

**Multiplied Burdens or Honorable Duty? Working Women, Trade Unions and
Women's Councils in Soviet Lithuania 1985 - 1988**

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Abstract

This thesis is a multi-focal local history of women's work-place related organizing and action in the city of Kaunas in Soviet Lithuania. Building on the analysis of a rich array of primary material, it explores women's participation in the state 'voluntary' or "mass" organisations and contributes to the social and political history of the Soviet Union at the time of *perestroika*. The primary focus of the research is women's participation in women's councils and trade unions. Due to the employment politics of Soviet Union and the five-year planning of production, the workerist doctrine of Soviet state is taken into account when women's participation in women's councils and in trade unions are analysed. A key problem addressed in this research is the exclusion of the development of the Soviet industrial relations from the historical analysis of women's councils and trade unions activities. In order to develop a thorough analysis of women's councils and trade unions, the complexity of the relation between women and state and subsequently, the gendered division of labor and the Soviet modernity are included, as well as industrial development and commodification of labor.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed,

Agne Bagdziunaite

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1. Introduction

This thesis is a multi-focal local history of women's work-place related organizing and action in the city of Kaunas in Soviet Lithuania. Building on the analysis of a rich array of primary material, it explores women's participation in the state 'voluntary' or "mass" organisations and contributes to the social and political history of the Soviet Union at the time of perestroika. The primary focus of my research is women's participation in women's councils and trade unions. By concentrating only on perestroika I want to emphasize that the scholars of Soviet history should be attentive to the periodization of Soviet history to be able to escape the wide generalizations about Soviet society which today are still reproduced.

It is widely accepted that Mikhail Gorbachev revived the activities of *zhensovety* and openly declared that women's problems were the problems of the Soviet society as a whole, therefore, I chose perestroika years (1985-1988) as my point of departure for my research to investigate women's relations to the 'voluntary' organisations at workplaces in Soviet Lithuania. The trade unions in Soviet union played an important part in the management of the workplace and welfare of the workers. Since women were fully participating in Soviet labour market, some of the trade unions in the workplaces were also run by women.

Thus, a key problem I want to address in my research is the exclusion of the development of the Soviet industrial relations from the historical analysis of women's councils activities. At the same time the analysis of women in the trade unions of Soviet Union is also very scarce until today. I argue that, due to the employment politics of Soviet Union and the five-year planning of production, the workerist doctrine of Soviet state have to be taken into account when women's participation in women's councils and in trade unions are considered. Thus, first women's position as workers will be my starting point for further analysis of women's participation in the organisations related to their workplaces.

As I hope, the main contribution of my thesis will be to overcome the conceptual paradigm which is used by the majority of Soviet history scholars, when women's participation in the workplace and state 'organisations' is still rendered as something imposed by the Communist Party despite the fact that women were part of the economic development and were fully included in the

Soviet industrial project. The other part of the scholars contend that women refused to participate in state-socialist politics and institutions by concentrating on the issues of their families, they distanced themselves from the state ‘voluntary’ organizations by approaching them only in the formal way. Thus the body of my thesis is constructed around argument that Soviet society took a huge step away from anti-individualist ideology, industrial development turned Soviet society to individualist and utilitarian citizens. I hope that my thesis will also complicate the discussion about the late Soviet society and women’s question in Lithuanian academy and allow to recede from simplified totalitarian paradigm. By delving into the archival material and analyzing very concrete sites of trade unions and women’s councils in the city of Kaunas, I hope also to prove that in order to develop an adequate analysis of Soviet state policies related to industrial relations and gender issues the concrete cases on the micro-level are as important as the macro investigations.

Concerning the limitations of my thesis I have to admit, first, that a longer term and comparative perspective is missing which could help to flesh out more clearly the specificity of the perestroika period. It is difficult for me to delineate the political and economic processes which resulted into the reforms of the perestroika. Secondly, it is clear that interviews with women who participated in women’s councils and trade unions would have added one more layer to my research and it would have helped to sharpen the analysis of women’s relations towards the workplace and the state at that time.

Nevertheless I hope that I succeeded to grasp the complexity and diversity of the relations between women, trade unions and women’s councils that women developed as workers and finally as women. Accordingly my main research question is: What were the relations between the women workers, the women’s councils and trade unions on the local enterprise level and national level during perestroika in Soviet Lithuania?

My thesis will be structured as followed. In the second chapter I will construct my thesis main argument which is based on the three layered theoretical framework, also I will revise the literature regarding women’s scholarly work on women in Soviet Lithuania. In the third chapter I will briefly introduce the context of perestroika, the reforms in relation to women’s councils and trade unions. In the third chapter I will analyze the documents of trade unions’ meetings, the interview of one ex-chairman of the trade union, the articles of one weekly newspaper of the enterprise and the articles of the all-union of Soviet Lithuania magazine. The focus of this chapter

is on how women saw their various positions in trade unions and how they reflected on their own positions in trade unions in relation to other women workers.

In my fifth chapter I explore how women through the institution of the women's councils developed a range of activities in different workplaces and engaged as women in public policy on local and national levels. I will explore how and whether women corresponded to the political climate of perestroika, including the 'revival' of women's councils. Also, I will compare different agendas of women's councils in relation to the status of women as workers. I will specifically analyze the resolution of the All-Lithuanian Women's Conference in 1988 in order to underline the main direction of state policies regarding gender.

And in my last chapter I focus on one factory which produced synthetic fiber and had a particularly strong women's council. I will compare the minutes of the women's council meetings and the articles of the weekly newspaper of the factory to reveal the individualistic approach to workplace and women's councils of women as professional workers. In other words I will investigate what image of women's council was constructed in the factory's newspaper and how women positioned themselves in the workplace. I will also discuss whether class had an impact on how women referred to the gendered policies of the state.

2. On Soviet Modernities

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In her article “Special protective legislation and equality of opportunity for Women Workers in the USSR”(1980) the secretary of All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions Alexandra P. Biryukova contended that the state guaranteed access to social services for women would enable them to participate in economic, social and political activity as well as to become a mother.¹ She stressed on full women’s participation in the USSR labour market and highlighted the wide range of occupations that women were holding at that time.² While she was convinced that women’s participation in the waged economy made an effect on the relations of gendered division of labour in the domestic sphere³ at the same time she admitted that women remained the central figures to do all the care work in the family.⁴ The questions can be raised about how to read Biryukova’s report on the situation of women - should Biryukova’s arguments be rejected as pure propaganda? Or maybe it should be taken into account that at the time of writing this article she was holding the secretary position of All-Unions Trade Union Presidium.

Dalia Leinartė was very concise and determined about the position of Lithuanian women during Soviet regime, she claimed that most Lithuanian women accepted the roles imposed on them from above but “in their hearts” they remained “mere observers rather than active participants in building socialism.”⁵ She compared the active role of Russian women - who would be proud of their achievements in Soviet state - with Lithuanians who adopted the Soviet reality as inevitable.⁶ Thus, taking Leinarte’s framework, Biryukova should be read as active agent of ‘Sovietization’:

¹A.P. Biryukova, “Special Protective Legislation and Equality of Opportunity for Women Workers in the USSR,” *International Labour Review* 119, no. 1 (January 1980): 51.

²Biryukova, 52.

³Biryukova, 59.

⁴Biryukova, 60.

⁵Dalia Leinarte, *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam: BRILL, 2010), 3.

⁶Leinarte, 3.

the one who is an active subject of the history and at the same time the ‘occupier’, the builder of Soviet society. Given that in my thesis I am focusing on women who were mostly ethnic Lithuanians, then who were these women who were active in trade unions, and in women’s councils in Soviet Lithuania? How to write about those women who in Soviet Lithuania participated in key institutions of Soviet society at the time, who were part of the work collective, party or trade union committees?

In her article Anna Krylova criticized the approach that analyzed the Soviet regime “as a resolute ideology carrier, consumed by its own ideological content while imposing it on the Soviet society.”⁷ The author opposed the idea that the Marxian-Bolshevik-Soviet ideological project which in the course of its history underwent multiple revisions should be interpreted as something that never gave up its fundamental Bolshevik anti-individualist concepts.⁸ The author delineated the scholarly tradition which always intended to analyse the Soviet society according to one paradigm, defining the Soviet society as eternally seeking for one goal, to erase the difference between the individual, the collective and the state.⁹ I want to challenge the paradigm exemplified by Leinarte’s approach which I claim is similar to what Krylova defined as “anti-individualist cultural paradigm of Bolshevism”. I will try to establish the context where the activities of women in Soviet Lithuania are not taken from the perspective of victimhood. The social and economic shifts in Soviet society has to be taken into the account as evidence that Soviet society changed through time and obtained more or less individualistic approach towards the social politics and culture.

In the following chapter I will briefly outline my theoretical framework which I will unpack in several layers. First layer is the industrial development of Soviet Union and commodification of labour power; the second is the status of women in Soviet Lithuania; and third - the conceptual framework of Soviet-modernity introduced by Anna Krylova.

In her book “The Object of Labour” Martha Lampland argued that state socialism in Hungary actually produced atomized, individualist, utilitarian attitudes towards work, property,

⁷Anna Krylova, “Soviet Modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik Predicament,” *CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN HISTORY* 23, no. 2 (May 2014): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777314000083>.

⁸Krylova, 175.

⁹Krylova, 176.

money and morality.¹⁰ The book is an ethnographic account on Hungarian workers in the villages. While my thesis focuses on the City of Kaunas I found Lampland's definition of commodified labour under state socialism useful as she claimed that the developments of later socialism, in terms of introducing market economy in small doses and encouragement of consumption, was partially a consequence of socialist industrial process. The features of socialist industrialism were distinct from capitalist market economy as the production was organized by central planning and plan fulfilment; shortage and storming are distinguished by Lampland as specific character features of socialist political economy.¹¹ Referring to Michael Burawoy and Janos Lukasc, Lampland argued that economic planning had a significant impact not only on the organization of labour but also on the consciousness of workers within socialist enterprise. Lampland's argument that the economism of socialism became a common idiom of both public and private worlds,¹² is an important point of reference for my thesis. The concept of economism as penetrating all the spheres of life under socialism helps me to define women's relations towards work and other public activities in Soviet Lithuania and break from the idea that women were ideologically manipulated. I argue that women in Soviet Lithuania when joining different state "voluntary" organizations during perestroika could have had multiple approaches, including the opportunistic, career oriented and/or oriented towards improving the lives of women. The participation in such organizations could have meant the economic incentives such as higher position for holiday vouchers, access to better services, grocery products etc., and/or dedication to improve the working and living conditions of women.

In his article on Soviet women's political recruitment Bohdan Harasymiw explores the relationship between the level of economic development of the constituent Soviet republics and the participation of women among party-political executives.¹³ He indicates that party-political managers and executives encompass "managers of bodies of state administration and of party,

¹⁰Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor : Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, c1995, n.d.), 5.

¹¹Lampland, 19.

¹²Lampland, 21.

¹³Bohdan Harasymiw, "Have Women's Chances for Political Recruitment in the USSR Really Improved?," in *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Tova Yedlin (New York : Praeger, c1980, n.d.), 140–84.

Komsomol, trade union, and other mass organizations and their subdivisions.”¹⁴ The article analyses various data, tables of statistics to compare the position of women in the constituent union republics of the USSR. One of the Tables given¹⁵ shows the correlation between the level of economic development, expressed as a percentage of the top republic’s per capita produced national income, and the percentage of women among Party-Political Executives. Soviet Lithuania, for example, in the latter table occupied sixth place among the republics in 1959 and in 1970 Lithuania was already 3rd. In conclusion the author claims that economic development played a very important part in political recruitment of Soviet women.¹⁶ Women’s educational levels were also rising even faster than men’s in Soviet Union.¹⁷

To explain the participation of women in such organizations as women’s councils and trade unions during the time of perestroika I connect three elements in my thesis: - first, the economic development of Soviet Lithuania which brought a steep rise of women’s participation in paid employment; second, the participation of women participation in different levels of Soviet institutions; and third, Lampland’s argument about the production of atomized and individualist socialist society. There was a visible connection between the high numbers of women in workplaces and women’s increasing interest in participation in ‘voluntary’ state organizations. The functions that were assigned to trade unions and women’s councils induced the aspirations of women to seek better social positions. This approach enables me to interpret the archival documents and the media articles of Soviet Lithuania without assuming and reinforcing the assumptions about Soviet socialism as an anti-capitalist and anti-individualist society that, according to Ana Krylova, are widely unquestioned in American Soviet studies tradition.¹⁸

As identified by Krylova, the “anti-individualist cultural paradigm of Bolshevism” has informed not only the studies of Soviet history in general but also was applied to study women’s position in Soviet society. The cliché that could be found in many scholarly articles on Soviet

¹⁴Harasymiw, 144.

¹⁵Harasymiw, 145.

¹⁶Harasymiw, 179.

¹⁷Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, “USSR Women at Work: Changing Patterns,” *Industrial Relations* 14, no. 2 (May 1975): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-232X.1975.tb00596.x>.

¹⁸Krylova, “Soviet Modernity,” 168.

women (it dominates today too) is that Communist party in Soviet Union always followed Engel's ideologic line regarding woman question, that women are to be emancipated through the full participation in paid labour and public life. Anna Krylova explained that many scholars who have been studying Soviet history "equate the *longue durée* of the Soviet modern project with Bolshevism and its system of anti-individualist values."¹⁹ According to this perspective, women, even in late Soviet industrial society, never reached the full equality or full participation in the political life of Soviet Union, because, ostensibly, the state was stuck and stubborn while propagating a wrong image of how to emancipate women. But what did women do at the time when Soviet state tried to address women-related issues? The theory of stasis of Soviet Union ideology feeds into the totalitarian scholarly tradition. It is a very repetitive line of thought, similar to Dalia Leinarte's argument on passivity of Lithuanian women and, as I will show later in this chapter, to the account of other Lithuanian scholars who are writing about women in Soviet Lithuania. Anna Krylova's argument that the industrialization brought huge changes to Soviet society, inciting a change of paradigm from the anti-individualist Bolshevism creates a substantial framework of my thesis. Krylova asks:

How was this anti-individualist cultural paradigm of Bolshevism to address the profound social transformation brought about by the 1930s industrialisation, namely, the appearance of an urban and professionally differentiated middle class defined by the alienating and self-centred character of intellectual labour and the expectations of urban privacy?²⁰

This question informs my thesis as I am determined to ask how women coming from different class backgrounds contributed to the activities of trade unions and women's councils during perestroika, which is the last period of industrial development in the Soviet Union? How did organizations refer back to what women did, what was the politics of women's work and how it was perceived differently by women in and outside of state 'voluntary' organizations?

¹⁹Krylova, 169.

²⁰ Anna Krylova, "Soviet Modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik Predicament," *CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN HISTORY* 23, no. 2 (May 2014): 170, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777314000083>.

In her article Elena Zhidkova defines women's councils as the saviors of marriages and safeguards of Soviet morals during 1960s when Khrushchev was in power.²¹ The structure of enterprise and dense settlement of workers in the apartment blocks permitted the state to observe the workers and voluntary organizations closely, including women's councils, according to Zhidkova, which have helped the state to intervene into the family life and preserve the traditional gender roles and the division of labor in families.²² Zhidkova's focus on the interventions of women's councils' into the families and private life of Soviet citizens during the Thaw, certainly captures one important dimension. However, by focusing only on the control of the families she obliterates the position of women who at the time were involved in the activities of women's councils. The participation of women in women's councils or trade unions certainly cannot be reduced to the one sided function of surveilling the families. As if it was the only approach to the state family policy of which the state was in charge seeking to fully control the society. This approach not only denies women's position in the workplace as fully participating agents of politics and discontent, by defining women's issues only in family or private sphere. More broadly, it does not take into account industrial relations. In order to develop a thorough analysis of women's councils, the complexity of the relation between women and state and subsequently, the gendered division of labor, the Soviet modernity needs to be reconsidered, including industrial development as bringing about the commodification of labor. Only doing so it is possible to understand the complexity of the relation between the women and the state, regarding women not only as representatives of family and the private sphere, but also as fully subsumed participants of Soviet labor market.

2.2 Literature Review

In present-day Lithuanian public and scholarly discourse the modernity of Soviet Union is hardly ever on the table. The anti-Bolshevik paradigm is the dominant model when

²¹Elena Zhidkova, "Family, Divorce, Comrades' Courts: Soviet Family and Public Organizations During the Thaw," in *And They Lived Happily Ever after : Norms and Everyday Practices of Family and Parenthood in Russia and Central Europe*, ed. Helene Carlbäck, Yulia Gradska, and Zhanna Kravchenko (Budapest ; New York : Central European University Press, 2012), 47–65.

²²Zhidkova, "Family, Divorce, Comrades' Courts: Soviet Family and Public Organizations During the Thaw," 53.

considering women's organizations and women's participation in public institutions and organizations, their role during Soviet times is hardly ever seriously considered or investigated. If women's organizations and participation are considered, then the stereotypical perspective is reproduced. One example taken from the limited scholarly literature where women's councils or soviet women are mentioned demonstrates how the activities of women's councils were perceived as pure mirrors of Communist Party:

The Women's Council was controlled by the Communist Party, and it embodied the façade ideology of the Soviet regime. It presented the same illusions put forth in Soviet propaganda – that is, “The citizens of the Soviet Union are equal; happily living in a prosperous country and struggling for peace and a better future.”²³

In her subchapter “Women's Organizations” Marija A. Pavilionienė expressed her content about thirty-three women's organizations being established during the short time after independence of Lithuania. She claimed that it is an impressive number if to compare it with the Women's Council in Soviet past.²⁴ Pavilionienė seemed to ignore women's councils/zhensoveti that were practically everywhere “in almost every factory, every office, and every institution.”²⁵ Another example for this approach which disregards women's input into the development of Soviet society can be found in the book of “Women in Transition”²⁶ where women economists, activists, politicians and sociologists have written about the situation of women and their activism after Lithuania gained the independence from Soviet Union. In the book there is a lot of comparative analysis on Soviet Union and the situation around 1998. Almost in every article the repetition of the same phrases can be found in describing the situation of women in Soviet Lithuania. Women were not emancipated, the double, or even triple, burden was carried by exhausted women in all Communist nations, the state simply used the labor force of women for their industrial project.²⁷

²³ Marija Aušra Pavilionienė, “Moving Forward: Women's Studies and Organizations,” in *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, ed. Suzanne LaFont (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 107.

²⁴ Pavilionienė, 107.

²⁵ Rima Praspaliauskienė, “Women's Activism in Lithuania: 1945-1985,” in *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger, and Elisabeth Frysak, vol. 13, L'Homme Schriften/ Reihe Zur Feministischen Geschichtswissenschaft (Böhlau, 2006).

²⁶ Suzanne LaFont, ed., *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 1998.

²⁷ LaFont, 4.

In the introduction's subchapter on women's activism the editor Suzanne LaFont of the same book, mentioned in the previous paragraph, asserted that women's public participation was degraded into a mere representation of women "within the context of totalitarianism" after Soviet Union took over the power.²⁸ If to take Giedre Purvaneckiene's subchapter in the same book "Lithuanian Women and Soviet Regime"²⁹ in her article the late Soviet period is only mentioned within the context of the lack of food and other goods in the shops. The problem raised by prominent women's sociologist in terms of how problematic was for women to attain the necessary products for family to survive was certainly highly relevant for women in Soviet Lithuania.³⁰ Nevertheless there is not even a slightest reconsideration of periodization of Soviet Union in the book generally, and the glasnost or perestroika are never mentioned. Periodization and change over time are important in writing Soviet history (as well as in any other historical analysis) which could have helped to contextualize the lack of the products in the stores, the double burden and women's participation in politics and in public.

Irina Novikova, another scholar who has written about women in Soviet Lithuania, is indebted to this scholarly tradition when generalizing about women's activism in Soviet Lithuania.³¹ In her article "History, National Belonging, and Women's Movements in the Baltic Countries" the time after the 1940s in Lithuania is represented in a uniform manner as decades of the mere instrumentalization of women's role and marginalization in the social and economic spheres.³²

Finally, I managed to find just one historical text written by Rima Praspaliauskiene where *zhensovety* or women's councils are mentioned and their relevance is acknowledged in passing. The author mostly discusses the work of the Women's Committee in the 1950s and briefly describes the work of women's councils in later Soviet years:

²⁸ Lafont, 14.

²⁹ Giedrė Purvaneckienė, "Women in the Domestic Domain," in *Women in Transition: Voices from Lithuania*, ed. Suzanne LaFont, 1998, 51.

³⁰ Purvaneckienė, 52.

³¹ Irina Novikova, "History, National Belonging, and Women's Movements in the Baltic Countries," in *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger, and Elisabeth Frysak, vol. 13, L'Homme Schriften/ Reihe Zur Feministischen Geschichtswissenschaft (Böhlau, 2006).

³² Novikova, 147.

Women's Councils had their ups and downs in Soviet Lithuania, and they were determined by the position of the Communist Party which limited the activities and initiatives of Women's Councils by certain regulations, thus creating an atmosphere of political non-involvement.³³

Praspaliauskiene acknowledges that women were largely participating in public social life by engaging with activities in women's councils, developing ideas about the improvement of women's material and emotional conditions of living in Soviet Union.³⁴ In this sense Praspaliauskiene's research is an exception which can be used as a starting point for the wider exploration of the women's organizations in Soviet Lithuania. Her work is helpful in that it indicates the location of the most important documents related to women's lives and activism of Soviet times, and specifies that some documents like legislation projects and comments including protocols of women's congresses and women's councils can be found in Central State Archive and regional archives in Lithuania.³⁵

In this subchapter I have tried to demonstrate how important is to include the factor of Soviet industrialised relations into the analysis of Soviet society at large. In my thesis I analyse women's participation not only in women's councils but in trade unions as well. Since perestroika was the last and latest period of Soviet Union, the commodification of labour, the industrial relations have changed even more towards the market oriented economy. At the same time the trade unions gained additional significance, and against the background of the shortage of labour due to the demographics the relations between women and the state underwent significant change. I have shown that the history of Soviet modernity cannot be adequately grasped via explicit or implicit reference to the Marxian-Bolshevik politics and paradigm of the 1920s. From such a perspective, the time of perestroika would appear as just another period of stagnation after Brezhnev and a total collapse of the anti-individualist Bolshevik project of Soviet society, and women who were a part of the same society would simply appear to be, once again, oppressed and manipulated by state in a gender-specific manner.

³³ Praspaliauskienė, "Women's Activism in Lithuania: 1945-1985.", 305.

³⁴ Praspaliauskienė, 316.

³⁵ Praspaliauskienė, 305–6.

By contrast, this thesis will explore how women who were active in trade unions and women's councils during perestroika, negotiated their own position as workers and then women. In order to challenge the paradigms of stagnation (cultural anti-individualist Bolshevik paradigm and totalitarian paradigm) I will employ the concept of Anna Krylova who contends that the analysis of industrial development in Soviet Union has to be incorporated when the relations between the individual and the society are analysed. My thesis focuses on one particular group of individuals, namely women who were participating in factory level trade unions and women's councils in the city of Kaunas, as well as on national level. Inspired by Krylova's and Lampland's approach my intention in this thesis will contribute to our understanding of how women communicated and pursued their interests in trade unions and women's councils in Soviet Lithuania during perestroika.

2.3 On Composite Archival Research

In terms of a method, this thesis is based on a local study of several enterprises and women's councils operating in these sites. All of enterprises were located in the city of Kaunas, Lithuania. For my study I have used multiple archival and printed primary sources in order to define the relations between workers and women's councils, also the labor union and the management of enterprises. As a complementary source I have conducted an interview with a former chairman of a labor union at one of the enterprises that I have been studying.

Before I started my research on women's councils and trade unions for this thesis I had already established important knowledge about women's councils in Soviet Lithuania. I have done a research of smaller scope as my final paper for one of the courses at CEU. This research was grounded in an analysis of *Sovietinė moteris* (Soviet woman) magazine articles of 1988. To have a wider and more detailed analysis for my thesis I included the material from Kaunas State Regional Archive and periodicals such as all-trade union magazine of Soviet Lithuania *Darbas ir poilsis* (Work and leisure), weekly newspapers of different enterprises in Kaunas and a longer period of *Sovietinė Moteris* from 1985 to 1988. I chose Kaunas (which is my hometown) because it is one of the biggest cities of Lithuania that during Soviet times was widely industrialised area

where some of the major enterprises of the state were developed. My plan was to connect the periodicals I found at the library with the archival material of the same enterprises. When I started research on women's councils in the archive at first I found very few files of women's councils meetings. The situation was very different concerning the files of various trade unions. It seemed that most of the minutes of trade union meetings of different levels were carefully collected while the minutes of the women's councils meetings were scarce in terms of numbers and inconsistent.

In the archives I came to consider that I found some but not all the minutes of factories' women's councils meetings, since the documents giving the minutes were numbered with some of the numbers missing. Most of the time the files of women's councils on enterprise level went missing and they are absent around years of 1980. For example, the files of the wool production enterprise "Liteksas" which included the documents of women's councils from 1985 to 1987 are damaged and after that the folders would only consist of trade union minutes of meetings. In other folders containing material about individual factories the minutes of women's councils are included from 1986 until 1987. It is possible that women's councils in some organizations didn't exist any longer, and possibly they were replaced by the women's commission of the trade unions. There are, however, some exceptions when the minutes of women's councils are included until 1988. I also explored the folders with minutes of other organizations that were active in the factories just to compare how carefully the material was collected regarding meetings, plans and decisions in general. The volumes of the archival folders, I have to admit, were very diverse. For instance, the volume of the so called friendly courts – i.e. the institution responsible for investigating the case of thefts from the workplaces mostly, also the cases of alcohol consumption at the workplaces – was usually as thick as two hundred pages, while the folders containing the minutes of the women councils' meetings varied from 6 to 30 pages approximately.

In order to be able to grasp the nuances of communication and relations between the workers and various organizations operating in the factories or enterprises, I read all the archival files, paying attention to minor details. At first sight the minutes could seem very repetitive, especially the minutes of trade union meetings. However, reading carefully and with patience, it was possible to distinguish and comprehend how workers' speeches and complaints were included in the minutes of trade union or women's councils' meetings, what were the dominant names, what

were the professions of the workers who spoke etc. The nuances of relations became more evident when the additional sources such as weekly newspapers were compared with the archival material. For example, it is significant if a published article about the meeting of the trade union in the weekly newspaper does not refer to some parts of the minutes while other points are discussed in a more open manner.

I am aware that my research is very limited and at the time could seem inconclusive because sometimes I analysed only the minutes of women's councils of several factories/enterprises, while excluding the trade union files of the same factories. In the case of two enterprises I could analyze only the files of the trade unions because there were no files in the Archives regarding women's councils in these enterprises. This is the case for the wool production enterprise "Liteksas"; however, with regard to "Liteksas" I also analysed their weekly newspaper. The only case when I analysed and compared the minutes of women's councils and the weekly newspaper articles was in case of Kaunas synthetic fiber factory. Based on my research experience I can recommend to simultaneously analyze three types of sources pertaining to the same enterprise or factory: the trade union minutes of meetings, the women's councils' minutes and the weekly newspaper articles.

3. Trade unions, Women's Councils, and the Politics of Women's Work in late Soviet Lithuania: Backgrounds and context

3.1 Promises of Perestroika

The economic crises in early 1980 in the Soviet Union and associated stagnation in economic growth was read as a sign for the need of radical change.³⁶ In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev vocalized the issue and announced the beginning of perestroika, the time to boost the economy while also transforming the citizen's psychology to become an active participant of the society.³⁷ The grand project encompassed not only a change in the electoral system but also democratic reforms started in other complementary organizations, media, workplaces and social life. People were encouraged to be critical and talk openly about the problems in different spheres of life. The term *glasnost* was introduced to officially declare the new requirements for more transparency and new vigor of Communist Party to engage with the citizens of the Soviet Union. The purpose of glasnost was also for workers to be able "to elect their own factory directors and rectors of the institute."³⁸, learning that the problems and the solutions to them should be proposed by workers themselves.

Word *perestroika* in the literary sense means "restructuring", which gained political meaning in 1985 when Michail Gorbachev announced that the economic and political system cannot stay the same as before. After various speeches of Mr. Gorbachev perestroika became a title for his time of leading Communist Party of Soviet Union officially from 1985 till 1991. The restructuring of the Soviet political and economic system was based on several intersecting issues: the Soviet system of stratification rewarded power not according to the performance of the population; unfulfilled promises of the leading elite alienated the society from the party and the

³⁶Mary Buckley, *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

³⁷Buckley, 5.

³⁸Buckley, 5.

regime; the growth of middle-class was not “reflected in the official arena with power sharing, professional and political autonomy”³⁹. And most importantly, the Soviet economy was in decline, as Gorbachev himself described: “A kind of “braking mechanism” formed affecting social and economic development”⁴⁰.

Overall, the main focus of perestroika was on the economy which was seen as inefficient, unable to satisfy customers’ demands. Gorbachev saw it as a result of the backwardness in technology development and lack of workers’ discipline. Thus the restructuring was partially relying on so called “human factor” which was defined by Gorbachev (and his predecessors such as Yuri Andropov⁴¹) as a combination of measures to strengthen workers’ discipline, being achieved by developing what he refers to as ‘the initiative and self-activity of labour collectives’. Nevertheless, as Donald Filtzer claims, disciplining the working force was all-time project and struggle of Soviet Union ruling Party in general and it always failed⁴². The differentiation of wages was introduced again - a similar wage reform was attempted by Khrushchev in the 1950s. Wages during perestroika were supposed to be tied to the quality and intensity of the working day by introducing the “scientific-technical” norms of the day and establishing new state quality-control agency (Gospremka)⁴³. However the implementation of the reform was ineffective because of several reasons. First reason was labor shortage which became a huge problem during the late period of Soviet Union due to low demographics and lack of mechanization. Since labor force was free to change their workplaces, they used it as their bargaining tactics, for the same reason the managers of the Soviet enterprises were not fond of the reforms as much as their workers. The managers knew that if they start making changes in the system of wages, they will lose their most

39Bialer, “The Domestic and International Sources of Gorbachev’s Reforms.”286-287

40Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1987), 19.

41Andropov’s experiment/reform was to be achieved by setting up stable economic norms for the experimental enterprises and making individual wages and collective social provision highly dependent upon the end results of work, both with regard to quality and productivity.

42Donald Filtzer, “Labor Discipline, the Use of Work Time, and the Decline of the Soviet System, 1928-1991,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 50 (1996): 9.

43Donald Filtzer, 23.

needed workers who would be the main source to surpass the productions goals⁴⁴. But women workers were most often not in the group of workers who had a bargaining power:

Skilled workers, or even semiskilled workers with considerable experience and knowledge of production routines, could extract concessions which the less skilled, the less experienced, or those in less vital trades could not. This was most obvious in the case of women workers, who worked in industries and occupations where they had far less bargaining power with management than did men, and who therefore occupied the worst-paid jobs in the worst conditions.⁴⁵

The other “softer” methods regarding the “human factor”, in other words, workers’ discipline, were not very effective as well. The certain autonomy given to the workers’ collectives, i.e. the enterprise, were expected to give a major boost to the Soviet economy. Profits earned by the enterprise would be the only source of funds for the technical re-equipping of the enterprises and the development of social provision for the workforce. Gorbachev tried to reduce the central-plan indicators and the law that defined the rights of the enterprise and duties was introduced.⁴⁶ At the end all the reforms were resisted by both the workers and the enterprise management and their implementation was slowed by ministries⁴⁷. In general, perestroika meant to change a socialist economic system to increase the role of a market⁴⁸. According to Bob Arnot, the Soviet rulers had to decide at the end of the day whether they wanted to go towards a full market economy or to give full autonomy to the direct producers, the workers⁴⁹. However, today, the end of the perestroika is known to everyone and the path that Soviet Union took in 1991 was already independent from Lithuania, as it claimed independence from Soviet Union in 1990.

It is very complicated to define the changes in the Soviet economy during Perestroika for several reasons. Perestroika reforms concerning the economy and labor relations started changing in very slow pace. There was no intention to change or refuse the main principle of planned

⁴⁴Donald Filtzer, 22.

⁴⁵Donald Filtzer, “Labor Discipline, the Use of Work Time, and the Decline of the Soviet System, 1928-1991.”

⁴⁶Leggett, “Gorbachev’s Reform Program,” 37.

⁴⁷Bob Arnot, *Controlling Soviet Labour: Experimental Change from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1988), 261.

⁴⁸Leggett, “Gorbachev’s Reform Program,” 36.

⁴⁹Arnot, *Controlling Soviet Labour: Experimental Change from Brezhnev to Gorbachev*, 261.

economy - the ruling Communist Party cadres remained the main planners and decision makers – nationwide, on the local level, and in the enterprises. Thus, the status quo was barely challenged by Gorbachev. The resistance to changes existed even within the party itself. However, the process that couldn't be stopped in terms of changes was related to Gorbachev's *glasnost* principle or, as he defined it, "democratization of the atmosphere in society".⁵⁰ The *glasnost* effect was felt in Lithuania too in terms of the growing amount of critique addressing the issues of institutional activities that were ruled by the party and state apparatuses.⁵¹

3.2 Perestroika as Democratisation. Woman Question

Women employed in industry and farming became a universal phenomenon in the Soviet Union by 1985: 89.7 per cent of all Soviet women of working age (from 16 to 54) participated fully in the labor force.⁵² In his time during the 1950s and 1960s Khrushchev admitted that women, as a separate social group from men, had their own needs and problems therefore he encouraged lectures, conferences, and discussion for women and the development of *zhensovet*y for women's councils.⁵³ Under Brezhnev's rule more attention was given to women's double burden when it became clear that the housework and childcare prevented women from being good and disciplined workforce.⁵⁴

The demographics of Soviet Union started to decline already in 1960s and kept dropping during the decades that followed. The party more and more focused on the family factor. Until the mid-1960s it was assumed that the increased participation of women in economic and political life would have a direct and favorable impact on their role within the family.⁵⁵ The childcare issues, the rising percentage of divorces, single parenthood became one of the biggest concerns during perestroika. Gorbachev openly spoke about women who "no longer have enough time to perform

⁵⁰Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, 75.

⁵¹Arvydas Anušauskas, ed., "Paskutinės Pastangos Sustiprinti Sovietų Režimą [Last Efforts to Strengthen Soviet Regime]," in *Lietuva 1940 - 1990, Okupuotos Lietuvos Istorija [Lithuania 1940-1990, History of Occupied Lithuania]* (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2007), 553.

⁵²Joseph Shapiro, "The Industrial Labour Force," in *Perestroika and Women*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14–38.

⁵³Buckley, "The 'Woman Question' in the Contemporary Soviet Union," 266.

⁵⁴Buckley, 254.

⁵⁵Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women, Work, and Family in the Soviet Union* (Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe, c1982, n.d.), xxxii.

their everyday duties at home – housework, the upbringing of children and the creation of a good family atmosphere.”⁵⁶At the same time in special Party conference in June 1988, Gorbachev emphasized the importance of women's political activity as such, beyond the restricted realm of the *zhensoviety*.⁵⁷ Women’s low participation in top political positions was challenged, Gorbachev himself officially regretted the low numbers of women in the high ranks of the party.⁵⁸ Thus there was the contradiction inscribed not only in the economic reform, when the market economy had to be “somehow” combined with the planned economy, but as well with Gorbachev’s approach to the woman question. On one hand, he wanted the traditional family roles to be sustained and cherished, on the other, he stressed the lack of women’s participation in politics.

Nevertheless, the democratization (*demokratizatsiia*) process allowed women to articulate their own issues in workplaces, family, healthcare system, etc.⁵⁹ *Zhensovety* or women’s councils were considered as a starting point for women to be engaged in the politics and to promote their own candidates to hold 75 seats on the Congress of People’s Deputies.⁶⁰ Soviet Women’s Committee was coordinating women’s councils’ work which meant that internal issues gained higher prominence throughout the USSR than in previous times before perestroika.⁶¹

3.3 Trade Unions

Trade union committees should have teeth, and not be convenient partners for management. Bad working conditions at some enterprises, a poor health service, substandard locker rooms – trade union organizations seem to have got used to all of this.⁶²

The infringement of labour laws was a regular phenomenon throughout the whole existence of Soviet Union. The Soviet Labour Code had a separate section for protection of women’s work. It included such articles as preventing women from working heavy-load work or work under

⁵⁶Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, 117.

⁵⁷Maxine Molyneux, “The ‘Women Question’ in the Age of Perestroika,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 10 (1991): 97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4065459>.

⁵⁸Buckley, *Perestroika and Soviet Women*, 59.

⁵⁹Buckley, 52.

⁶⁰Genia K. Browning, “The Zhensovety Revisited,” in *Perestroika and Women*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99.

⁶¹Browning, 99.

⁶²Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, 114.

hazardous conditions, assigning women to easier work, limiting night shifts for women or prohibiting night shifts for pregnant women and women with small children. Despite a commitment to various forms of protective legislation, women had always performed heavy labour even under hazardous and poisonous conditions. In factories women frequently carried far heavier loads than permitted by law, and worked in unsanitary, polluted and noisy conditions.⁶³ Soviet Labour Code of 1970 functioned, among other things, as a tool to curb workers' turnover in the plants and to impose work discipline through different systems of incentives as well as punishment.⁶⁴ In order to discipline the workers the management ranks had to be taken into control.

The unions were made into main advisors and supervisors of the management under the Soviet Labour Legislation. The Labour Code during perestroika was not radically changed, the major changes were done only in 1988, the new term of work collective was introduced which gained a lot of rights including, for instance, the election of the director of enterprise and his/her dismissal. From 1988 March 30th work collective became a “full-fledged host in the company, [which] independently solves all issues of production and social development.”⁶⁵ Some changes were also made regarding the protection of pregnant women and mothers of children. The main change was related to women who raised children alone or raised the child with disabilities. The trade unions in Soviet Labour Code were assigned to be responsible for protecting workers' rights, for overseeing and controlling compliance with labor laws and labor protection rules and for controlling workers' apartment-household services. Moreover, the trade unions managed state social insurance, as well as sanatoriums, prophylactics and rest houses, cultural and educational, tourism and sports facilities at their disposal.⁶⁶ Gorbachev's approach was again to remind the trade unions their true function in the workplace.

However, trade unions in Soviet Union were part of very complex bureaucratic system. The chairmen of trade unions were accountable and had to deal not only with the Communist Party

⁶³Maxine Molyneux, “The ‘Women Question’ in the Age of Perestroika,” 93.

⁶⁴Emily Clark Brown, “Fundamental Soviet Labor Legislation,” *ILR Review* 26, no. 2 (January 1973): 782, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001979397302600203>.

⁶⁵“Lietuvos Respublikos Darbo Įstatymų Kodeksas [Labor Code of the Republic of Lithuania],” Article 268, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.20470/kGuywFLvYJ>.

⁶⁶“LIETUVOS TARYBŲ SOCIALISTINĖS RESPUBLIKOS DARBO ĮSTATYMŲ KODEKSAS,” accessed June 10, 2019, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.20470?jfwid=71xt7tuw0>.

representative, the management and Young Communist League of their plants but also “work within the trade union bureaucracy.”⁶⁷ All the unions functioned under the supervision of the All-Union Central Trade Union Council (VTsSPS). The enterprise would have the chairman of the trade union, the presidium which met every other week to discuss more urgent problems and the committee which met once a month. Together with volunteer activists the members of the committees would be running various commissions responsible for production, social insurance, labor protection, cultural, women’s matters (women’s councils) etc.⁶⁸ In accordance with the USSR Union Laws, the Trade Union Local Committee of the factory had multiple rights and obligations including the economic planning, the wage system, the norms system, the social funds planning together with the administration of the enterprise.⁶⁹ The local trade union helped to develop invention and rationalization in every way in the factory, in general it had to show an interest in the process of production. All the decisions the trade union were taking had to be under supervision of factory’s administration/management.

In actual reality, as I will demonstrate the protection of workers’ rights, their working conditions and the general atmosphere in the enterprise depended very much on the relations between the management, the chairman of the trade union and Party officials. The manager had a choice to cooperate with trade union and together improve workers’ conditions, but he could also try to co-opt the chairman of the trade union and make an alliance with Party official against the interests of the workers, or he could be against the trade union in order to reach the final goal at any cost - the production quotas.⁷⁰ These relations varied from one enterprise to the other, but the main aim of all three main officials – i.e. the manager, party officials and the chairman of the labor union - running small or gigantic enterprises was “to stay in the good graces of their constituencies.”⁷¹ In other words the balance between the performance of the factory and the living standards of its workers had to be worked out in such a way that none of the positions of the so

⁶⁷Blair A. Ruble, *Soviet Trade Unions : Their Development in the 1970s*, Soviet and East European Studies (Cambridge [Eng.] : Cambridge University Press, c1981, 1981), 46.

⁶⁸Ruble, 49.

⁶⁹ “LIETUVOS TARYBŲ SOCIALISTINĖS RESPUBLIKOS DARBO ĮSTATYMŲ KODEKSAS.”

⁷⁰Ruble, 56.

⁷¹Ruble, 63.

called “troika” of the factory would be questioned by the higher officials who elect them every once and then.

3.4 Women’s Councils

As far as I can suggest from my findings women’s councils or *zhensoveti* were an overall multi-layered system ranging from national state level down to district, city, and factory levels. The system was reformed and remolded several times, first it was established by Krushchev and then intensified by Gorbachev. I will delineate the activities of women’s councils in this subchapter to point out the relevance of it, in principle, for workplace-related “women’s issues” in general and on local levels.

Women’s councils, or as they are called *zhensoveti* during perestroika were concentrated on local issues, regional or structural problems regarding women’s issues. Their functions varied from mediation between family and school to negotiations between workers and managers in the factory⁷². Regarding the main functions of *zhensoveti*, Racioppi and See claim that women’s councils did not have one coordinated agenda.⁷³ However, Genia Browning pretty well categorizes the main functions of *zhensoveti* as she claims they had four main sections of their activity: mass work, ideological and moral education of women, improving living and working conditions, strengthening the family and raising its role in the education of the younger generation.⁷⁴

When Genia Browning writes about *zhensoveti* in Ivanovo district she confirms that the issues in the workplace “have always been of concern to the *zhensoveti*.”⁷⁵ Women wanted the night shifts to be taken off, they demanded shorter working hours but the threat of unemployment was not addressed, the author contends.⁷⁶ As I have already mentioned, perestroika was primarily an economic project concentrating on effective solutions. One of them, according to Joseph Shapiro, was the mechanization of unskilled labor ; most unskilled women workers worked under

⁷²Linda Racioppi and Katherine See, *Women’s Activism in Contemporary Russia* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1997), 109.

⁷³Racioppi and See, 109.

⁷⁴Browning, “The Zhensoveti Revisited,” 100.

⁷⁵Browning, 105.

⁷⁶Browning, 105.

very harsh conditions.⁷⁷ Shapiro also claims that women were encouraged to come back home, that the radical economic reform of perestroika coincided with the overall political agenda for women to leave the workplace in order to consolidate the family.⁷⁸ However, I argue that the intention behind the *zhensoveti*'s work with the families while trying to supplement the social role of the state, was to alleviate the double burden for women to be able to stay at work.

The re-activation and expansion of *zhensoveti* during perestroika in Soviet Union were met with passive resistance from other organizations led by men in the workplaces. The indifference to women's organizing at workplaces remained intact within the trade unions, the soviets, and the CPSU through 1980s.⁷⁹ The deficiency of resources and the lack of power to change certain legislation or even to enforce the existent laws of labor⁸⁰ regarding women had a reasonable influence on the activities of *zhensoveti*. However, neither Browning nor Racioppi and See fully explore the connection between the struggles of *zhensoveti*, Gorbachev's politics of family and the reluctance of male counterparts in trade unions and workplaces to change their views towards women.

In order to consolidate the family *zhensoveti* had several main strategies, also it depended upon the local statistics and the status of *zhensoveti* in the area. They proposed the counseling services for families to prevent divorce, they gathered data about single parent families, the 'troubled' families "to co-ordinate activity with that of the administration, schools, and social organizations."⁸¹ They were also supervising the schools for children to make sure that teachers and parents were in the right direction, that they were informed about the education process and behavior of their children. The elderly and especially the older retired women were assisted by *zhensoveti* in their homes and public events.⁸²

⁷⁷Shapiro, "The Industrial Labour Force," 29.

⁷⁸Browning, "The Zhensoveti Revisited," 106.

⁷⁹Browning, 101.

⁸⁰Browning, 101.

⁸¹Browning, 06.

⁸²Browning, 109.

3.5 Conclusion

Concerning my thesis it is important to emphasize how perestroika reflected the latest development of industrial relations in Soviet Union. First, Gorbachev's reforms meant a further turn of Soviet economy towards market economy as the competition between the enterprises were encouraged by granting the relative autonomy to separate industrial units. Second, the democratization process encouraged the citizens, namely workers, to be more open and opiniated about the politics of Communist party, which, as I will further demonstrate, also affected the relations between the local organizations and workers in the factories. The work policies in the factories depended on the power dynamics between the management and the union of the factory, and to some degree the personality of the chairman of the trade union. In some respects Gorbachev granted more power to the trade unions by requiring unions to give more attention towards infringements of labor law and the miserable working conditions. He also gave attention to *Zhensovery* claiming that it was the organization that could deliver a balance between women's duties at work and home. In my thesis I will investigate the contradictions and interpretations of women workers regarding the gender and work politics of perestroika.

4. Women and Trade Unions: methods and goals

In this chapter I will discuss the position and role of women in the trade unions in Soviet Lithuania. According to Genia K. Browning who wrote about women's councils in Soviet union, women were encouraged to participate in the economy by women's councils which worked as "a crucial factor in raising female consciousness."⁸³ But was the raising of female consciousness really a priority for women at the time? In my chapter I will analyse the women's tactics and activities in other organizations than women's councils, namely, the trade unions. I will ask, how women used trade unions to promote the social work that trade unions had to do in order to better the conditions of work and social benefits. If women wanted to have better working conditions, expand the social services – what possibilities, within the framework of trade union, did they have for negotiations? And who took various positions in the trade union - what effect had the mass of workers on union official, and more precisely, in factories where the majority of workers were women, such as textile factories. My main argument in this chapter is constructed around the insight that trade unions were used widely by women to bargain for their conditions not only as workers but also as women who were juggling parental responsibilities. These women continued to be the main caretakers of the family and at the same time had to do most of the unmechanized labour in the factories.⁸⁴ I will focus on the social services provided for workers by the trade unions, their priorities, relations with management and workers, in Soviet Lithuania and several particular factories in Kaunas.

I will ground my chapter on the interview I made with my uncle, Raimondas Bagdžiūnas, who was a chairman of the weaving workshop trade union which belonged to enterprise of wool production enterprise "Liteksas" (enterprise "Liteksas"). In relation to his answers I will analyse the meetings, conferences protocols of two factories in Kaunas, silk textile factory "Kauno audiniai" (Kaunas fabrics) and the enterprise "Liteksas". As well as the umbrella magazine of all unions in Soviet Lithuania *Darbas ir poilsis* (*Work and Leisure*) and the weekly newspaper of one

⁸³ Genia K. Browning, *Women and Politics in the USSR : Consciousness Raising and Soviet Women's Groups* (Sussex : Wheatsheaf Books ; New York : St. Martin's Press, 1987., 1987).

⁸⁴ Browning.

of the factories *Liteksietis* (*Liteksas Worker*). Both of the factories belonged to the light industry branch where most of the workers were women.

As Ruble stated in his book on Soviet Trade Unions, in the various enterprises and factories trade unions had very diverse relations with the management and it was up to them if they wanted to be on the side of the workers or on the side of the management.⁸⁵ The relations between the workers and the unions depended on the structure of the factory, the size of the company and the union's relations with the management and administration. While the smaller factory, in this case "Kauno audiniai", seemed to be closer and more aware of the regular workers problems, the other, "Liteksas" enterprise, was acting in the top down manner. At the same time it seemed that the head of the joint trade union in enterprise "Liteksas" had closer relations with the directors and approached the foremen - managers of different workshops - directly. I will analyse the effects that this kind of difference had on the ability for women to bargain and to be heard.

4.1 Social Services

Almost at the end of the interview I asked my interviewee, Raimondas Bagdžiūnas, about women's council, whether he remembered anything about their existence in the enterprise "Liteksas". His answer was rather short and vague: "There was something but I don't remember..."⁸⁶ I couldn't find the protocols of women's council of "Liteksas" at the time of perestroika in the archive as well. What I managed to find was only the short notice in 1988 protocol of the union that "women's council has to be eliminated".⁸⁷ I also asked Raimondas about the main organizers of different factory celebrations and sports competitions since I was already informed about the roles of women's councils in the factories and their preoccupation with organizing different events and festivities for workers. He told me, that the management together

⁸⁵ Blair A. Ruble, *Soviet Trade Unions : Their Development in the 1970s*, Soviet and East European Studies (Cambridge [Eng.] : Cambridge University Press, 1981), 86.

⁸⁶ Bagdžiūnas, Interview with Chairman of Weaving Workshop Trade Union, Kaunas.

⁸⁷ "“Liteksas” profsąjungos prezidiumo posėdžio protokolai Nr. 55 [“Liteksas” Trade Union Presidium Meeting Protocols No 55].”

with the committee of the joint union decided how and what to celebrate. He also added that majority of workers in the enterprise were women who would be active in the trade union.⁸⁸

4.1.1 Leisure and Preferences

To my question about the function of the unions and, more precisely, about the union of weaving workshop, where he was a chairman of trade union, Raimondas answered that they as union were responsible for organizing working people's holiday. His very first memory that he told me when I explained to him about my research emphasizing the *perestroika* time was also about searching for location for workers' vacation time:

From 1985 it was not bad. We even had resort house in Palūšė⁸⁹. Not very big. it was the time when there was a proposition for companies which were financially stronger to buy and repair old mansions. So we would travel around Aukštaitija looking for those mansions, those mansions used to be built in very beautiful places but we decided that it will be too expensive to renovate a mansion for such purposes. Then we decided to buy a small house in Palūšė and to expand it, it wasn't very big, around 25 places with the lake nearby.⁹⁰

The priority and emphasis on the organization of the vacations for workers was not very present in enterprise's joint union committee protocols of conferences and meetings. There is a tendency from 1986 in unions' documents and in the public discourse to repeat that the social problems should be a priority for the unions, that the concerns about the "human factor" have to guide activities of the trade unions. Statement that was also emphasized by Mikhail Gorbachev during the XXVII Communist Party Summit where he stated that human factor is crucial for the

⁸⁸ Bagdžiūnas, Interview with Chairman of Weaving Workshop Trade Union, Kaunas.

⁸⁹ A tourist village in the Aukštaitija National Park in eastern Lithuania.

⁹⁰ Raimondas Bagdžiūnas, Interview with Chairman of Weaving Workshop Trade Union, Kaunas, interview by Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, April 10, 2019 Kaunas.

effective production in 1986.⁹¹ In the magazine of trade unions “Work and Leisure” the trade union of the factory that was producing sanitary ware, is criticised for having poor resting conditions:

The factory does not have a good sport, its recreation base (the old one has lived its age), a pioneer camp. Today, these social objects are necessary for the collective of thousand workers, especially as the work is difficult, harmful to health.⁹²

The workers’ conditions were also considered in “Liteksas” union’s protocol of 1987 in the remarks on the state of “social objects”. It claimed that although the changing rooms for men were renovated or the women’s hygiene room was installed, there were still some parts missing for improvement of workers’ living/resting conditions as, for example, sport’s hall was not fully equipped. Reference to the vacation home that Raimondas mentioned in the interview, unfortunately, is absent from the union protocols in these years.⁹³ It is because the allocations of holiday vouchers were assigned to lower ranks of trade unions⁹⁴ and the improvement of the holiday facilities were relegated to the deputy of general director of “Liteksas” who was responsible for social affairs⁹⁵. Besides that, the trade unions could decide how to organize workers leisure time and whether or not to improve it. The preferences of how should workers spend their free time was also not quite in workers’ own hands. For example, the head of the trade union of “Liteksas” was very enthusiastic about the sport activities of the workers in the factory, in his article of *Liteksietis* about the Spartakiade (sports festivity), he even notified: “Meanwhile, the participants from the main company looked pitifully: dressed as they fit, the numbers on the T-shirts missing, the rest of them put the numbers using...chalk.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress*, p. 49, accessed May 27, 2019,

<http://archive.org/details/PoliticalReportOfTheCPSUCentralCommitteeToThe27thPartyCongress>.

⁹² Danutė Žvirblytė, “Įvertino Patenkinamai, Bet Išsiskirstė Nepatenkinti [Evaluated Satisfactorily but Left Unhappy],” *Darbas Ir Poilsis [Work and Leisure]*, no. 12 (1986): 3.

⁹³ The role of the vacation home within the broader context of the focus on social questions thus needs further clarification.

⁹⁴ Audronė Vaitkutė, “Kodėl Neatsigręžiame į Žmogų? [Why Don’t We Turn To Man],” no. 25 (June 24, 1986).

⁹⁵ Ignas Preibys, “Socialinių Poreikių Tenkinimui - Nuolatinį Dėmesį [For Social Needs - Constant Attention],” *Liteksietis [“Liteksas” Worker]*, no. 18 (May 5, 1987).

⁹⁶ Valdis Žindulis, “Spartakiada Naujųjų Išvakarėse [New Years Eve Spartakiade],” *Liteksietis [“Liteksas” Worker]*, no. 1 (January 7, 1986).

The head of the other enterprise, who had her own column as a diary in all-union in Soviet Lithuania magazine *Darbas ir poilsis*, had different focus than the enthusiast of sports. When she wrote about the leisure, she turned her attention to the pioneers' camp (summer camp for workers' children), she was concerned that the program of the camp was too boring for the children as she exemplified by the case when one woman worker complained to her that her child was refusing to go to the camp every summer⁹⁷. Thus the priorities and the hobbies of the top-level unionists could have had an effect on the way how the union approached the matters of their responsibility. For example, the head of the union in "Liteksas" could have promoted ideas about stadiums and sports halls and make it as a priority on the list of social expenditure. While writer of the diary could have been much more in favor of improving the camp for children and let women workers have more free time in summer assuring that the child will not come back suddenly after couple days in the camp.

4.1.2 Complaints and Mediation

The quality of the union's work was also judged by higher ranks of the unions according to how seriously (and sincerely) the complaints of workers were taken and considered. Rima Bugelienė, the head of the bread production enterprise, who, as I have already mentioned, had her own column in the magazine *Darbas ir poilsis*, emphasized the responsibility of trade union to be attentive and open to the opinions of workers: "After all, you should listen and swallow those bitter pills quietly, tell about the literature, agree, talk. Otherwise, the worker will seek justice elsewhere - the conflict will deepen and expand"⁹⁸. Bugelienė was precise and open about the function of the trade unions as a mediator, the institution that accepted the complaints from workers but not necessarily acted upon it. Therefore it could have been a case that women were allowed and encouraged to take the high positions in the trade unions in Soviet Union as good listeners and reconcilers at the same time.

⁹⁷ Regina Bugelienė, "Dienoraštis [Diary]," *Darbas Ir Poilsis [Work and Leisure]*, no. 3 (201) (January 3, 1986).

⁹⁸ Bugelienė.

If to take “Kauno audiniai” factory, where in 1986 women was elected as the head of the trade union, in the protocol of trade union presidium meeting of 1986⁹⁹ there is a complaint of workers which included into agenda the disrespectful behavior of one foreman. According to workers’ anonymous complaint, the foreman of the workshop ignored his workers’ concerns on social problems. On the other hand the foreman explained to the union that workers were actually dissatisfied with the reforms concerning employees’ discipline therefore they were complaining about the changes. The party committee secretary in the meeting suggested rather formally that social problems should be solved by including the public organizations. After both persons spoke up, the resolution was adopted instructing the foreman of the workshop to be more attentive towards “bad microclimate”. Also, the resolution stated, that the heads of various workshops should take special courses of production management. However the social problems of the workers were not mentioned in the protocol and the resolution was written in more advisory manner. The second point of the resolution was related to the broader training of the foremen.¹⁰⁰ In this case the union of “Kauno audiniai” treated the complaint of the workers in similar way as the administration of the factory would treat it - meaning that the foreman should take a stronger/better grip on his brigade.

In “Liteksas” the position of the union’s chairman seems at first sight more antagonistic towards the foremen of the workshops and the administration of other factories belonging to the enterprise of “Liteksas”. In his speech about the collective agreement¹⁰¹, it’s results in 1986 and the future changes in 1987, the head of the trade union Valdis Žindulis pointed out that the administration and union committee of two factories were not paying close attention to the *buitinės* conditions of the workers. By *buitinės* he meant the changing rooms and the rest rooms for workers, which were described as shabby and dirty. He spelled out the names of the directors: “Today we need to say it straight that the directors R. Juozapavičius and R. Žvironas did not give attention to solving those questions, they concentrated only on the production and planning.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ “‘Kauno Audiniai’ profsąjungos prezidiumo protokolas Nr.7 [Kaunas Fabrics Trade Union Presidium Protocol No 7],” December 25, 1986, R-325 ap.2 b.367, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ “‘Litekso’ Darbo Kolektyvo Konferencijos Protokolas Nr. 2 [“Liteksas” Workers’ Conference Protocol No 2],” 1987, R-324 ap. 2 b. 255, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹⁰² Ibid

Later in his speech Žindulis talked about the tradition in the association for the managers of workshops, brigades, factory collectives to have meetings to discuss workers' interests with workers themselves. However not everyone, according to the chairman, was eager to stick to this tradition: "The administration of the workshop, the head G. Mačiulskienė does not conduct meetings with the workers, she does not inform and doesn't discuss with the collective the main tasks, she does not hear out workers' comments and requests."¹⁰³ Then he turned to the negligence of trade committee of the factory and rhetorically asked: "Was it not possible to correct the work of the workshop administration on the spot?"¹⁰⁴ The fact that the head of the trade union in "Liteksas" was not afraid to openly criticize persons in leading positions probably signals that he was in good relationship with the director of the enterprise and he also could be the important figure in the upper level of the trade unions. Raimondas Bagdžiūnas in the interview also noted that the whole union of light industry was very strong in general, especially in Kaunas city.¹⁰⁵

The expressive speeches create an image of the strong union which not only helped administration to manage the production and provided social services but also could voice an open critique to the management of the factory. In comparison with the "Kauno audiniai" gentle interaction with the foreman, the head of the trade union in "Liteksas" enterprise makes the impression of the influential man, however his rhetorical approach could have been an opportunistic gesture to show of in front of the main administration of the enterprise. Whereas the case of "Kauno audiniai" trade union could mean that the head of the union was in the position which did not allow to be as disdainful as Žindulis. In the next subchapter I will focus on the case which demonstrates how women in "Liteksas" used the sphere of complaint to actually advance their own conditions in the enterprise.

4.2 Women Bargaining

In the minutes of "Kauno audiniai" ¹⁰⁶ the special case of the canteen is discussed. Apparently 80 workers got poisoned from food in the newly built canteen. The document of

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Reference to interview

¹⁰⁶ "'Kaunas Audiniai' Profesinės Sąjungos Prezidiumo Protokolas Nr. 4 ['Kaunas Fabrics' Trade Union Presidium Protocol No 4]," April 26, 1988, R-325 ap.2 b.382 l. 18, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

minutes consists of many complaints from foremen of the workshops, also the doctor of the factory. The workers were unsatisfied with variety and quantity of food and drinks. The workers in the night shifts could not get hot tea or even bread, one of the worker mentioned they had to eat schnitzel with sour cream instead of bread.¹⁰⁷ The matter was taken seriously, the minutes of the meeting registered 8 complaints from workers, including the factory doctor. The ex-chairman in the interview also admitted that people went to complain about the canteen to them, to the union.¹⁰⁸ But how seriously were the complaints of “Liteksas” workers taken?

First I have to come back to the interview with R. Bagdžiūnas, who also indicated that “well, because it was “Liteksas” who was in charge“, they [the main administration and the trade union] would send us their demands”. The speech of “Laisvė“ (Freedom) factory’s fore(wo)man of equipment is added as an attachment to the protocol of “Liteksas” workers’ conference¹⁰⁹. A. Puškorienė asked the association to provide her factory with the materials for improving the premises for workers in the factory where they rest and exercise. The fore(wo)man also asked for the proper bus for the factory workers to be able to come to the festivities and other activities organized in Kaunas: „Thus on behalf of the collective, we ask you to find an opportunity to assign a bus or a minibus for our factory, furthest from the association center”.¹¹⁰ The speech demonstrates the dependency of the other factories on the central allocation of funds and materials of “Litksas” enterprise. My interviewee also confirmed that the biggest questions, reforms and funding questions were already preordained by the central management of the multi-site enterprise and the head of the “Liteksas” trade union:

The decisions and orders were already planned in the yearly report meetings. In those meetings we could hear the plans what to do for the next year. But everything was more related to the production, so the biggest vote was made by the authority, all the directors. You [as representative of the union] would go to ask for money from [your factory] director to allocate money for one thing or another.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Bagdžiūnas, Interview with Chairman of Weaving Workshop Trade Union, Kaunas.

¹⁰⁹ ““Litekso” Darbo Kolektyvo Konferencijos Protokolas Nr. 2 [“Liteksas” Workers’ Conference Protocol No 2].”

¹¹⁰ Ibid

Puškorienė's requests were officially answered in the weekly newspaper of *Liteksietis* ("Liteksas" worker) by the head of the "Liteksas" trade union V. Žindulis, in an article titled "After Analysis of Delegates' Comments"¹¹¹. He stated that such requests should be discussed in the factory's collective and that the funding for the transport should be allocated by the administration of the factory "Laisvė". At the end of the article there is a critical statement by the enterprise's union committee concluding that, judging from the questions and requests that were raised in the general conference of work collectives from the various "Liteksas" enterprise factories, it "shows that there is still too little talk with people in the collectives, the critical analysis is weak, single decisions and resolutions are not presented to the public."¹¹² Puškorienė's requests could be seen as a pressure for her factory's management to be more attentive to the union's and workers' needs. However the final resolution of the "Liteksas" workers' conference¹¹³ was included in the joint union's protocols but none of the requests from Puškorienė were considered.¹¹⁴ There was one order to factory's "Laisvė" director to finally make its sports center ready for use. Nevertheless the publication in the newspaper could be also used as union's tactics to push the management of "Laisvė" to have a dialogue with their workers.

Very critical article in *Liteksietis*¹¹⁵ could confirm that "Liteksas" union strong and caring position in terms of workers' needs and complaints was only rhetorical, and did not go beyond paper. The opinion of the worker who also belonged to the trade union and the words of the reporter in the article merged into one to manifest that there is not enough attention to the workers in "Liteksas". First the promises that the union of "Liteksas" were not kept were pointed out by the worker: "(“Liteksas”, A.B.) union's committee promised to give every worker a towel, and did not keep the promises. The same is for toilet soap, ostensibly the application is missing, and the soap would be delivered... It's been a year and we still haven't got it."¹¹⁶ The services that factory

¹¹¹ "Išanalizavus Delegatų Pastabas [After Analysis of Delegates' Comments]," *Liteksietis* ["Liteksas" Worker], February 23, 1987, 8 edition.

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Workers' conference was a general meeting organized by trade union committee with workers from various workshops and factories which belonged to „Liteksas“ enterprise present.

¹¹⁴ "“Litekso” Darbo Kolektyvo Konferencijos Protokolas Nr. 2 [“Liteksas” Workers' Conference Protocol No 2]."

¹¹⁵ Vaitkutė, "Kodėl Neatsigręžiame į Žmogų? [Why Don't We Turn To Man]."

¹¹⁶ Vaitkutė.

provided was compared with the other textile factory where women were the main workers: “There, the women's services are equipped with a grocery store, confectionery and culinary shops, a hairdresser, a greenhouse for growing flowers.”¹¹⁷ The grocery shop was planned or at least was written in the plans of 1987¹¹⁸ by “Liteksas” deputy of the director for social affairs. However in 1988 the same grocery shop was still only in the plans: “This year we are going to set up a grocery store in the premises of the main company, and in each workshop we will open rest and dining rooms.”¹¹⁹

If women workers in “Liteksas” were not listened or heard by writing to the enterprise’s newspaper, they employed even more public measure to be noticed. The magazine *Tarybinė moteris* published an article¹²⁰ about the working conditions in “Laisvė” (Freedom) factory that belonged to “Liteksas” enterprise. I have mentioned above how “Liteksas” union’s and workers’ meeting handled the case of Puškorienė who spoke on behalf of “Laivė” factory workers. The meeting happened at the end of March in 1987 and later the article of *Tarybinė moteris* was published in June of the same year. The article described the very poor working conditions: the production premises were so small that the mechanization of the manual work was impossible, the workers’ did not have the resting premises, or if it existed, it was old and shabby:

“A number of people working in the factory live at home without facilities. To wash, clean your head here, at work, for many - a necessity. Then they go with wet hair because there is no dryer. In fact, there is no place for the dryer, even if there was a dryer.”¹²¹

But if the resolution of the meeting in “Liteksas” did not really include the concerns of “Laisvė” factory, the response was soon to appear in the magazine regarding the critique of the working conditions in the factory that belonged to the enterprise. After four months the answer of

¹¹⁷ Vaitkutė.

¹¹⁸ Preibys, “Socialinių Poreikių Tenkinimui - Nuolatinį Dėmesį [For Social Needs - Constant Attention].”

¹¹⁹ Ignas Preibys, “Nuolatinis Dėmesys - Socialiniams Klausimams [Constant Focus on Social Issues],” *Darbas Ir Poilsis [Work and Leisure]*, no. 20 (June 1988).

¹²⁰ Marija Gaidienė, “Išaugtas Drabužis [Garment Is Too Small],” *Sovietinė Moteris [Soviet Woman]*, no. 6 (1987).

¹²¹ Gaidienė.

“Liteksas” director and the head of trade union was published.¹²² The dryers for the workers were installed and some of the restrooms were also equipped, however the enlargement of the factory was promised to be finished in 1988. At the end of the response the help from the Ministry of Light Industry was asked, emphasizing the common responsibility for the misery of workers. However, women workers were heard and noticed only because there was a magazine which was run by the members of Soviet Lithuania women’s council. Thus women had more to complain and to draw attention towards their working and living conditions and if trade union could not help, women’s council on the national level could have been also a choice.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to delineate the trade union’s approach to women’s working conditions within the trade union and outside of it. First, I wanted to demonstrate how the preferences of the heads of trade unions mattered and could have an effect on the decisions that trade unions took to improve workers’ leisure time and living conditions. Thus, if women were in charge of the trade union in the factory/enterprise, the approach could have been different (but not necessarily). The relation between the union and the management of the factory also mattered as management could have been using women as the “good ears” for the workers’ complaints. Nevertheless as I showed in my chapter’s part “Complaints and Mediation” the heads of the trade union could discipline the lower management, regardless the sex of the unionists in charge. My main argument is developed in the last part of my chapter “Women Bargaining”. The case of “Laisvė” factory delineated women’s possibilities to bargain for the better conditions, it revealed that the activities of women’s councils on the national level had an impact on women’s lives in Soviet Union. In next chapter I will analyze, whether using women’s councils on factory level women created the conditions to approach women’s poor conditions of work and living.

¹²² “Mums Atsako [Responses to Us],” *Sovietinė Moteris [Soviet Woman]*, no. 10 (1987): 18.

5. Social Work of Women's Councils: multiplying burdens

What kind of mediation platform was women's councils in the factories of Soviet Lithuania? Was it the organization that only had to mediate between the family and the state? Did women oppose the functions they were assigned to do in women's councils during the prerestroika? In this chapter I will analyse minutes of women's council meetings of several textile factories in Kaunas: Kaunas Šiaučiūnaitė knitwear industrial enterprise (Knitwear enterprise), P. Ziberto Work Red Flag Medal Silk factory (Silk factory), Footwear factory "Red October" (Footwear factory), knitwear factory "May 1st" (May 1st factory).

To begin, I will give one example of women's council plans for 1985 in Knitwear enterprise¹²³ just to imagine what functions and duties such councils had in the factories. The Women's council in the Knitwear enterprise had four commissions: the Commission of esthetics and household culture, the Commission of political-mass and cultural work, the Children and youth upbringing commission and the Commission of women's work, rights and health protection. Each of them had different assignments and different chairpersons. In the Commission of esthetics and household most of the assignments were related to the organization of afternoons (lectures) under the thematic subject of alcoholism, domestic culture, fashion. The Commission of youth and children upbringing would be responsible for organizing festivities such as International Children's Day on first of June, arranging small presents for pupils going to the first grade at school. Also this Commission would see as their duty "to be a helping hand for schools and families"¹²⁴ - organize meetings with parents whose children misbehaved at school and keep the account of children who misbehaved and were known to the soviet police department. The Commission of political-mass and cultural work would have lectures for nurturing of communist worldview, including topics on atheism for children's educational afternoons. And finally the Commission of women's work, rights and health protection would be responsible for guarding the

¹²³Kauno Šiaučiūnaitės trikotažo gamybinis susivienijimas, Moterų tarybos dokumentacija: darbo planas 1985 m., 1985, R-862 2 260, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹²⁴Ibid

rights and benefits of pregnant and nursing women, looking after women who “studied in evening schools, technical schools and universities”, i.e. taking care of younger workers. This commission would also keep an account of workers who work under hazardous conditions and ensure proper benefits for them. And finally, it had “to be interested in hygiene rooms in the company.”¹²⁵

In this chapter I will concentrate on the activities of women’s councils in the textile factories in Kaunas and the articles in *Tarybinė moteris* (Soviet Woman) related to the work of Women’s councils and gender politics in general. I will argue that local women’s councils in different factories were not directly dependent on the main party line. First, perestroika was a time when women’s councils were revived in a certain way, mostly by party’s encouragements for women to concentrate on family. Secondly, Gorbachev continued the political line of late Brezhnev period that sought to strengthen the family for the better demographics of Soviet Union.¹²⁶ Mary Buckley writes in her subchapter about women’s councils in Moscow¹²⁷ that one of the main concerns of women’s councils of textile factory in Moscow was family life and prevention of divorce¹²⁸ which was completely in line with the main concerns of the party. In the first part of the chapter I will analyze the degree of compliance of women’s councils in Kaunas factories to the goals and rhetoric of perestroika regarding the “woman question”. Then I will try to demonstrate how women’s professional background influenced the approach women employed in their voluntary social work. I will try to demonstrate how women in women’s councils were engaged in family issues, what was their main approach regarding family and work and how this approach varied according to their professional background, the relations with the administration of the workplace and official party politics.

The “Human Factor”

In 1986, *Tarybinė moteris* (Soviet Woman) magazine published an interview with Irena Paltanavičienė, the head of women’s councils in Soviet Lithuania, where she is interviewed by the

¹²⁵Ibid

¹²⁶Mary (Mary E. A.) Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor : Iniversity of Michigan Press, 1989, n.d.), 195.

¹²⁷Ibid 210-215

¹²⁸Ibid 211

main editor of the magazine *Tarybinė moteris* (Soviet Woman)¹²⁹. While asked about women working heavy manual work, even sometimes under hazardous conditions, Paltanavičienė answered that it is still a big issue but “by 1990, it is planned to put an end to the hard physical work of women”¹³⁰. Paltanavičienė was also the secretary of All-Unions Council of Soviet Lithuania, she was the one who should have known the problems women had to experience in their workplaces. Nevertheless, while answering the question about women’s working conditions, she adds in the end:

No matter what we would talk and what we would do in this area - there is a human beside the machinery and mechanisms. His role, dedication, honesty in many cases determine everything and are very closely related to such a sore quality of the production problem. Therefore, the role of the human factor is one of the most important. This is something our female producers must understand as well.¹³¹

The “human factor” that the head of women’s councils talks about was present in every speech and public discourse of perestroika. The “human factor” is mainly related with the discipline of the workers, as Paltanavičienė emphasized, first goes the discipline and quality of the product and only then the conditions of the worker. During perestroika the discipline of workers was creatively attached to the strong role of the family. In her next question for Paltanavičienė the main editor of *Tarybinė moteris* refers to Gorbachev, who at the 27th Communist Party Summit emphasized the strengthening of the family with the help of women’s councils.¹³² Regarding the work of women’s councils during the changing times Paltanavičienė responded that “at the moment, it is also necessary for them [the women's councils, A.B.] to focus on the family as much as possible, increasing parental responsibility for the upbringing of their children.”¹³³

While women’s councils were focusing on the upbringing of workers’ children already in 1985 (according to the minutes I have studied, though we might guess it can be traced back to even

¹²⁹Regina Paulauskienė, “Galvojant apie rytdieną [Thinking About Tomorrow],” *Sovietinė moteris* [*Soviet Woman*], no. 8 (416) (1986).

¹³⁰Ibid

¹³¹Ibid

¹³²Ibid

¹³³Ibid

earlier decades) this interview, made in 1986, highlights a new “marriage” between family policy and disciplining of workers, as accentuated by grand 27th Summit of Communist Party of the same year. At the end it was women who had to raise dedicated, honest workers who would produce proper products for the factory and for the Party.

5.1 Family

Women’s council in Šiaučiūnaitė Knitwear enterprise, although it had four commissions, focused only on the work with children and youth, as indicated by the minutes of meetings. Most of the protocols contained the meetings with the workers whose children were reported as having problems with studies or committed a crime. Most of the measures applied by commissions to deal with juvenile delinquencies or school problems confined to recommendations and “moral” warnings. However, one of the meetings on similar issue diverges from the rest.¹³⁴ This meeting was attended not only by the representatives of Youth and children commission of the Women’s council as usual, but it was led by the head of the enterprise-level trade union. The meeting was about a child – a daughter of one of the workers in the knitwear enterprise, who have been getting low grades at school and frequently missing classes. The school had informed the factory about this state of things, sending a formal complaint. According to the protocol, the woman worker stated that it was true that her daughter skips the school sometimes and is lazy, but instead of apologies, she explained that while being a single mother it was hard to raise the child alone. The other worker present at the meeting who knew the mother as “disciplined, decent, good worker,”¹³⁵ emphasized that mother did not respond adequately to the demands of the school. All the other speakers at the meeting also pointed out that the mother had been ignorant of the warnings of the school collective. The head of the trade union indicates:

Z. R. [the mother] describes her daughter in one way but the school collective differently. It is clear that Z. R. makes mistakes in the upbringing of her daughter, does not find a common

¹³⁴“Išplėstinio profkomiteto posėdžio protokolas nr. 8 [Extended Meeting of Trade Union Committee],” 1985.04.19, R-862 ap. 2 b. 260, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹³⁵Ibid

language with the educators and thus her way of upbringing the daughter will not bring good results¹³⁶.

The resolution was strict, stating that the mother needed to be reprimanded for the bad upbringing of her daughter. The mother was also directly blamed for her daughter's behavior.

The contrast between the regular meetings and the one described above is very exceptional, further research needs to be done in order to explain the reasons for different measures taken in this meeting. For instance, it is unclear why this case was handled by or involved the trade union, and even its head, and not women's council alone? Was there a pre-history of this case (undocumented in the files I have been able to identify), i.e. was the procedure documented here a second instance procedure? Or maybe the mother was punished for being single?

Harsh opinions about single mothers in *Tarybinė moteris* started to appear more often during perestroika years (1986-1988). In one article, the secretary of the Vilnius city committee of the Lithuanian Communist party made a direct connection between the "incomplete" families and juvenile crimes¹³⁷. Even in the Lithuanian All-Union magazine *Darbas ir Poilsis* condemnations of single mothers can be found: "Who could have thought that today's Veronicas will be walking with their heads up and will be proud of their loneliness, will demand even the privileges they are given through the courts."¹³⁸ I am aware that the exceptional meeting I described above took place in 1985 and the articles about the single mothers were written in the subsequent years. Nevertheless, in line with the 27th Party Summit, the Women's council of the Knitwear enterprise directed its activity towards safeguarding the families and as a consequence of such political line single mothers in particular were shamed and blamed for the wrongdoings of their children and "the burden" they put on the rest of the society.

¹³⁶Ibid

¹³⁷Birutė Boreišienė, "Poveikio jėga [The Power of Effect]," *Sovietinė moteris* [*Soviet Woman*], no. 9 (417) (1986): 5–6.

¹³⁸Danutė Žvirblytė, "Pamokslas Vienišai Motinai [Sermon to Single Mother]," *Darbas Ir Poilsis* [*Work and Leisure*], no. 8 (218) (1987): 6.

5.2 Working conditions

In one women's council meeting on November 1986 of the same Knitwear enterprise, the chairwoman stated that the situation with the Commission of woman's work, rights and health security "is worse"¹³⁹ than with the Commission dealing with children of workers or the commission responsible for organizing festivities and events. The reason I emphasize this remark is that the tone and direction of discussions in *Tarybinė moteris* about women's working conditions changed radically starting from 1986. From then on, the journal frequently discussed women's health protection issues and seriously considered the harmful conditions as they appeared in various factories. However, this discussion seemed to have been limited for the journal. Although every women's councils had the commissions that were responsible for a voluntary inspection of women's working conditions, but there were almost no considerations or reports on issues of working conditions in the protocols of women's councils in several textile factories of Kaunas that I have studied. In general, the expanded discussion and critique of women workers' situation during the years of Perestroika is only visible in *Tarybinė moteris* magazine, the meetings and the activities of women's councils in the factories were happening in the same manner as if nothing has changed. Every year women's councils had almost identical plans, however as I have mentioned earlier, their focus did vary – a change of attention that was also documented in *Tarybinė moteris* magazine.

For example, the labour laws were at the centre of *Tarybinė moteris* article¹⁴⁰ where the women from women's councils met with directors of factories including the representative of Soviet Labour Inspection and jurist from the construction company. The discussion started from the statistics of women working under the harsh conditions. As the inspector enumerated, the overtime, night shifts, work on weekends and double shifts are the main infringements of the labour legislature¹⁴¹. The chairpersons of the women's councils assured that they supervised the working conditions of women and tried to negotiate with the managers about the violations in the

¹³⁹"Moterų Tarybos Posėdžio Protokolas Nr. 8 [Womens' Council Meeting Protocol No 8]," November 4, 1986, R-862 ap. 2 b. 272, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹⁴⁰Stefa Tamoševičienė, "Įstatymų kryžkelėje [At the Crossroad of Laws]," *Sovietinė moteris* [*Soviet Woman*], no. 11 (1988): 5–7.

¹⁴¹ Ibid

workplace but the results depended a lot on the attitude of administration towards their workers. The chairperson of women's council in Panemunė district of Kaunas pushed even further for assuring the improvement of working conditions:

The chairperson of Women's Councils must prove to be worth the duty entrusted to her – to fight for women's affairs. In my opinion, the chairperson of the council has to be included as a member to union's committee¹⁴².

The deputy of the other women's council from Panevėžys reports that their women's council works well with the administration therefore they have quite good conditions in the sewing factory. They do not have night shifts, women having small children work less hours, some of them have shorter working weeks. Also, they have work breaks where they exercise and do hand massages¹⁴³. It seems that the relation between the improvement of women's working conditions and the role of women's councils was very closely knit. The study of labour legislation and the provision of labour code infringements were significant part of some women's councils, however not all of them were heard by the administration. What were the reasons behind the divergent outlook and impact of women's social initiatives at the workplace? Apart from important constellation of relationship between the factory management, trade union and party, the women's council activities were determined also by the status of woman – woman as a worker or as a social activist.

5.3 Festivities

When reading the minutes of women's council meeting at May 1st Knitwear factory (May 1st factory)¹⁴⁴ the relations between the women's council and other social organizations in the factory can appear opaque. The meeting was attended by 102 persons including the Director of the factory, the Secretary of the party, and the Chairman of trade union committee. Nevertheless, considering the amount of the participants the protocol is rather short. Some speeches are reported

¹⁴²Ibid

¹⁴³Ibid

¹⁴⁴“Moteru Tarybos Ataskaitinio-Rinkiminio Susirinkimo Protokolas Nr. 3 [Women's Council Report-Election Meeting Protocol No 3],” May 12, 1985, R-642 ap. 2 b. 196 l.13-15, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

and added separately, such as the speech of the Chairwoman of the women's council. Also, some of the workers spoke up. The first was the head of one workshop-level women's council, she claimed that "women are not quite satisfied with the buffet's work. The lunches are of insufficient quality, the food menu is rather scarce."¹⁴⁵ Another worker, the knitting workshop instructor, emphasized the poor situation of the family dormitories. The May 1st factory used to share the dormitory with cotton spinning factory – the owner of the dormitory - but now the owner of the dormitory wanted to take back the premises. The worker was worried and urged to take all possible measures in order to at least ensure the same amount of family dormitories they had at the time, although, the workers admitted, it was far from satisfying their needs.¹⁴⁶ The last speech was made by the deputy of the trade union chairperson. She advised the women's council to be active at "strengthening the family, promoting a sober and healthy lifestyle not only at work but also in the family"¹⁴⁷ and in order to do it, more events and sport festivities were needed. At the end of the protocol the resolution was made along the lines of the last speech while the problems of food and dormitories were not mentioned at all, even in the abstract or vague way. Thus in the end it seems that women's council in the May 1st factory could develop only the activities that were related to the traditional gender roles largely in the private sphere. This limited and gendered scope of activities can be illustrated by the already mentioned interview in *Tarybinė moteris* (Soviet Woman) magazine with the head of all women's councils Paltanavičienė, where she claims that:

Our women's councils have developed a wide range of activities. Perhaps I would not have seen any city or district, work collective where women's councils would not give their tribute to organizing various events, fostering the beauty of the environment, developing good traditions.¹⁴⁸

The range of the events that women organized in May 1st factory were mainly related to children and younger generation which involved exhibitions of children's drawings, the decoration of halls for occasional festivities or contests of dishes and flower bouquets. For example, the agenda of the women's council in the Footwear factory contained the organization of "Young

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸Paulauskienė, "Galvojant apie rytdieną [Thinking About Tomorrow]."

Worker's Day" and the organization of "Celebration Without Alcohol: What is it like?" evening¹⁴⁹. In the following year, 1986, around the same month, the minutes of women's council is written informally that reminds more of the form of report than protocol. The document was without name and unsigned: "August 29, 1986, the Women's Council organized a "First Call Celebration" for children of working people. 60 children attended the celebration."¹⁵⁰

As I have argued in the beginning of this chapter, women councils, although they worked under common programmatic statements, conveyed different activities and focused on different issues. Whether the focus will be on leisure and sport or on, rather more structural issues as ensuring better condition of work, depended also on the constituency of the councils. While comparing the membership of different women councils I find out that, for example, the women's council in Footwear factory had 15 members and only 5 of them had university degree, 4 of them had specialized secondary education and the rest 6 were only of secondary education.¹⁵¹ Compared to other councils, this one was rather of "low constituency" meaning not only that the persons in the council were less educated, but, more importantly, that their position as workers in the factory were less favorable: we should bear in mind that higher education was directly connected with employment to higher positions. Therefore, the level of education might have affected not only the comprehension and articulation of issues regarding women, but also externally, in terms of power dynamics at precise factory, by limiting council's possibilities because of comparatively lower status of women who ran it.

On 21st of November, 1987, the Summit of Soviet Lithuania Women was held. It was an important event that set guidelines for further work of women councils, their main focus and issues to be solved. The event was widely reported in "Soviet Woman" magazine later, in the beginning of 1988. According to the article, there were 811 women delegates from the country, 619 women were from professional backgrounds including doctors, high level engineers, judges and 192 women were of lower rank working positions.¹⁵² The resolution of the summit which determined

¹⁴⁹"Moterų tarybos posėdžio protokolas nr. 5 [Women's Council Meeting Protocol No. 5]," August 25, 1985, R-742 ap. 2 b. 283, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹⁵⁰"Moterų tarybos veiklos dokumentai [Women's Council Activity Documents]," 1986, R-742 ap. 2 b. 291 l. 7, Kauno regioninis archyvas.

¹⁵¹ Ibid 1.15

¹⁵²"Truputis statistikos [A Little Bit of Statistics]," *Sovietinė moteris [Soviet Woman]*, no. 1 (1988): 4.

the women's council activities contained 6 main points which could be summarized as follows: 1. To involve women in public political activities; 2. To persuade women to adhere to strong, classical ideological positions; 3. To fight the societal maladies like alcoholism, alienation, religious superstition, moral indecency and others; 4. To actively help women to fulfil their motherhood and family duties; 5. To help organize women's purposeful leisure time and educate them effective and healthy household management; 6. To participate actively in the preparation of plans for improvement of working conditions, its protection, sanitation and health promotion and participate in different raids in workplaces, canteens, kindergartens etc.¹⁵³ I would argue that the first five points in the resolution could be covered by organizing exhibitions, festivities and educational events. Only the last point, aiming to improve working conditions, could actually have helped women to be more involved in the public political activities. This point adhered with the main demands of 27th Communist Party Summit, however, at the same time the party required the consolidation of the family – a repeating contradiction of demands that were neither solved on political/rhetorical level, nor on the shop-floor.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to delineate the variety of possibilities and issues that women in the women's councils could promote. I wanted to show that women's councils did not act under one programmatic party line, but were more or less autonomous in choosing specific methods and focus. As the women's council in the Knitwear enterprise in Kaunas was concentrating more on the family issues, the upbringing of the youth, other councils in different factories concentrated more on the workplace issues as well as the health of women workers. Nevertheless, on the 27th Summit of Communist party in 1986 the doctrine that family issues constitute the major problem of Soviet society was announced and the responsibility for taking care of family issues was without questions attributed to women. The division of domestic labour was rarely questioned publicly nor it was questioned in the internal documents of women's councils which I analyzed. Sometimes, as pointed out in one protocol, women, while being single mothers, were punished for handling

¹⁵³“Lietuvos TSR Moterų Suvažiavimo Rezoliucija [The Resolution of Lithuanian SUR Women's Summit],” *Sovietinė Moteris [Soviet Woman]*, no. 1 (1988): 8.

everything on their own terms. At the same time I found differences in how women's councils' acted in different factories and work collectives. The chapter has argued that these differences were, in all likelihood, rooted in two distinct factors defining the possibilities and limits of women's councils. First, the activities of women's councils depended on the relations among the factory organizations, for instance, trade union officials could have prevented the women's councils to do certain activities. Second, the social status of women in women's council has determined its' possibilities and limits, because the level of education was directly convertible to the employment position at the workplace, therefore, gaining more or less authority. In the resolution adopted by the Women's Summit in 1987 that determined the activities of women's councils could be interpreted in two distinct manners. If reading it formally, it allowed women to be the organizer of various festivities, take responsibilities in organizing leisure activities. On the other hand, the statements of summit could be seen as an opportunity for women to be involved in the public political sphere. The next chapter will look at the activities of one women's council which tried to develop its activities into the latter direction.

6. My Family - My Work Collective

From the first sight it seems that women's councils had very similar concerns and mostly focused on the family issues. However, as we have seen in previous chapter, there were two main streams of the activities of women's councils, the festivities or politics of work. In this chapter I took the case of Kaunas October 50th synthetic fiber factory (Fiber factory) where women's councils which existed until 1988, focused on the women's problems in I would claim exceptional way. In addition, I will also go through the various articles in factory's weekly newspaper called *Pluoštas* (Fiber) that mostly represented issues concerning the production. This case will demonstrate that women were not just active in the women's council but also they were interested in the production processes which means that they vastly participated in the trade union, wrote articles about their co-workers and showed immense attention to the conditions of work.

Donna Harsch confidently argued that women in GDR (Eastern Germany) were extremely oriented towards family¹⁵⁴. According to her, the housework was not taken into account as real labor by the communist party which was also dis-interested to encourage the fair division of housework within the family. Therefore, women had/were forced to spend a lot more time at home since the housework was socialized in slow pace, also they were not interested in the career as they had heavy family duties. In this chapter I will raise questions about women's dedication to the opposite, the work: how did women approach it through the women's council and how did they communicate their interests in the weekly factory's newspaper?

First, it is very important to look at the structure of women's council in the Fiber factory. The meeting for election of women's council in 1986¹⁵⁵ had 3 points in the agenda: 1. The report of 1985; 2. Speeches; 3. New elections of women's council. According to the minutes, the deputy of the secretary of factory's communist party committee proposed the new constitution of women's council. The table in the minutes recorded 15 members' names and additional information such as

¹⁵⁴ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c2007., 2007).

¹⁵⁵ "Dirbtinio pluošto gamyklos moterų tarybos posėdžio protokolas nr. 1 [Women's Council Meeting Minutes Nr. 1]," February 3, 1986, R-1353 ap. 3 b. 198, Kauno regioninis valstybės archyvas.

belonging to the party, educational degree, political education and occupation in women's council. Only 5 of 15 members belonged to the communist party and 12 members had a university degree. These women were running or participated as members in four commissions - women's work rights and health protection and youth upbringing commissions, another two separate commissions on children and youth upbringing, and the commission of culture and political mass. Most of the members, 4 out of 15, belonged to the women's work rights and health protection commission and to the commission of culture and political mass. We could conclude that women workers in the council occupied a pretty high positions in the factory. For instance, the chairwoman of the council was the head of the central laboratory which indicates that she was an actual scientist.

6.1 More than just workers

After the elections the second meeting was arranged which stated the new direction of women's council activities¹⁵⁶. The education of the younger women workers was underlined in all the spheres, the improvement of work and household conditions was also included. In the newspaper "Pluoštas" around the same date (March 5)¹⁵⁷ there was an article about women working in the shift "A". The author of the article expressed her worries about the quality of free time. When the young women workers were asked about the time after work, their response disappointed the journalist. She asked workers rhetorically if they have heard about six women scientists who tried to reach the North pole. Apparently, workers replied that they sow, knit and prepare food but the reporter contended that women should expand their interests and go beyond the family duties and work at the factory. The reporter expressed her beliefs that everything was possible when someone wanted it and the family with two children shouldn't be an obstacle to seek for more than just food and work. Here we see a contradiction, women's work at factory is appreciated but it is admitted that work is just work while family is also like work which is nothing special. We also can see that the statements in protocol of women's council does not remain in this case just an empty statement to propagate and educate young women workers in the factory. The gentle denouncement of women's way of life could be interpreted in two ways. Women workers

¹⁵⁶ "Dirbtinio pluošto gamyklos moterų tarybos posėdžio protokolas nr. 2 [Women's Council Meeting Minutes No 2]," March 3, 1986, R-1353 ap. 3 b. 198, Kauno regioninis valstybės archyvas.

¹⁵⁷ Sigita Klimienė, "Žvilgsnis į 'A' Pamainą [Looking at Shift 'A'], " *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, March 5, 1986, No. 8 (722) edition.

should be more creative about their time after work which maybe would draw them to public political activities. Or women should become more than just workers and wives because the state has much more to offer than just that. At the same time the encouragement of women to be more than wives or mothers denies men the right of privileged workers with really free time from work and family duties after the working hours. Thus, it either says that leave some drudgery of housework to men or trust the state to take care of things that will allow you to spend more time in theaters and maybe even more time for education to seek for a better career. Otherwise, why the reporter would criticize women spending their free time while cooking food? We can read this gesture of the reporter as pursue of the women's council agenda. However, the name of the reporter did not show up in council's members' list.

6.2 On Program "Health"

That the work of women's council was not only about organizing different festivities or commemorations, which probably took a half of women's public voluntary work, the minutes of the meeting no. 4¹⁵⁸ confirmed that women also participated in the women's conferences of the city (Kaunas city in this case). In the meeting it was stated that the chairperson of women's council of the Fiber factory made a statistical report in the conference about women workers in higher positions in the production, also the numbers of women in the party and in the city council. The other topics were also mentioned in the protocol, such as problems of alcoholism, smoking among women and women's free behavior. The multi-child families and the behavior of children were noted as well. The chairperson of all Lithuanian women's councils was also mentioned as the one who encouraged women's councils to collaborate with trade unions' committees in order to improve the working conditions and the health protection of women workers. The Chairman of Kaunas City Executive Committee urged women to be more demanding and make pressure on factories' administrations about minimizing the heavy manual work and upgrading the working conditions for women.

¹⁵⁸ "Dirbtinio Pluošto Gamyklos Moterų Tarybos Posėdžio Protokolas Nr. 4 [Women's Council Meeting Minutes No 4]," June 5, 1986, R-1353 ap. 3 b. 198, Kauno regioninis valstybės archyvas.

The Minutes No. 4 document was written during the meeting on 5th of June in 1986. If we look at the newspaper of the same year, on June 18th there was an article prepared by the member of women's council Elena Šerėnienė who at the same time was also the chairperson of Women's work rights and health protection commission.¹⁵⁹ In this article, or maybe more precisely it should be called a program of "Health", the emphasis was strictly put on the working conditions and workers' health in the factory. It stated that one of the aims of the program was to reduce the number of women workers who performed heavy and harmful work which was also monotonous and unskilled. The pollution and the noise of the workplace had to be diminished as well. The article also confirmed that mostly women worked manual work in the factory. The author indicated that by describing the measures for improvement of workers' working conditions and physical and even mental health, during the five years 120 workers had to be transferred to mechanized workplaces and 81 (two thirds) of them would be women. The improvement of living and household conditions was seen as a part of the health program. However, it was not mentioned directly how to improve these conditions but we could take the demand of the expansion of the health resorts as one of the measures.

In general, the health program spoke about necessity of healthy worker for the successful process of production. One of the reasons why "Health" program had to be carried out was the frequent morbidity of the workers in the factory which brought a lot of loss to the production results. In other words, the member of the women's council who was also an engineer in the factory first laid out very concrete cause of the program and that was the productivity. The author of the text indicated that the committees of trade unions agreed with the program, they supported it by organizing socialist competition and by informing workers on the health protection rules. It is hard to say again if the program is the result of the Kaunas women's councils' conference that was mentioned in the Minutes No. 4. However, it is possible to interpret the written program as pressure for the union in the factory to be more active and execute the five year plan commitments that would include program "Health".

¹⁵⁹ Elena Šerėnienė, "Programa 'Sveikata' [Program 'Health']," *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, June 18, 1986, 24 (738) edition.

6.3 Political Interests?

In the scholarly literature the women's councils in Soviet Union were often regarded as public organization which functioned on formal grounds. Yet, the activities of the councils, as I have already shown in my previous chapter, differed from one workplace to the other. In the fiber factory even during the 8th of March the question of the women's household problems was included in the celebration of Women's day program in relation to perestroika, the conversation about perestroika was planned including "more attention towards women's living problems".¹⁶⁰ In the newspaper on March 4th¹⁶¹ that was dedicated to Women's day the problems of household were pushed away with the portraits of different women workers who one way or another were the champions of their workplaces. One of them was the chairperson of women's council Aliutė Jackevičienė. There was only one sentence about her as person who had this precise public duty. The large part of the article was about her direct duties in the factory, she was presented as very creative scientist who with her colleagues registered already two inventions that had to improve the quality of the threads that were used in the factories. At the end of the article there was an indirect reflection on the activities of women's council by the scientist herself:

We need to rise above the small household worries, says Jackevičienė, pastries and handicrafts are self-evident everyday things. Do you need to pay so much attention to them as it has been so far? Where is the sociality, position, creation, duty, spiritual maturity of a woman?¹⁶²

It seems that the chairperson was determined to direct the work of women's council towards the collective and self fulfilment rather than just a role of woman who would be dedicated to the family errands. The political and public activities of the women's council of this factory led them even to the selection of women workers to the city council of deputies (the minutes of 1987). I have looked through the minutes of women's councils in several other factories of Kaunas where

¹⁶⁰ "Dirbtinio pluošto gamyklos moterų tarybos protokolas [Women's Council Minutes]," February 24, 1987, R-1353 ap. 3 b. 208, Kauno regioninis valstybės archyvas.

¹⁶¹ Nijolė Renaitė, "Jeigu Esi Inžinierius [If You Are Engineer]," *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, March 4, 1987, No. 9 (770) edition.

¹⁶² Renaitė.

workers were mostly women and I could not find any other minutes documenting the selection of the candidates to the city council. The conclusions and interpretations could vary - it could be the case that in other factories women were selected as candidates to become deputies of city councils by the trade unions. If we put the last sentences of the article about the chairperson of the council and later minutes of that year together, the consolidation of women's political interests would be evident.

6.4 Production, Not Reproduction

In 1987 issue of the last week of October¹⁶³ the content of the newspaper was discussed publicly. All workers wrote that they were happy to have a newspaper that covered a lot of relevant topics. One worker expressed the wish for the newspaper to be more polemic, more critical that would fit in the context of perestroika and the process of democratization. Another woman who worked as an economist in the factory wanted more news about the process of the production, she wished that the series of articles would be published under the renewed topic of "technologist diary". Thus, we could safely declare that the problems of women, indicated in the previous subchapter, have been partly ignored in the newspaper. However, I pointed out the examples where the content of women's councils' protocols corresponded with the content of the newspaper.

The other topic of the living conditions in the workers' dormitories was actually vaguely touched by the women's council but consistently considered by the reporters of the factory's newspaper. This topic was also widely discussed in the all-trade unions in Soviet Lithuania monthly magazine *Work and Leisure*. Workers' dormitories had their own councils and commissions, they were directly accountable to the trade unions. The reports about the quality of living conditions were written by the governesses who were mostly women. The articles about the working and looking after the dormitories revealed the relations to the household of the trade union and factory administration. The important fact is that the matters of the dormitories were not

¹⁶³ "Keliame Problemas, Vertiname Savikritiškai, Diskutuojuame [Raising Issues, Self-Criticism, Discuss]," *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, October 7, 1987, 35 (797) edition.

delegated to the responsibility of women's council. There was almost nothing written about the dormitories in the minutes of women's council meetings, only from time to time the exhibitions or other small events of women's club were organized by it.

Women's council in the Fiber factory in Kaunas was more connected to the workers' production sphere and the cultural life of the factory than directly to the conditions of the household. First of all, I think it was necessary to point out that women in the women's council occupied relatively high positions in the factory. In other words, they were career women, good workers, who considered their 'voluntary' work as part of their social position. It would be reasonable enough to conclude that women in women's council had good contacts with the administration and factory trade union. Although the work of women's council was not reported directly in the newspaper but quite a lot of members of women's council wrote articles about other women workers, about the processes of the production, the working conditions or cultural events which would mean that they were active in publishing and working with the factory newspaper. However, even during perestroika, women seemed reluctant to express criticism of the working and living conditions in the factory's newspaper.

One of the examples I can give is the article in "Fiber"¹⁶⁴ about the loader Ona Cvirkienė who have worked in the factory for 29 years. When she was asked about conditions of work, she claimed that she had to carry 400 kilograms bags of textile every day in order to meet the norm. "Although everything is drowning in dust, work is considered harmless here. And there is no shower. When the work is over, you get covered with dust and you leave."¹⁶⁵ - wrote the reporter. Almost everything that was written in the article could be seen as one big infringement of the Soviet labour code. The denouncement of such worker's conditions was subtly inserted in the article nevertheless the article was celebratory just because Ona Cvirkienė had worked in the factory for a very long time. The position of the loader in the article was considered to be simple

¹⁶⁴ Sigita Klimienė, "Pareiga [Duty]," *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, January 29, 1986, No 4 (718) edition.

¹⁶⁵ Klimienė.

but hard. Then the background of the worker was emphasized, first she could not get the proper education because she was born in the family of 18 children, second she was a single mother of two children. The aim of the article was to honor the long-term employee. At the end, oddly, the worker was praised for being patient, the one who did not complain about the harmful conditions of work and didn't demand shower or special diet.

6.5 Worker and Mother

The other portrait of the worker, the forewoman of the shift, was depicted by the same reporter as the article about the loader.¹⁶⁶ This time it was in the form of the interview. The forewoman expressed her total trust to her colleagues, women co-workers while she was more skeptical about the men workers who supposed to look after the machines. The reporter also asked about the young women workers who just started working at her shift. The forewoman believed that she had to do the educational work in addition to her direct factory responsibilities. In other words, she felt the obligation to be a moral guide to younger women workers. "They are indifferent to everything. You need to make every effort to find a way to their hearts."¹⁶⁷ - said forewoman of the shift. The article emphasized the educational duties of the senior workers. However, when the article was about the man worker, the shopkeeper of fiber factory, the duty to care about younger generation was not mentioned.¹⁶⁸ He was more judgmental and more strict than the woman who was in the higher position. In the article about the man worker in the factory, his voluntary work and obligations to improve the society were nowhere mentioned while women would be a part of one or the other commission, committee etc. He was a career man and that was enough for a man.

In the interview with the shopkeeper man of the factory when referring to the young women workers the tone was radically different. The shopkeeper contended that some of his younger co-

¹⁶⁶ Sigita Klimienė, "Įsigilinti į Reikalą-Suprasti Žmogų [Deep into the Matter, Understand the Person]," *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, August 27, 1986, 32 (746) edition.

¹⁶⁷ Klimienė.

¹⁶⁸ Sigita Klimienė, "Svarbiausia, Žinoma, Žmonės [Most Importantly, of Course, People]," *Pluoštas [Fiber]*, June 3, 1987, No 21 (782) edition.

workers women did not deserve to get the flat just because they were complaining that it was hard to live in the dormitory room with all the family. The title of the interview is “Most Importantly, Of Course, People”¹⁶⁹ which tells more about the quality of the workers than shopkeeper’s concerns about the social relations among his shop floor workers. In general, when the shopkeeper was asked about his relations with the younger workers - whether he tried to make them “to get interest in something”¹⁷⁰ - he immediately listed the social and cultural activities in and outside the factory which were usually organized by women’s council, promoting the idea that it was their duty to care about women workers and definitely not his. Thus, he refused to take responsibility to actually care if the younger women were indifferent to work in his shop. He was able to evaluate the quality of work refusing to carry out the emotional labor that was usually demanded from women.

6.6 Conclusions

Women’s relations to work at the fiber factory cannot be simply defined as disinterested in to the process of production. It could be true that women in women’s council were engaged in developing social relations among women workers. They concentrated on the educational practices and even emancipatory content claiming that young women should expand their interests beyond family and work - develop their careers and have more cultural leisure time. The fact that women’s council was up for selecting deputies to the city council contradicts Donna Harsch’s hypothesis that women were much more concentrated on the family life. However, the case of the fiber factory suggested that women’s councils gave more attention to women as social persons who should be interested in the public life. In a way women’s council closely collaborated with the trade union by drawing attention to the workers’ conditions of work and their health.

I also noticed that there were not many reports specifically on the activities of women’s council. The lack of reports could be interpreted as disinterest towards women’s specific problems because it was obvious, by looking at the weekly newspaper of the factory, that most of the workers

¹⁶⁹ Klimienė.

¹⁷⁰ Klimienė.

were women and most of the articles and reports were written also by women. The main editor of the newspaper was also a member of women's council therefore the newspaper could have been partially ran by women's council.

Sometimes, as some articles, demonstrates women would be disregarding the working conditions of women workers in the lowest positions, in case of the loader working in very dusty environment; sometimes women would demand more content oriented towards production and in that way refuting the myth about specific content designated for women. I also pointed out that the question of dormitories was dealt separately from the activities of women's council. In the plans of women's council, there were no women who would be appointed to dormitory's commission or council. It might be that members of the women's council saw themselves as being above such domestic questions. They did not want to deal with workers' living conditions and, as we have already witnessed, encouraged other women to look for their social position beyond baking the cookies.

7. Conclusions

*An increasingly 'modern' society developed which was urbanised, educated and professionalised. None of these phenomena were new to the USSR, having increasingly been features of Soviet development since the revolution.*¹⁷¹

Nothing in Soviet Union can be seen as stagnation. People lived, worked, sought careers, respected or detested their workplaces, were opinionated about the political and social processes and reforms that had a direct impact on their lives. In my thesis I also showed that nothing was static about the way the state institutions and organizations functioned. The Communist party in Soviet Union measured their economic development according to the productivity norms, therefore, the ruling elite was forced to make social arrangements that would also serve the workers. However, the balance that had to be kept for the sake of productivity between the Party and the workers was not easy to maintain since workers were eager to oppose such utilitarian measures. The Party was always promising better conditions of work, improvement of workplace and living facilities. Those promises were announced officially and to some degree implemented through certain institutions and organizations. I picked women's councils and trade unions as organizations where voices of women workers were mostly visible and vibrant - or at least I expected it to be that way. I aimed to explore women's positions towards the policies of Soviet Union while researching their relations with the specific organizations like trade unions and women's councils. The emphasis on women's issues was made by perestroika's leading figure Mikhail Gorbachev. These were my three key points to build the body of my research: the development of modern society of USSR, the welfare organisations for workers as a platform to negotiate and bargain, and how the claim of perestroika to focus on women's issues affected women's efforts and abilities to attain a better bargaining position.

¹⁷¹ Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, Studies in Russian and East European History and Society (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Palgrave, 2002), 16.

In chapter 4 I tried to define the functions of trade unions in the concrete enterprises of Soviet Lithuania, how the preferences of the heads of trade unions mattered and whether it had an effect on the decisions that trade unions took to improve workers' leisure time and living conditions. Women who were in charge of trade unions sometimes served as "good ears" for workers' complaints – a discontent that would be quickly forgotten by the management. In the last part of my chapter I managed to depict the relations within the trade union and interactions between the women workers' and chairman of the union. The ignorance of the administration and trade union to the women's workers problems created a precedence for women to use the platform of public complaints established by women's councils on the national level.

In chapter 5 I showed that women's councils were more autonomous and sometimes developed their own specific focus or activities depending on relations among the organizations of factory – the so called "troika" of administration, trade union and Party officials. On the one hand, trade union officials most probably prevented women's councils to have the full range of activities. On the other hand, the social status of women in women's council also determined the focus of their activities in the workplace. Soviet Lithuanian Women's Summit that happened in 1987, as I argue, determined the activities of all women's councils and left women with two choices. The first, that most likely would not face opposition by "troika" organizations in the factory, would be the activities oriented towards culture and education. And the second choice was more about challenging these organizations and mingling into more social and political affairs of the factory.

My longest chapter 6 was focused on one of the factory's women's council and the articles of weekly women's run newspaper of the same factory. The case of the fiber factory suggested that women's councils gave more attention to women as social persons – those who should be interested in the public life and their career. In a way women's council closely collaborated with the trade union by drawing attention to the workers' conditions of work and their health, since women in the women's council were high level professionals. Therefore, I contend that women workers from professionalized urban class made women's council into their own organization where they could organize the activities around their own aspirations.

Overall, I hope that I succeeded to grasp the complexity and diversity of the relations between women, trade unions and women's councils that women have developed as workers, but

also as women of modern Soviet society. At the same time, I do not claim that I unravel all the aspects of relations within the trade unions and women's councils and their relations to the other organizations within enterprises. Nevertheless, at the end I argue that the chaos of Soviet bureaucracy was hardly ever fully conceived by any scholar. The analysis I have built in this thesis relies on details rather than generalizing picture - I believe that the only general conclusion that can be made about perestroika is that there is no general conclusion.

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Kauno vilnos gamybinis susivienijimas “Liteksas” (Kaunas wool production enterprise “Liteksas”)

“‘Liteksas’ profsąjungos prezidiumo posėdžio protokolai Nr. 37; 38; 41; 47; 53; 55 [“Liteksas” Trade Union Presidium Meeting Minutes No 37; 38; 41; 47; 53; 55],” 1988. R-324 ap. 2 b. 259. Kauno regioninis archyvas.

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“1985.04.09 Pokalbio protokolas [Conversation Protocol],” 1985. R-862 ap. 2 b. 260. Kauno regioninis archyvas.

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