that you pursued a relationship with another man before the divorce was settled."[293] This reflects the lingering conservative attitudes, even in the environment of the women's movement of the late 1980's. The example reflects Havelková's argument that "the understanding and interpretation of marriage among the legal community (in the normalization period) became openly based on a traditional understanding of the gender roles and considered the woman responsible for marital harmony."[294]

[291] NAP, Holdings of the CSWU, box 75, Forgáčová.
[292] Ibid. Svobodová.
[293] Ibid. Čadíková.
[294] Havelková, "Gender," 46.

6.6 Other

Many folders also contained very casual inquiries. In May 1989, Božena Horáková, an Interhelp employee in the USSR, requested re-registration in the CSWU because she stated that she wanted to "return to her fatherland with her daughter."[295] In other cases, such as that of Oľga Kovalová, women would request to be transferred to a different workers category.[296] The CSWU and indeed the state show themselves to be aware, on some level, of the inadequacies of Czechoslovak socialist bureaucracy. According to the official statements of the CSWU, correspondence with its member base was "an important part of its political task," and their reports also state that "sensitive reactions to the content of the complaints contributes towards the trust of the people towards socialism, but also to the elimination of deficits and also towards the furthering of the civil activities of citizens."[297]

6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the letters discussed in this chapter show that women who wrote to the CSWU asking for help were mostly women from the working class. As examples have shown, some women assumed the CSWU to be more competent then it really was in resolving their queries. Writing to the CSWU presented a way for women to express their concerns "as women" and "as mothers." As we have also seen, many women dared, especially from the later years of the decade, to call the state out on its perceived incompetence and to criticize the welfare system and government administration. The assertive tone of some of the late 1980s letters reflects that the Czechoslovak socialist state as a respected entity was in decline and that steady democratization that was taking place in Czechoslovak society. Writing about the CSWU, Nečasová noted that "their actual powers were extremely limited, and the vast majority

[295] Note: Interhelpo was a socialist, industrialist cooperative that wa sestablshed in Czechoslovakia for the purpose of helping build up socialist Kyrgisztan.

[297] O činnosti Československého Svazu Žen mezi Sjezdy, 86.

of basic documents were subject to approval at the highest levels of the communist hierarchy."[298] It emerges from the discussed correspondence that the CSWU was often a space for women's solidarity, rather than for the resolution of women's issues. Nečasová claims that the CSWU "suffered from extensive bureaucratization, which had a negative effect [on them]," which also comes across in the grievances.[299] Nonetheless, what is the most striking about these letters is that they show the trust that women had in the Union and how the CSWU did everything it could to help women in their difficult situations.

[298]Nečasová, "Women's organizations," 58.
[299]Ibid. 59.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided a history of the CSWU from 1950 to 1990. There is very little existing historiography on the CSWU and what there is, is narrow because it adopts a "top-down" perspective on the Union through the archive of the CP. The guiding assumption in that historiography, of which Nečasová's 2014 study is the main representative, is that the Union was a CP "transmission-belt" working for the CP rather than working for women. My research, by contrast, used some of the actual (very big) archive of the CSWU to ask what kind of organization the CSWU was and what they did. In the First Chapter, I have drawn on two main theoretical frameworks. Firstly, I discussed how Marxist and left-feminist thought conceptualized the woman question in order to explain the theoretical and political background of the Union. Secondly, I have discussed "totalitarian" and "revisionist" scholarship to show what perspectives on socialist mass women's organizations there are in historiography and to show which one will guide my research.

This thesis has three main research chapters, starting with Chapter Four, which focused on the five leading women of the Union. Providing their biographies has allowed me to show and establish that the chairpersons of the CSWU were what connected the CSWU with the international women's movement. Also, their close proximity to the Communist Party was what allowed them to participate in politics related to the woman question in Czechoslovakia. Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, Gusta Fučíková, Helena Leflérová in particular were actively involved in the international women's movement (WIDF and others) and were part of the anti-fascist resistance movement in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938). They were committed to communist ideas before and after 1948. This challenges the prevalent notion of communist functionaries as opportunistic careerists simply enjoying privileges positions without doing any real work.

Chapter Five focuses on the international activities of the CSWU. I have discussed how International Women's Year and the United Nations Decade for Women was interpreted in Czechoslovakia by the CSWU and its agenda "nationalized" for the socialist audience. Looking at the akční plány (action plans) that the CSWU initiated throughout the country, I demonstrated that in spite of the Cold War setting of the UNDFW, the CSWU was able to engage in the dialogue of the international women's movement on the platforms of the UNDFW, but also the WIDF. I have also indicated the Union's ties with WIDF, although I am aware that I have only introduced this briefly. Although this is a very brief exploration of their international work, Chapter Five clearly shows that this was a key dimension of their identity and their impact. Without taking into account its international dimension, it is impossible to understand the CSWU as a women's organization.

Chapter six analyzed the relationship between the CSWU and its member base. By means of a careful reading of letters that women sent to CSWU chaiperson Marie Kabrhelová between 1981 and 1989, I have shown that women adressed the Union with their problems and did consider, in the cases that I have discussed, the Union to have been helpful and there to support women and even to further their interests through lobby in the Government.

The main implications of this research are, firstly, that the CSWU existed from 1950 to 1990; secondly, that its agenda and theoretical background are connected to a longer history of left feminism in Czechoslovakia; thirdly, that the CSWU was not only part of the Czechoslovak State structure, it was also an active member of the international women's movement and it was also working for women's interests on a local level. In sum, this thesis has provided a more complex and multi-layered account of the CSWU and argues that it is important that we recognize the CSWU and its leading women as part of the feminist history of Czechoslovakia.

This research has only touched upon the surface of the vast main archive CSWU, and it shows that an enormous amount of basic research needs to be done – on a local, national and

trans-national level. The need for further research also includes the need for comprehensive biographies of Hodinová-Spurná, Fučiková, Leflerova, Litvajová and Kabrhelová. Hodniová-Spurná's moving life in particular demonstrates that Czechoslovakia did have active left-feminism both nationally and on the international level.

APPENDIX – Holdings of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union (CC CSWU), NATIONAL ARCHIVE PRAGUE (NAP)

Československý svaz žen - ústřední výbor (ČSSŽ-ÚV)

(Kamýk, budova A3, dep. 1, místnost 1, 1a1-1c3)

kt. 1 - Protokol - utajované písemnosti 1983-1990, sjezd 1967
kt. 2 - Sjezd 1974 (1)
kt. 3 - Sjezd 1979 (2)
kt. 4 - Sjezd 1984 (3)
kt. 5 - Sjezd 1989 (4)
kt. 6 - Sjezd 1989 (4)
kt. 7 - Sjezd 1989, Stanovy 1989
kt. 8 - Sjezd 1990 (5)
kt. 9 - Celostátní konference 1956, 1959, 1963, 1966
kt. 10 - VČŽ (2), Plenární zasedání 1958-1967
kt. 11 - VČŽ - Slovensko (2), Plenární zasedání 1962-1966
kt. 12 - VČŽ (3), Předsednictvo 1965-1966
kt. 13 - VČŽ (3), Předsednictvo 1967
kt. 14 - VČŽ, Předsednictvo 1967
kt. 15 - VČŽ (4), Sekretariát 1966-1967
kt. 16 - VČŽ - akce (5) 1949-1962
kt. 17 - VČŽ - akce 1964-1970
kt. 18 - VČŽ, MDŽ 1951-1960
kt. 19 - VČŽ (6), ediční činnost 1966-1970
kt. 20 - ČSRŽ (1a), plenární zasedání 1969
kt. 21 - ČSRŽ, plenární zasedání 1970 (1a), 1971 (1b)
kt. 22 - ČSRŽ (1b), plenární zasedání 1972-1973
kt. 23 - ČSRŽ, sekretariát (2) 1970-1971
kt. 24 - ČSRŽ (2), sekretariát 1972-1973, akce (3) MDŽ 1969-1970
kt. 25 - ČSRŽ akce (3) 1970-1973
kt. 26 - plenární zasedání (2) 1967-1969
kt. 27 - plenární zasedání (6a) 1974-1975
kt. 27a - plenární zasedání (6b) 1976-1977
kt. 28 - plenární zasedání (6c) 1978-1979
kt. 29 - plenární zasedání 1979-1980
kt. 30 - plenární zasedání 1979-1984
kt. 31 - plenární zasedání 1984-1985
kt. 32 - plenární zasedání 1986

kt. 33 - plenární zasedání 1987
kt. 34 - plenární zasedání 1989-1990
kt. 35 - předsednictva (3a) 1968 (I. pololetí)
kt. 36 - předsednictva 1968 (II. pololetí)
kt. 37 - předsednictva (3b) 1968-1969
kt. 38 - předsednictva (10) 1974, 1975
kt. 39 - předsednictva (11) 1976
kt. 40 - předsednictva (11) 1976
kt. 41 - předsednictva (12) 1977
kt. 42 - předsednictva (12) 1978
kt. 43 - předsednictva (13) 1979
kt. 44 - předsednictva (13) 1979
kt. 45 - předsednictva (14) 1980
kt. 46 - předsednictva (14) 1981
kt. 47 - předsednictva (15) 1981 (I.pololetí)
kt. 48 - předsednictva (15) 1981 (II. pololetí)
kt. 49 - předsednictva (16) 1982 (I. pololetí)
kt. 50 - předsednictva (16) 1982 (II. pololetí)
kt. 51 - předsednictva (17) 1983
kt. 52 - předsednictva (17) 1984
kt. 53 - předsednictva (18) 1985 (I. pololetí)
kt. 54 - předsednictva (18) 1985 (II. pololetí)
(19) 1986 (I. pololetí)
kt. 55 - předsednictva (19) 1986 (I. pololetí)
kt. 56 - předsednictva (20) 1987 (I. pololetí)
kt. 57 - předsednictva (20) 1987 (II. pololetí)
kt. 58 - předsednictva (21) 1988 (I. pololetí)
kt. 59 - předsednictva (21) 1988 (II. pololetí)
kt. 60 - předsednictva (22) 1989 (I-IX)
kt. 61 - předsednictva (22) 1989 (X-XII), 1990
kt. 62 - porady tajemnic a předsedkyň OV (24) 1975-1988
kt. 63 - porady tajemnic a předsedkyň OV (24) 1975-1988
kt. 64 - sekretariát (4) 1967
kt. 65 - sekretariát (4) 1968
kt. 66 - sekretariáty (23) 1974-1976
kt. 67 - sekretariáty (23) 1977-1981
kt. 68 - sekretariát (23) 1989
kt. 69 - výroční členské schůze 1975, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1984
kt. 70 - výroční členské schůze 1985, 1987, 1989

kt. 71 - POOK (29) 1985-1988 materiální pomoc rozvoj. zemím (31) 1983-1987

kt. 72 - členská základna ČSŽ, SSŽ 1971-1980

kt. 73 - členská základna ČSŽ, SSŽ 1980-1988

kt. 74 - městské výbory 1979-1987 (30), sídliště 1977-1985

kt. 75 - stížnosti a podněty pracujících 1981-1989

kt. 76 - akce (5) 1967-1968

kt. 77 - akce-MDŽ 1974-1983

kt. 78 - akce-MDŽ 1984-1989

kt. 79 - dekáda OSN pro ženy Mexico 1975, Mezinárodní rok ženy 1975, Mezinárodní rok dítěte 1978, Konference OSN Kodaň 1980

kt. 80 - světové kongresy MDFŽ 1981-1987

kt. 81 - světové kongresy MDFŽ 1975, 1981, 1987

kt. 82 - byro a světové kongresy MDFŽ 1975, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987

kt. 83 - rady MDFŽ 1985

kt. 84 - byro MDFŽ 1973-1987

kt. 85 - MDFŽ - informace (71 II), překlady

kt. 86 - seminář MDFŽ Moskva 1974, seminář k výročí A.Bebela 1979

kt. 87 - MDFŽ - panafrická organizace žen, všearabská liga žen

kt. 88 - MDFŽ - ženy - Afrika, Afghánistán

kt. 89 - MDFŽ - ženy - Albánie, Asie

kt. 90 - MDFŽ - ženy - Asie II

kt. 91 - MDFŽ - ženy - arabské státy, Bulharsko

kt. 92 - MDFŽ - ženy - Benelux

kt. 93 - MDFŽ - ženy - Francie

kt. 94 - MDFŽ - ženy - Itálie

kt. 95 - MDFŽ - ženy - Jugoslávie, Kanada, Kypr

kt. 96 - MDFŽ - ženy - Latinská Amerika I, II

kt. 97 - MDFŽ - ženy - Latinská Amerika III

kt. 98 - MDFŽ - ženy - Latinská Amerika, Kuba, Maďarsko

kt. 99 - MDFŽ - ženy - Polsko, Portugalsko, Rakousko

kt. 100 - MDFŽ - ženy - Rumunsko, Řecko

kt. 101 - MDFŽ - ženy - Skandinávie

kt. 102 - MDFŽ - ženy - SSSR, SRN, Španělsko

kt. 103 - MDFŽ - ženy - Švýcarsko, USA

kt. 104 - MDFŽ - ženy - Velká Británie

kt. 105 - MDFŽ - kroniky čs. ženské organizace

kt. 106 - 17. listopad 1989, akční výbor 1990

kt. 107 - shromáždění politických stran a hnutí v ČSFR 1990

kt. 108 - Informace (Tisk)

kt. 109 - Dokumentace - tisk (35) 1974-1988

kt. 110 - Dokumentace - výstřižky, plakáty

kt. 111 - Rozsévačka (4)

kt. 112 - Udělování medailí ČSSŽ (36a,b)

kt. 113 - Dodatky 1955-1962, Čs. výbor pro ochranu dětí, MDD

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