

DODGE

Women in the Soviet Economy

JOHNS

WOMEN IN THE SOVIET ECONOMY

*Their Role in Economic, Scientific,
and Technical Development*

*A study sponsored by the Foreign Studies Group, Office of Economic
and Manpower Studies, National Science Foundation, and prepared
under the supervision of the Department of Economics, University
of Maryland*

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PREFACE

CONCERN IN recent years for the waste of women's talent and labor potential led to the appointment of The President's Commission on the Status of Women, which has issued a series of reports on various problems affecting women and their participation in economic, political, and social life.¹ For any formulation of policy directed toward the better use of our woman power, it is important to know the experience of other nations in utilizing the capabilities of women. For this reason as well as others, the Soviet experience is of particular interest at this time.

Although the lack of reported data on some of the topics under consideration resulted in many unanswered questions, during the past decade there has been a significant improvement in the flow of both statistical and descriptive materials from the Soviet Union. A great variety of statistical handbooks and other materials presenting figures on the country's economic, social, and cultural developments has been screened and analyzed for this study. Because so many of these statistics had to be related to data on population and its characteristics, the pivotal years for analysis in the present study are 1926, 1939, and 1959—the years in which national censuses

for the U.S.S.R. were made. Bench marks so widely separated are of limited use, however, unless one can fill in the gaps with additional information. Thus, intercensal comparisons are supplemented when possible by other published statistics and by estimates of births, deaths, size and structure of the population according to educational attainment, employment, and so forth. Projections of the population by broad age groups are made for 1970 and 1980. As in most studies lacking a strong historical focus, the reader will find that greater attention is devoted—with a few exceptions, when current data are deficient—to more recent materials.

A somewhat analogous progression is attempted in the emphasis by topics, the greatest emphasis being placed on professional women in the field of science and technology. Four chapters do not deal specifically with the labor force but with more general aspects of women, their number, age structure, and education—Chapter 2 on population questions, Chapter 6 on educational trends, Chapter 7 on training in science and technology, and Chapter 8 on educational attainment. Chapters 7 and 8 are, of course, crucial to an understanding of the contribution of women to the scientific and technical achievements of the Soviet Union. Primary emphasis, however, is placed on the role of women in the Soviet labor force. The extent to which

¹The President's Commission on the Status of Women, *American Women* (Washington, D.C., 1963), and other specialized reports.

women participate in the economy as a whole is discussed in Chapter 3. Some of the factors affecting this participation are examined in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapters 9 and 10, the role of women in the two most important categories of the Soviet labor force is described—the less skilled occupations in agriculture and industry (Chapter 9) and the more highly skilled semiprofessional and professional occupations (Chapter 10). In Chapter 11, I examine and attempt to assess the contribution of women to Soviet science and technology.

The sources used in this study are mainly published Soviet materials. In addition, first-hand information and impressions were gathered in the Soviet Union during a month in the spring of 1955, two months in the summer of 1962, and five weeks in the spring of 1965. During the two latter visits, which took me from Leningrad to Alma-Ata, I had both formal and informal conferences and interviews with several-score Soviet officials, administrators, scientists, engineers, teachers, physicians, economists, and others concerned with problems related to the training and employment of women. Many of those interviewed were women.

Intourist and the Institute of Soviet-American Relations were helpful in arranging my visits to nurseries, kindergartens, schools, higher educational institutions, research institutes, farms, factories, and other institutions and enterprises.

I should like to thank the National Science Foundation for its financial support of this research and to express special thanks to Mr. Joseph P. Kozlowski of the Office of Economic and Manpower Studies for his encouragement and help. This study was initiated by Mr. Michael Roof, but because of other commitments he withdrew from the project.

His contribution, particularly in the early stages of the study, was helpful. Mr. Charles West was also very helpful in the initial stages, and his loyal assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Special thanks are due Mrs. Elizabeth Marbury Bass for assistance on the legal sections of Chapter 4, Mr. James Brackett of the Bureau of the Census for invaluable help on Chapter 2, and Mr. Murray Feshbach, also of the Bureau of the Census, for assistance and advice on Chapters 9 and 10, as well as on bibliographic matters. The excellent collection of materials in the library of the Foreign Demographic Analysis Division of the Bureau of the Census, which was made available to me by Mr. Feshbach, yielded much valuable data.

Mrs. May Spiro ably and loyally edited and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. Imaginative editorial assistance was given by Mrs. Mary Knight. Mrs. Janet Lugo was also of assistance in the final throes of completing the manuscript.

I should also like to thank the staff of the Slavic Room of the Library of Congress, particularly Dr. Gisela Weinfeld, for its generous help over many months. Professor Dudley Dillard, chairman of the Department of Economics, and the departmental secretary, Mrs. Helen Jenkins, have facilitated my work in many ways. Finally, I should like to acknowledge my great debt and gratitude to my old friend and former colleague, Professor Nicholas DeWitt, whose important and fundamental work in the areas of Soviet education and professional manpower has made my task easier.

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*College Park, Maryland
September, 1965*

DEFINITIONS

Able-bodied age group	Officially 16 to 59 years for men and 16 to 54 years for women
Age-specific birth rate	Number of children born to a thousand women of a given age
<i>Aspirant</i>	Graduate student
Birth rate or crude birth rate	Number of children born per thousand of the total population
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
Candidate degree	First Soviet advanced degree; roughly comparable to the Ph.D.
Doctoral degree	Highest Soviet advanced degree; senior to the Ph.D.
<i>Dotsent</i>	Associate professor
<i>Dvor</i>	Traditional peasant household
<i>Feldsher</i>	Assistant physician or medic; term originated in the army
<i>Gosplan</i>	State Planning Committee (Commission)
Gross reproduction rate (GRR)	The maternal gross reproduction rate is the number of female children who will be born per 100 women who will survive through the reproductive ages, if a constant set of age-specific birth rates prevails throughout the period
<i>Internat</i>	Boarding school
<i>Kafedra</i>	Academic department or chair in a higher educational institution
<i>Komsomol</i>	Young Communist League
<i>Kulak</i>	Rich peasant
MTS	Machine Tractor Station
NEP	New Economic Policy (1921–28), under which a wide range of private economic activity was legalized

<i>Nomenklatura</i>	Appointments list controlled by the party
<i>Oblast</i>	Governmental administrative unit subordinated to a republic; province
Philology	In Soviet usage, the field of languages and literature
Polytechnical institute	General engineering school offering several specialties
Private subsidiary agriculture	Cultivation of private garden plots
R.S.F.S.R.	Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, or Russia proper
Scientific worker (<i>nauchnyi rabotnik</i>)	Specialist working not only in a natural science field but in any field of knowledge
<i>Technicum</i>	Specialized secondary school
<i>Trudoden</i>	Labor day; a work-day unit on a collective farm
Working age group	Men and women 16 to 59 years of age
<i>Yasli</i>	Nursery or crèche

CONTENTS

Preface.....	vii	XII. Achievements in Science and Technology.....	216
List of Figures.....	x	XIII. Summary and Conclusions.....	238
List of Tables.....	x	Appendixes:	
Definitions.....	xvii	I. Demographic Tables.....	251
I. Introduction.....	1	II. Population and Employment, by Sex and Age, by Republic, 1959.....	259
II. Demographic Factors Affecting Employment.....	5	III. Child-Care Facilities and Time Budgets.....	269
III. Participation in the Labor Force.....	32	IV. Education of Women.....	276
IV. Social, Economic, and Legal Factors Affecting Employment.....	52	V. Graduate Degrees.....	279
V. Family versus Work.....	76	VI. Educational Attainment.....	282
VI. Education and Training.....	100	VII. Nonprofessional Occupations.....	293
VII. Specialized Training.....	123	VIII. Semiprofessional and Professional Occupations.....	298
VIII. Educational Attainment.....	140	IX. Women Scientists at Universities.....	302
IX. Nonprofessional Occupations.....	160	X. Method of Making Article Counts.....	304
X. Semiprofessional and Professional Occupations.....	184	Bibliography.....	307
XI. Professional Attainment.....	200	Index.....	321

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Sex ratios, 1897-1980.....	7
2. Population pyramid, Russian Empire, January 28, 1897.....	8
3. Population pyramid, December 17, 1926.....	9
4. Estimated population pyramid, January 17, 1939.....	10
5. Estimated population pyramid, January 1, 1946.....	11
6. Estimated population pyramid, January 1, 1950.....	11
7. Population pyramid, January 15, 1959.....	12
8. Projected population pyramid, January 1, 1970.....	13
9. Projected population pyramid, January 1, 1980.....	13
10. Population and employment pyramids, 1926..	34
11. Population and employment pyramids, 1959..	36
12. Population and employment pyramids, 1959, Latvian S.S.R.....	39
13. Population and employment pyramids, 1959, Uzbek S.S.R.....	40
14. Age-sex distribution of the labor force, 1926..	43
15. Age-sex distribution of the labor force, 1959..	45
16. Optimal proportion of male to female employment.....	49
17. Optimal proportion of male and female enrollment in higher education.....	117
18. Optimal proportion of male and female enrollment in graduate education.....	138
19. Educational level of the urban and rural population, by age and sex, January 15, 1959.....	148
20. Educational level of the urban population, by age and sex, January 15, 1959.....	149
21. Educational level of the rural population, by age and sex, January 15, 1959.....	150
22. Educational level of employees and collective farmers and their families, by age and sex, January 15, 1959.....	153
23. Age distribution of males and females employed in predominantly physical occupations, 1959.....	161
24. Age distribution of males and females employed in predominantly physical occupations in agriculture, except private subsidiary agriculture, 1959.....	161
25. Age distribution of males and females employed in predominantly physical occupations other than in agriculture, 1959.....	162

26. Age distribution of males and females in semiprofessional and professional occupations, 1959.....	186
27. Percentage of women among the teaching staffs of higher educational institutions, by field, 1947.....	208

Appendix VII

1. Age distribution of males and females employed in various agricultural occupations, January 15, 1959.....	294
2. Age distribution of males and females employed in various "physical" occupations, January 15, 1959.....	295

LIST OF TABLES

1. Females as percentage of total population, 1897-1980.....	6
2. Sex ratios, 1897-1980.....	6
3. Population of working age, 1897-1980.....	14
4. Annual changes in the sex ratio of the working-age population, 1955-70.....	16
5. Dependency ratios, 1897-1980.....	16
6. Percentage distribution of the population by age and sex, 1897-1980.....	17
7. The married population, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....	18
8. The urban and rural married population, 1959.....	19
9. Crude birth, mortality, and natural increase rates, 1913-64.....	20
10. Birth rates in Union republics, 1961 and 1962.....	21
11. Estimated maternal and paternal gross reproduction rates, 1950-61.....	21
12. Family allowances, by decrees of 1936, 1944, and 1947.....	24
13. Family composition, by urban and rural residence and by sex, 1959.....	25
14. Family composition, average size, by occupation and by urban and rural residence, 1959..	26
15. Family composition, average size, by nationality and by urban and rural residence, 1959..	26
16. Percentage of females in each family size, 1959.....	27

17. Family members living apart from their families, by urban and rural residence and by sex, 1959.....	29	38. Percentage of total population compared with percentage of total places in permanent kindergartens in selected republics, 1939 and 1959.....	85
18. Family members living apart from their families, by urban and rural residence and by age, 1959.....	29	39. Estimated percentage of kindergarten-aged children for whom accommodations were available in permanent kindergartens in the Turkmen and Kirgiz republics, 1959.....	85
19. Nonfamily members, by urban and rural residence and by sex, 1959.....	29	40. Monthly payments by parents for maintaining children in kindergartens, 1948-65.....	86
20. Nonfamily members, by urban and rural residence and by age, 1959.....	30	41. Cost of attending a boarding school.....	88
21. Population and labor force, by age and by sex, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....	32	42. Number of extracurricular children's institutions of the Ministries of Education in the Union republics and of the Ministry of Railways.....	90
22. Participation rates of urban women in the labor force, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....	33	43. Time budgets of male and female workers in 1922 and at the beginning of 1960.....	93
23. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1926.....	35	44. Percentage allocation of time of male and female workers in 1922 and at the beginning of 1960.....	94
24. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959.....	37	45. Distribution of families by hours spent on housework and in the preparation of meals and washing dishes in Leningrad, Tbilisi, and Pavlovo-Posad.....	95
25. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Latvian S.S.R.....	41	46. Time spent by working women on housework and child care and on rest and sleep.....	96
26. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Uzbek S.S.R.....	41	47. Percentage of urban population provided with municipal utilities, 1927, 1939, and 1956.....	97
27. Total labor force, by major occupational group and by sex, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....	44	48. Production of consumer durables, selected years, 1940-64.....	97
28. Percentage distribution of the total labor force, by major occupational group and by sex, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....	46	49. Number of public catering establishments.....	98
29. Distribution of the labor-force and nonlabor-force population by socioeconomic category, sex, and broad age group, 1959.....	47	50. Percentage of girls in Soviet primary and secondary schools, 1927-61.....	106
30. Percentage of females in the labor-force and nonlabor-force population, by socioeconomic category and age group, 1959.....	48	51. Percentage of girls in Soviet secondary schools in representative republics, 1955.....	107
31. Percentage of respondents whose mothers had worked (Harvard Project).....	54	52. Percentage of girls in Soviet secondary schools in certain Central Asian republics, 1950, 1955, and 1959.....	108
32. Number of permanent and seasonal nurseries, 1917-29.....	77	53. Women among day and evening students enrolled in specialized secondary educational institutions, by field, 1927-64.....	110
33. Number of places in Soviet nurseries, 1913-64.....	78	54. Specialized secondary education enrollment and the proportion of women of local nationality enrolled, Tadzhik S.S.R., 1959.....	110
34. Percentage of total population compared with percentage of total places in permanent nurseries in selected republics, 1939 and 1959.....	79	55. Total specialized secondary education enrollment and the proportion of women of local nationality in total enrollment, Turkmen S.S.R., 1959.....	111
35. Estimated percentage of nursery-aged children for whom accommodations were available in permanent nurseries in the Turkmen and Kirgiz republics, 1959.....	80		
36. Monthly payments by parents for maintaining children in nurseries, 1948-65.....	81		
37. Number, staff, and enrollment of urban and rural kindergartens and nursery-kindergartens, 1914-64.....	84		

56. Proportion of women enrolled in specialized secondary educational institutions, Tadzhik, Turkmen, and Kirgiz republics, 1950 and 1959.....111
57. Women among day and evening students enrolled in higher educational institutions, by field, 1926-64.....112
58. Number and percentage of women applying for admission and the ratios of male and female applicants admitted to the science faculties of Moscow State University, fall of 1964.....113
59. Higher educational enrollment and the proportion of women of local nationality enrolled, Tadzhik S.S.R., 1959.....118
60. Higher educational enrollment and the proportion of women of local nationality enrolled, Turkmen S.S.R., 1959.....119
61. Percentage of women of total enrollment in higher educational institutions, by republic and nationality, 1960.....120
62. Nationality groups as percentage of total population of selected republics in 1959 compared with the share of women of a given nationality in the total enrollment of women in higher education in 1960.....120
63. Percentage of women enrolled in higher educational institutions, by field, 1950 and 1959, in the Tadzhik, Kirgiz, and Turkmen republics.....121
64. Percentage of women enrolled in engineering-industrial institutes, 1956-57.....126
65. Percentage of women enrolled in selected engineering institutes.....127
66. Total enrollment and percentage of women enrolled in day division, by faculty, Voronezh State University, 1950, 1960, and 1963....130
67. Percentage of women enrolled, by faculty, Uzhgorod State University, 1950, 1955, and 1963.....131
68. Total enrollment and percentage of women enrolled in day division, by faculty, Tartu State University, 1950, 1960, and 1963....132
69. Percentage of women enrolled in day division, by faculty, Odessa State University, 1950, 1960, and 1963.....132
70. Enrollment and percentage of women enrolled in day, evening, and correspondence divisions, by faculty, Erevan State University, 1964.....133
71. Enrollment and percentage of women enrolled in day division, by faculty, Tbilisi State University, 1964.....133
72. Enrollment of graduate students, by type of institution, 1960.....134
73. Graduate students, by type of institution, 1929-61.....135
74. Number and distribution of women graduate students, by type of institution and by field, 1938.....136
75. Number and percentage of women granted candidate degrees, 1946-53.....136
76. Estimated percentage of women receiving candidate degrees, by field, selected years...137
77. Estimated percentage of women receiving doctoral degrees, by field, selected years...138
78. Percentage of literacy of the urban and rural population, age 9-49, by sex, 1897, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....141
79. Men and women with secondary and higher education, 1939 and 1959.....143
80. Proportion of men and women with secondary and higher education, 1939 and 1959...144
81. Male and female workers, employees, and collective farmers in the urban and rural population with higher or secondary education, 1939 and 1959.....145
82. Number and percentage of persons with less than a seven-year education in the population age 15 and over and in the able-bodied age group, 1959.....146
83. Number and percentage of persons with less than a four-year education in the population age 20 and over, 1959.....146
84. Number and percentage of persons with less than a four-year education in the able-bodied age group, 1959.....147
85. Persons of able-bodied age with higher and secondary education, by republic, 1959....149
86. Men and women with higher and secondary education, by republic, 1939 and 1959....151
87. Educational level of the employed population, by socioeconomic group and sex, 1959 154
88. Educational level of the urban and rural population employed in physical and mental work, 1959.....157
89. Educational level of women in various occupations, 1939 and 1959.....158
90. Civilian labor force, by socioeconomic category, branch, and sex, 1959.....162
91. Contribution of able-bodied women to collective farm labor, selected years, 1936-62..164
92. Percentage of women among able-bodied collective farmers, by republic, selected years, 1940-61.....165

93. Labor inputs of all collective farmers, in percentages of man-hours worked by each group, 1959.....167
94. Labor inputs of able-bodied male and female collective farmers in Krasnodar Krai, in percentages of man-hours worked by each group, 1956-58.....167
95. Utilization of collective-farm labor resources, by sex, 1953.....168
96. Number and percentage of women among collective farmers employed in predominantly physical labor in agriculture, by occupation, January 15, 1959.....169
97. Percentage of women among MTS personnel, by occupation, 1948, 1950, and 1954.....170
98. Percentage of women employed in the private subsidiary sector, by age, urban and rural residence, and republic, 1959.....173
99. Number and percentage of women among state farm and other workers of state agricultural enterprises employed in predominantly physical labor, January 15, 1959....174
100. Number and percentage of women workers and employees, by branch of the economy, selected years, 1929-64.....178
101. Percentage of women wage workers, by branch of industry, selected years, 1913-62 180
102. Percentage of women among workers and employees, by republic, selected years, 1933-64.....182
103. Number and percentage of women employed in major occupations involving physical labor, 1959.....182
104. Women specialists employed in the economy, with higher or specialized secondary education.....185
105. Age distribution of female "mental" and "physical" workers compared with age distribution of females having specialized training and with the entire female population.....188
106. Women specialists with specialized secondary education employed in the economy, by specialty, 1955-57, 1959-64.....189
107. Distribution of women specialists with specialized secondary education employed in the economy, by specialty, 1955-57, 1959-64.....190
108. Percentage of women among all specialists with specialized secondary education employed in the economy, by specialty, 1955-57, 1959-64.....190
109. Utilization of men and women with specialized secondary education, beginning of 1959.....191
110. Number and percentage of women specialists with specialized secondary education employed in the economy, by nationality, December 1, 1961.....192
111. Women specialists with higher education employed in the economy, by specialty, 1941, 1954-57, 1959-64.....194
112. Distribution of women specialists with higher education employed in the economy, by specialty, 1941, 1954-57, 1959-64.....194
113. Percentage of women among all specialists with higher education employed in the economy, by specialty, 1941, 1954-57, 1959-64.....194
114. Women holding doctoral and candidate degrees, 1950 and 1959-61.....195
115. Women scientific workers having academic titles, 1950, 1955, and 1960-64.....196
116. Number and percentage of women specialists with higher education employed in the economy, by nationality, December 1, 1960.....197
117. Utilization of men and women with higher education, beginning of 1959.....198
118. Number and percentage of women administrators and specialists employed in the economy, 1941 and 1956.....201
119. Women administrators and specialists on collective and state farms and in other state agricultural enterprises, by occupation, December 1, 1956.....202
120. Women administrators and specialists employed in construction enterprises, by occupation, December 1, 1956.....204
121. Percentage of women administrators and teachers in elementary and secondary schools of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Transportation, 1940-41, 1950-51, 1955-56, 1958-64.....205
122. Number and percentage of women administrators and teachers in elementary and secondary schools of the Ministry of Education, by republic, beginning of school years, 1958-59, 1960-61, 1961-62.....206
123. Women administrators, teachers, and other specialists in educational institutions training specialized manpower, by occupation, December 1, 1956.....207
124. Women scientific workers in higher educational institutions, 1950, 1955, and 1960...207
125. Number of physicians, women physicians, and percentage of women, selected years, 1913-63.....209

126. Number of physicians, women physicians, and percentage of women, by republic, 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1961.....209
127. Women administrators and specialists in medical and health-care establishments, by occupation, December 1, 1956.....210
128. Women administrators and specialists in research institutions, by occupation, December 1, 1956.....211
129. Women administrators and specialists employed in project-making and design organizations, by occupation, December 1, 1956..212
130. Women scientific workers in scientific research institutes, enterprises, and other organizations, 1950, 1955, and 1960.....213
131. Number and percentage of women among the membership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R...214
132. Percentage of women among the teaching staffs of different types of higher educational institutions, 1927 and 1947.....224
133. Percentage of women with higher education in various specialties compared with percentage of articles in related professional journals contributed by women.....227
134. Percentage of women on the professional staffs of higher educational institutions in 1947 compared with percentage of articles in professional journals contributed by women in 1940, 1950, and 1960.....228
135. Percentage of students receiving "outstanding" on their *gostekhezkamen*, January, 1936.....230
3. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Belorussian S.S.R.....263
4. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Kazakh S.S.R.....263
5. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Georgian S.S.R.....264
6. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Azerbaidzhan S.S.R.....264
7. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Lithuanian S.S.R.....265
8. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Moldavian S.S.R.....265
9. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Kirgiz S.S.R.....266
10. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Tadzhik S.S.R.....266
11. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Armenian S.S.R.....267
12. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Turkmen S.S.R.....267
13. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Estonian S.S.R.....268

Appendix III

1. Number of children in nurseries of all jurisdictions, by republic, 1940-64.....269
2. Children's summer playgrounds, 1927-59....269
3. Distribution of kindergartens, by departmental subordination, 1937-55.....270
4. Distribution of summer playgrounds, by departmental subordination, 1955.....270
5. Children's establishments (other than schools) under the Ministries of Education and the Ministry of Railways in the U.S.S.R. and the Union republics on January 1, 1956.....271
6. Number of Pioneer camps in the U.S.S.R. and the Union republics, 1950-64.....271
7. Number of children attending Pioneer camps in the Union republics, 1950-64.....272
8. Number of children in kindergartens of all jurisdictions, by republic, 1940-64.....272
9. Number of children's summer playgrounds in the Union republics, 1950-59.....273
10. Number of children attending summer playgrounds in the Union republics, 1950-59...273
11. Children's homes, 1940-55.....274
12. Time budgets of male and female workers in the U.S.S.R. in 1922 and at the beginning of 1960.....275

Appendix I

1. Population of the Soviet Union, by age and sex, 1897-1959.....251
2. Projected population of the Soviet Union, January 1, 1970 and 1980.....253
3. Family members living together, by family size, urban and rural residence, age, and sex, 1959.....254
4. Family members living together, by family size, urban and rural residence, broad age groups, and sex, 1959.....257
5. Percentage of family members living together, by family size, urban and rural residence, broad age groups, and sex, 1959.....258

Appendix II

1. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, R.S.F.S.R.....262
2. Population and employment, by sex and by age, 1959, Ukrainian S.S.R.....262

Appendix IV

1. Percentage of girls in primary, seven-year, and secondary schools, by republic, 1955-56.....276
2. Number and percentage of women enrolled in regular and correspondence courses in higher educational institutions, by nationality, 1959 and 1960.....277
3. Number and percentage of women enrolled in regular and correspondence courses in higher educational institutions, by republic, 1958, 1959, and 1960.....277
4. Number and percentage of women in secondary specialized educational institutions, by republic, 1958-61.....278

Appendix V

1. Number and distribution of candidate degrees awarded by field, sample coverage, and estimated percentage of women.....279
2. Number and distribution of doctoral degrees awarded by field, sample coverage, and estimated percentage of women.....281

Appendix VI

1. Percentage of literacy of the urban and rural population, age 9-49, by sex and by republic, 1897, 1926, 1939, and 1959.....282
2. Educational level of the urban and rural population, by age and sex, 1959.....283
3. Educational level of the urban and rural population, by age and sex, 1959.....284
4. Educational level of the urban and rural population, by age and sex, 1959.....286
5. Educational level of the population, by nationality and sex, 1939 and 1959.....287

6. Educational level of the urban and rural population, by age, sex, and republic, 1959.....288
7. Educational level of the population, by socioeconomic group, age, and sex, 1959.....290
8. Educational level of persons employed in various branches of the economy, 1959.....291

Appendix VII

1. Number and percentage of women in various "physical" occupations, 1926, 1939, and 1959 293
2. MTS mechanized personnel, by age and sex, 1948 and 1950.....294
3. Persons occupied in private subsidiary agriculture, by republic, age, and sex, January 15, 1959.....296
4. Persons occupied in private subsidiary agriculture, by republic, sex, and urban and rural location, January 15, 1959.....296
5. Distribution and percentage of women among state farm workers and collective farmers engaged in predominantly physical labor, January 15, 1959.....297

Appendix VIII

1. Number and percentage of women specialists with higher and specialized secondary education employed in the economy, by republic, December 1, 1957, 1960, and 1961.....298
2. Number and percentage of women in various "mental" occupations, 1926, 1939, and 1959 299
3. Number of women scientific workers, 1947-64.....301

chapter

1

INTRODUCTION

A MAJOR resource of any nation is its people, and the effective utilization of this resource is the precondition for social, economic, or technical development. This study examines Soviet utilization of human resources—specifically, the resources of women—and attempts to present a broad survey of the part played by women in the Soviet economy, particularly in science and technology. Certain other relevant aspects of the life of Soviet women are touched on. The period from the Revolution (1917) to the present, with emphasis on the recent past, is the primary focus, but on occasion it is necessary to examine conditions in pre-Communist Russia in order to gain perspective on the Communist period. This study is intended to provide a foundation for an understanding of the forces which have shaped the role of women in the Soviet economy as well as an appreciation of their contribution to Soviet economic development. Hopefully, it will stimulate further investigation into the many controversial questions which it raises but does not resolve.

In any comparison of Soviet and American manpower resources, one is immediately struck by the differences in the utilization of women. The restricted role of women in the American economy contrasts sharply with their broad role in the Soviet economy. This difference is most striking in the areas of science and technology, where women have come to occupy an extremely significant position in the Soviet Union, particularly at the semiprofessional and intermediate professional levels.

In the chapters ahead it will soon become apparent that the difference in the utilization of women in the two economies stems largely from the fundamental differences in the underlying philosophies and aims of the two societies. The importance of women in the Soviet economy is primarily the result of the profound transformation in the political, economic, and social organization under the Soviet regime. These changes, which have been compressed into a period of fewer than fifty years, are the result of policies deliberately formulated and vigorously, even ruthlessly, pursued by the party and the government. Through the mobilization of the entire society, Soviet totalitarianism has sought to reconstruct not only the economic and social institutions, but also the attitudes and minds of the people. To this end, the regime has exerted absolute control over the various means of mass communication and education and has used them to inspire, manipulate, or drive the public into supporting, or acquiescing in, the regime's programs.

There are limits, of course, to the power of the Soviet regime, even when supported by the modern devices which so facilitate the wielding of centralized power. Formidable restraints are imposed by a society's previous cultural pattern. As the Soviets discovered in Central Asia, long-established beliefs, customs, and practices can be extremely difficult to eradicate. Institutions supporting the *status quo*—the family, school, and church—may show surprising resilience. Some institutions,

particularly the school, were soon reorganized to further the objectives of the Soviet regime. Others, such as the church, were eventually tolerated after they had survived in a much-weakened condition a period of vigorous attack. The family, however, as a primary social unit, has remained a constant challenge to the state by virtue of its resistance to outside influences and its tendency to harbor traditional values.

Marxist doctrine held that women were no less subjugated under capitalism than was the proletariat. The family was considered to be founded upon the domestic enslavement of the wife. Not only did the Soviet leadership feel bound to eliminate exploitation in the home, but it also believed that the family perpetuated the outmoded bourgeois ideology. Nikolai Bukharin, a leading party theoretician, stated at the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1924 that the family remained "a formidable stronghold of all the turpitudes of the old regime."¹ For this reason, early legislation aimed not only at improving the status of women, but also at undermining the strength of the family. Women were granted full equality with men under the law. Measures facilitating divorce, legalizing unregistered marriages, legitimizing children born out of wedlock, and legalizing abortion were designed to loosen the bonds which tied the family together.

The attitude of the regime toward the family changed as the regime gained confidence. By the mid-1930's the family was no longer considered a threat to the political control of the younger generation, and the Soviet leadership had become more clearly aware of the family's positive function in preparing children for their future roles in society. Modern industry called for the virtues of promptness, reliability, co-operativeness, and receptivity to direction on the part of workers—all virtues which the family can inculcate better than the state. As a result, much of the early legislation easing divorce and weakening family ties

was modified. Soviet theoretical discussions of the dissolution of the family and the transfer of its functions to the state are now much less frequent; and they refer, not to the near, but to a distant utopian future when the transition from socialism to full communism will be finally achieved.

The family now forms a social unit which preserves much independence from the state; it also competes with the state for the time and energy of women workers. Family demands may prevent some women from participating in the labor force and some women from giving their work sufficient attention, but the government has nevertheless been remarkably successful in maintaining a high level of participation in the labor force by all age groups, even by those in the principal years of child-bearing and child rearing. On the other hand, the double burden of family and work which many women bear has had the unintended social consequence of contributing to a reduction in the birth rate, which in turn may adversely affect future economic growth. It is clear from the complexity of these interrelationships that one cannot properly study women as participants in the labor force without considering how their roles as wives and mothers are affected, and vice versa. In the early chapters of this study, we shall attempt to discover the most important factors encouraging or inhibiting the participation of women in the Soviet economy.

As will be shown, the most important circumstance underlying the high level of participation by women in the labor force has been the forced-draft industrialization of the Soviet Union. The willingness of the regime to sacrifice human welfare for higher rates of economic growth has had a decisive impact on almost every policy affecting women in their economic role. For example, the large relative loss of male population caused by the two World Wars, the Civil War, and the vicissitudes of the 1920's and 1930's would not necessarily of itself have led to an increase in the participation of women in the labor force. However, the regime's determination to maintain the high rate of economic

¹Quoted in Alex Inkeles and Raymond A. Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 190.

growth necessitated that more women be drawn into and retained in the labor force. This determination also explains the ambivalence of the regime toward the provision of more adequate child-care facilities, cafeterias, and household durables. These would have been provided, even at the expense of investment in producers' goods, if the regime had been less preoccupied with economic growth and more with human welfare. The regime chose, however, to provide only the minimum necessary to keep a large proportion of women in the labor force. As a result, most Soviet women continue to carry heavy domestic burdens in addition to their work responsibilities. The resulting conflict between family and work is found to have important consequences for the productivity of women, especially in the more demanding and creative occupations.

The chapters on education are intended, in part, to show the rapid increase under Soviet rule in the breadth and scope of the education of women. After the Revolution, increasing numbers of girls entered the secondary specialized schools and higher educational institutions. The relative proportion of women in all fields of study increased. As the industrialization drive gained momentum, both the number and the proportion of girls enrolled in the sciences and technology, where the shortages of manpower were greatest, increased impressively. This study examines how young women in the Soviet Union are influenced in their choice of fields and shows why some professions traditionally followed by men—the medical profession, for example—are now largely the province of women. An attempt is made to explain why the relative proportion of female students shrinks as the level of education increases and why, in recent years, there has been a general reduction in the proportion of women enrolled in higher education—a reduction to a level substantially below that which would be expected from the proportion of women in the college-age population. An explanation is called for, since equal access to higher education continues to

be proclaimed as one of the cornerstones of Soviet policy.

The employment of women in unskilled and semiskilled jobs in agriculture, industry, and other sectors of the economy is discussed primarily for the purpose of presenting a background against which the employment of women in semiprofessional and professional occupations can be seen in proper perspective. Although the utilization of women in the professions, particularly in science and technology, is our primary focus of interest, it is important to realize that the bulk of Soviet working women are employed in relatively unskilled work. The largest single group of women is to be found in unskilled field work in agriculture.

With this background, the final chapters turn to our central interest—the employment of women in semiprofessional and professional occupations, especially in the fields of science and technology. The role of women in the various professions and their participation as executives and administrators in various sectors of the economy are examined. As in other countries, the proportion of women in a profession declines as the level of responsibility increases. Notwithstanding this, the proportion of women in a number of professions is so large that their representation in the top echelons is substantial. The present study also assesses the contribution of women to scholarship and research in a wide variety of scientific, technical, and other fields. A number of indirect measures of scholarly productivity are devised and applied. An explanation of the apparent lower scholarly productivity of women is then developed.

The lower productivity of women—particularly in creative scholarly work—has evident implications for the determination of the optimal allocation of scarce educational resources between men and women. The hypothesis is offered that recent trends in the enrollment of women reflect the awareness of planners that women offer the nation a lower average return on investment in their education than men. Similarly, it is concluded that