



McShane, Anne (2019) *Bringing the revolution to the women of the East. The Zhenotdel experience in Soviet Central Asia through the lens of Kommunistka*. PhD thesis.

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/40903/>

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlighten: Theses

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>  
[research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk)

# Bringing the Revolution to the Women of the East

The Zhenotdel experience in Soviet Central Asia through the lens of  
*Kommunistka*.

Thesis in Submission of Application for PhD in Politics

**Anne McShane**

Politics Department College of Social Sciences

Supervisors:

Professor Rebecca Kay, Professor of Russian Gender Studies, Central & East  
European Studies

Dr. Maud Bracke, Senior Lecturer in History, School of Humanities

Politics PhD Programme Director: Dr Mo Hume

## Abstract

This thesis considers the role of the Zhenotdel (Woman's Bureau) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in Soviet Central Asia through a close reading of its activist journal *Kommunistka* from 1920-1930.

This research seeks to address conflicting narratives within academic literature concerning the Zhenotdel's status within the CPSU, and in particular between accounts of its role in Central Asia rather than in European parts of the Soviet Union. Historians who have written on a campaign, known as the Hujum, launched by the CPSU in a direct attack on indigenous society in Central Asia in 1927, have tended to view the Zhenotdel as a compliant part of the Party apparatus. This interpretation contrasts with accounts of the Zhenotdel's far more problematic relationship with the Party outside of Central Asia during the same period.

A close reading of *Kommunistka* throughout the entire period of the Zhenotdel's work in Central Asia has not previously been undertaken, although the journal has been relied on along with other source materials by various historians. Therefore, this study brings new and original material and analysis to further our understanding of the Zhenotdel's activities in Central Asia. It provides a close examination of the views of activists and leaders, and a better understanding of the Zhenotdel project on its own terms, as opposed to the goals of the CPSU. The shifts within Zhenotdel policy over the decade can also be situated within the changing conditions of the 1920s within Soviet Central Asia, and the discussions within its ranks.

This thesis analyses the opinions expressed by Zhenotdel activists about indigenous women, along with the methods employed to interact with these women. It gives a detailed account of the Zhenotdel's social, economic and legal strategy and contrasts it with that of the CPSU. This thesis also considers the relationship of the Zhenotdel to the CPSU in the context of Central Asia. It shows how the tensions and conflicts within that relationship, already discussed through research focusing on the experience in the RSFSR and other European Republics, expressed themselves in the specific conditions of Central Asia. This research throws new

light on many of the assumptions made about the Zhenotdel's programme in Central Asia and shows how this programme actually diverged very significantly from that of the Party leadership. A reevaluation of the role of the Zhenotdel in the Hujum has been possible, based on this study. It shows that the involvement of the Zhenotdel in the Hujum and all other aspects of its activity in Central Asia has to be understood on the terms of an organisation which was committed to a woman-centred socialism. Ultimately this research shows the Zhenotdel in a struggle to make progress for its own programme while at the same time seeking to establish itself as a core part of the Soviet strategy in Central Asia.

## Declaration

I Anne Gerardine McShane hereby declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow University or any other institution.

Signed:

A black rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne G. McShane".

Anne Gerardine McShane

Student Number 1010223m

Date:

17 June 2018

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Thesis Map	12
<b>Chapter 1: The Zhenotdel and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union</b>	<b>17</b>
1.1 The Origins of the Zhenotdel	17
1.2 Anti-Feminism	22
1.3 Zhenotdel Socialism	27
1.4 The relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Communist Party	34
1.5 Action to transcend the family	38
1.6 The Zhenotdel leadership and the Central Committee	41
1.7 Conclusion	44
<b>Chapter 2: The Zhenotdel in Soviet Central Asia</b>	<b>46</b>
2.1 Central Asia before the revolution	47
2.2 The Debate on the Role of the Zhenotdel	52
2.3 The Hujum	57
2.4 The Zhenotdel and the Hujum	61
2.5 Interaction with Indigenous Women	65
2.6 The Zhenotdel relationship with Party and State in Central Asia	69
2.7 The Zhenotdel leadership in Soviet Central Asia	72
2.8 Conclusion	74
<b>Chapter Three: The Zhenotdel Programme in Central Asia</b>	<b>78</b>
3.1 The Zhenotdel's views on the Family	78
3.2 Attitudes to the Family in Central Asia	80
3.3 The Language of Transformation	82
3.4 The Programme of transformation in Central Asia	87
3.5 Impact of the Zhenotdel Programme on indigenous women	94
3.6 The experience of the Hujum	96
3.7 Conclusion	101
<b>Chapter 4: Economic and Cultural Policies in Central Asia</b>	<b>104</b>
4.1 Introduction	104
4.2 The Central Asian Women-Only Clubs	104
4.3 Nomadic Women	113
4.4 Co-operatives and economic work	114
4.5 Women Only Shops	119
4.6 Delegate Meetings versus Clubs	124
4.7 The impact of the Hujum	128
4.8 The First Five year Plan	132
4.9 Conclusion	135
<b>Chapter 5: The Legal Strategy of the Zhenotdel in Central Asia</b>	<b>138</b>
5.1 Introduction	138
5.2 The Zhenotdel and Legal Change	139

5.3	Kollontai's view of legal tactics in the East	142
5.4	The Central Asian legal programme	144
5.5	The Court System	148
5.6	Response and effect of legislation on the lives of indigenous women	151
5.7	Discussions on Soviet Law and Indigenous Society	156
5.8	The Unveiling Campaign and the Law	159
5.9	The political shifts of 1929 and the Legal Strategy	162
5.10	Conclusion	164
<b>Chapter 6: The Zhenotdel and the CPSU in Central Asia</b>		<b>166</b>
6.1	Introduction	166
6.2	Relationship of the Central Asian Zhenotdel to the Party	167
6.3	Mobilisations around March 8th	172
6.4	Recruitment, delegate meetings and the soviets	176
6.5	Relationship to co-operatives	181
6.6	The debate on autonomy	183
6.7	The role of the Zhenotdel as enforcer of the Party Purge and the Five Year Plan	191
6.8	Conclusion	195
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b>		<b>198</b>
7.1	The Zhenotdel's disappearance in Central Asia	198
7.2	The Zhenotdel - a complex organisation	200
<b>Appendix 1: Timeline - significant events for the Zhenotdel in Central Asia</b>		<b>208</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>210</b>

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisors Dr Maud Bracke and Professor Rebecca Kay for providing me with the benefit of their knowledge and expertise in helping me to draw out the many varied aspects of this research and for their patience and commitment to ensuring that I complete this thesis. Their support has been immeasurable.

I want to pay tribute to Emeritus Professor Stephen White, without whose support I would never have completed this thesis. As my supervisor for the first three years of my research, Professor White gave me inestimable practical and intellectual support throughout this experience, including access to *Kommunistka* and many other resources. I am deeply grateful to him for his advice and extraordinary kindness. He and his wife Ishbel have been such good friends to me.

I want to thank Professor Mo Hume for her outstanding support of me as a student of the School of Social & Political Sciences. She has made me feel like I belong in Glasgow University.

I must thank the Socialist Theory and Movements Network for its sponsorship of my research, and in particular to Emeritus Professor Hillel Ticktin and Emeritus Professor Bridget Fowler who have inspired me greatly as individuals and given me encouragement. Thanks also go to Dr Alex Marshall for introducing me to this fascinating area of history

Thanks to Professor Christine Cooper for allowing me to become part of her life for the last seven years and for providing me with a home in Glasgow. I want also to express my gratitude to Dr. Yassamine Mather, who was the person who suggested that I commence this research, and who has provided me with a truly life-changing experience.

My gratitude to Alena Mudra, my Russian teacher and good friend, without whom not a word of *Kommunistka* would have been translated. And thanks also to Dr Phyllis Comerford for patiently reading my final transcript and providing me with



invaluable feedback and guidance. And to Lisa Goldman for her insights and collaborative discussions.

I want to thank my friends, especially Esther Powell and Anne Heffernan, and my sisters Kay McShane, Mary Hewitt and Bernie Pridgeon for their support in these years. Special thanks goes to my sister Carol McShane for her encouragement and inspiration.

Thank you to Mary Kelly for lending me her seaside home for the last three months of this thesis. And to Geraldine Christopher and Phyllis Comerford for their companionship and generosity in that time.

Thanks to Seamus Turner and all at MJ O'Connor Solicitors who have facilitated my study and to whom I am very grateful.

Finally I want to thank my husband, Alan Gibson, who has been there for me at all times in the last seven years. His support for this project does not simply reflect his ambitions for me, but his deep and abiding commitment to women's equality.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my niece Sheola Keaney

Remembered with love always

## Introduction

In this thesis I consider the role of the Women's Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Zhenotdel) in early Soviet Central Asia, and primarily in Uzbekistan. The historical period under examination begins in 1920, in the months leading up to the conclusion of the civil war and ends in March 1930 in the first years of Stalin's Five Year Plan.<sup>1</sup> This was a time of momentous change, not least for the women's movement that had emerged after the revolution. The first leaders of the Zhenotdel believed that finally the time had come for them to lead the way in transforming the lives of Soviet women and thus provide an example to the wider world. It was a period when debate still took place within Communist Party journals, and when some of those debates centred on issues of sexual equality and the development of a new type of human relationships in a society free from capitalist repression.

My research is based on a close reading and original analysis of articles from the journal *Kommunistka*,<sup>2</sup> the central organ of the Zhenotdel, which was the forum for theoretical debates, meeting and congress reports and discussion of strategy. It provides a window into the world of Zhenotdel activists in the first years of the Soviet Union. I initially considered exploring Russian archival materials on the Central Asian Zhenotdel, either as an alternative or a supplement to *Kommunistka*. However, I decided that a focus on *Kommunistka* was an important opportunity to obtain an insight into what was within the knowledge of activists and subscribers who did not have access to private meetings. It would also allow an understanding of the degree to which Zhenotdel activists were willing and able to publicly fight for and debate their ideas and the manner in which they expressed criticism. Finally, it would provide an opportunity to review previous analyses which drew on *Kommunistka* in a limited way as a supplement to other

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 68-92 for a summary of that period.

<sup>2</sup> The articles which are the subject of this research do not always have the full name of the writer and this is reflected in the fact that generally surnames, rather than full names, are used.

materials, by using it instead as a key source for extensive and targeted analysis of reports and articles concerning the Zhenotdel's work in Central Asia over the entire ten years of its existence.

I initially planned to consider the entire region described in *Kommunistka* as the 'East'. This encompassed the Caucuses, including Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, as well as the Tatar and Chuvash oblasts of Soviet Russia, the Soviet 'Far East' bordering Korea and China, the North Eastern region which included Siberia, and Central Asia. The peoples of this vast region had extremely diverse histories, languages, cultures and religions. The diversity was reflected in the position of women within those societies, from the relatively secular Tatar women who engaged in public life, to the secluded Uzbek women, to the semi-nomadic women of the Yakut peoples. Having translated a number of articles from across the entire region, I decided that the experiences were too varied to allow for a systematic analysis of the ideological and policy agenda of the Zhenotdel.

Another key reason for focusing on Central Asia, and particularly on Uzbekistan, connects with the reason for focusing on *Kommunistka* as my sole primary source. It was because of my wish to relate my research to existing literature on the role of the Zhenotdel in the region. I wanted to recontextualise existing studies which have focused in the main on the dramatic events of 1927 in Uzbekistan, when the Sredazburo (CPSU Central Asian Bureau) used the language of women's liberation to launch an attack on the social fabric of that society.<sup>3</sup> The current literature on this attack on indigenous society, known as the Hujum (meaning 'assault' in Turkic); which was aimed primarily at the public unveiling of secluded women in Uzbekistan, has largely considered the Zhenotdel to be either a loyal ally, or a servant of the Central Party leadership during what was essentially a struggle for authoritarian domination. This seems to me to be a problematic analysis, especially when viewed in the wider context of literature on the Zhenotdel in other parts of the Soviet Union, which demonstrates a great deal of conflict

---

<sup>3</sup> G. J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press 1974); D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press 2004); S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia*, (Praeger Press 2001) and M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam Modernity and Unveiling Under Communism* (University of Washington Press 2006) are central contributions on the woman question in 1920s Central Asia which focus on Uzbekistan and on the Hujum (unveiling campaign)

between the Zhenotdel and the Party, both centrally and locally.<sup>4</sup> Such analyses are limited, further, by their consideration of the Hujum as an isolated or abrupt moment of change; instead, mid-term patterns of change and continuity need to be explored. With this in mind, my research sets out to answer the question of how exactly the Zhenotdel approached ‘the woman question’ in Central Asia? This inquiry demands a study of the Zhenotdel’s key policies in the region from the outset of its involvement and an examination of how those policies were shaped by factors such as its relationship to the Party, by the political trajectory of its leading figures, and by its engagement with local women and local culture. It also necessitates an analysis of the Zhenotdel’s methods of transformation, economically socially and legally, and how they interacted with the Party, the state, and the indigenous population.

In her study of the Zhenotdel, Elizabeth Wood sets out how activists battled continually against attempts to close the organisation down.<sup>5</sup> Barbara Evans Clements points to the disparity between the Zhenotdel’s conception of socialism and that of the Central Committee. She mentions Armand and Kollontai for their “distinctive form of utopianism...widely shared among less prominent zhenotdelovki”, and argues that these activists “crafted from the Marxist analysis of women’s emancipation a vision of the socialist future and the means to achieve it that diverged in very significant ways from those articulated by the Party’s male leaders”.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, she argues that the Zhenotdel’s leaders and key thinkers believed in localised woman-centred co-operative economic forms, rather than the male-dominated large scale industrial model which was advocated by leading members of the Central Committee, including Lenin and Trotsky.<sup>7</sup> Richard Stites has observed:

---

<sup>4</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates Gender & Industry in Stalin’s Russia* (Cambridge University Press 2002); E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997); R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia – Feminism Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press 1990) and B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge University Press 1997) are just four examples of an extensive literature on the relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Party as a highly contradictory and problematic one

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia*

<sup>6</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’ in *Slavic Review* Vol 51 No 3 (Autumn 1992), pp. 485-496 pg. 485.

<sup>7</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’, pg. 488.

The Zhenotdel represented a combination of class and sexual struggle and thus was a working out not only of Marxist notions about the female half of the labor movement, not only of the revolutionary Populist tradition of the “common cause”, but also, in some ways, of the much more feminist belief, given expression by Lenin in 1919 that “the emancipation of working women is a matter for working women themselves.”<sup>8</sup>

Others such as Carol Eubanks Hayden have highlighted the central contradiction at the core of the Zhenotdel, of attempting to combine a fight for women’s self-emancipation with loyalty to an increasingly authoritarian Central Committee.<sup>9</sup> This contradiction seriously restricted the potential of a post-revolution women’s movement to act autonomously. Yet, as almost all of the above agree, the initial Zhenotdel leadership saw itself as a voice for those women and fought hard for its programme in difficult circumstances. Wendy Goldman has shown how this struggle was not confined to the leadership and how activists continued to battle on right up until March 1930 when the Zhenotdel was dissolved, while at the same time protesting its closure.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, even after the Zhenotdel was shut down on the orders of Stalin, those same activists continued to fight for women’s rights within difficult and repressive conditions and without the aid of a journal. Studies of the struggle of the Zhenotdel within the CPSU have thus far been largely confined to experiences within European parts of the Soviet Union. My research therefore, aims to bring a much needed perspective from Central Asia, so as to add to the understanding of the scope and scale of the Zhenotdel’s work, and as outlined above, to challenge some assumptions about its role in relation to the Hujum and other CPSU campaigns in the region.

Marianne Kamp has studied the experiences of indigenous Zhenotdel activists in Uzbekistan and detailed the merger of their ideas with the national Zhenotdel programme.<sup>11</sup> In contrast my research considers this history from the perspective of Zhenotdel leaders and activists as gleaned through their writings in the Russian

---

<sup>8</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia*, pg. 345.

<sup>9</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’ in *Russian History* Vol. III, 2 (1976), pp.150-173

<sup>10</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics, Peasant Revolution and the Death of the Proletarian Women’s Movement in the USSR’ in *Slavic Review* Vol 55, No 1 (Spring 1996), pp.46-77

<sup>11</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*.

language *Kommunistka*. Thus, rather than an examination of personal stories, my research presents an analysis of the political views, debate and methodology of the Zhenotdel. A close reading of *Kommunistka* from the inception of coverage of Central Asia, allows me to build on existing analyses by exploring the Zhenotdel's own strategic priorities in the region in the decade from 1920.

*Kommunistka* has already been drawn on by a number of writers who have considered the role of the woman question within Soviet Central Asia. For example, Gregory Massell has referred to *Kommunistka* in some depth in his ground-breaking study of the imperatives of the CPSU Central Party leadership in launching the Hujum, and has connected it with a deepening authoritarianism within the Party.<sup>12</sup> Douglas Northrop has drawn on *Kommunistka* in his examination of the imperialist attitudes of the CPSU in Central Asia and the backlash by the indigenous population against a deeply repressive mass unveiling campaign.<sup>13</sup> *Kommunistka* has also been included as a component of other research, such as for example, a study by Shoshanna Keller of the role of the Hujum in a full-frontal attack on the influence of Central Asian Islam<sup>14</sup> and the research by Marianne Kamp into the views and political histories of the indigenous women who joined the Zhenotdel and Uzbek Communist Party and who rallied in their thousands in March 1927 to take part in dramatic unveilings.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the inclusion of *Kommunistka* in previous research, a systematic and detailed study of the journal from 1920 to 1930 has been lacking, in particular one that considers all aspects of the Zhenotdel experience in Central Asia in that period. Such a study is critical in order to see more precisely how the Zhenotdel interacted both with Soviet policy in the region and the local population. It can consider to what extent the ideological and programmatic tensions at the heart of the Zhenotdel expressed themselves in Central Asia, if at all. Furthermore, there has not been a study of the Zhenotdel's role in the region from the perspective of its programme to achieve women's liberation in the post-revolution

---

<sup>12</sup> G. J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*.

<sup>13</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press 2004)

<sup>14</sup> S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia*, (Praeger Press 2001)

<sup>15</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*.

period - for which I use the term 'Zhenotdel socialism'.<sup>16</sup> This is a useful definition in that it combines concepts of women's emancipation and socialism within a state-building programme. Its support for the Soviet state can be distinguished from the policy of opposition of Bolshevik women to all state involvement in women's lives prior to the revolution.<sup>17</sup>

*Kommunistka* began publication under the editorship of Nadezhda Krupskaya in June 1920 and the final issue was published in March 1930 when the Bureau was closed down by the CPSU Central Committee. The journal was published on a monthly or bi-monthly basis until 1929 when it became a fortnightly publication for the last year of its existence. It began with a reported print-run of 30,000 in 1921, which decreased to 20,000 by 1923. This drop was despite a drive launched in October 1923 calling on "every activist working with working class and peasant women to subscribe to *Kommunistka*".<sup>18</sup> The biggest slump in circulation occurred in 1926, from 24,000 in April to 11,000 in December of that year. This smaller print-run continued for the remainder of the journal's existence, averaging between 10,000 and 13,000 per issue. The target audience was a layer of women activists in and around the Zhenotdel. In a special issue of the journal to mark the third anniversary of its launch, then national Zhenotdel secretary, Sofia Smidovich, wrote that "*Kommunistka* provides direction to activists on issues which are of importance to the mass of working class and peasant women" and "informs them on how to engage with mass work from a correct political position".<sup>19</sup> It connected theory with practice, and "was prepared to discuss difficult questions like child mortality, abortion, birth control".<sup>20</sup> The editorial board aimed to "engage activists in local areas in developing resolutions for Zhenotdel and Party meetings".<sup>21</sup>

Issues of the journal comprised on average between 50 and 90 pages of feature articles, theoretical contributions, reports, discussions of strategy, meetings and

---

<sup>16</sup> B. Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel' where Clements describes the Zhenotdel's vision as utopian.

<sup>17</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai A Biography* (Merlin Press 2015)

<sup>18</sup> 'Dorogie toverishchi', *Kommunistka* 10 (1923) pg. 1

<sup>19</sup> S. Smidovich, 'Znachenie *Kommunistka* dlia raboty sredi zhenshchin' *Kommunistka*, 7 (1923) pp. 7-9

<sup>20</sup> Quote from N. Krupskaya in ER 'Nesmeniaemyi pedaktor *Kommunistka* N.K Krupskaya', *Kommunistka* 7 (1923) pp. 6-7

<sup>21</sup> S. Smidovich, 'Znachenie *Kommunistka* dlia raboty sredi zhenshchin' *Kommunistka*, 7 (1923) pp. 7-9

membership debates. This focused on discussion of the 'woman question' both in the wider Soviet Union and internationally, as the Zhenotdel sought to encourage other parties of the Comintern to follow suit and establish their own women's departments.

Discussion of 'women of the East' did not properly begin until Kollontai took over as National Secretary of the Zhenotdel in late 1920. Coverage in the first issues of the journal had been limited to very short reports on work among 'Muslim women'. Reportage increased significantly from October 1920 under Kollontai's leadership, and from this point indigenous women were described as 'Eastern Women' or 'Women of the East'.<sup>22</sup> From then until early 1923, when Serafima Liubimova was appointed as Head of the Turkestan (Central Asia) Zhenotdel, the proportion of the journal given over to the topic was less than 10%. Liubimova's appointment in February 1923 introduced more focus on the East, and particularly on Central Asia, with coverage averaging between 12-15% up until the end of 1924. This included specific articles on Turkestan or on specific questions for Eastern women, within which Uzbek, Kirghiz, Turkmen and Kazakh women were included.

From 1925, with the implementation of National Delimitation and the creation of Soviet republics and oblasts, Central Asia began to emerge more clearly from other discussion on the East. Between 1926 and 1927 there was a regular section of *Kommunistka* dedicated to work in the Soviet East, at times making up almost 20% of the journal. This development saw specific articles on Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and what was then known as Kirgizia (later Kyrgyzstan). A number of issues focused on organisational questions such as women-only clubs and delegate meetings. Others dealt with legal issues and the conditions of life of women in Central Asia or the East generally.

Reports of activist gatherings were described geographically or as all-Union meetings of activists among 'Women of the East'. From 1927 until the end of 1928, articles focused mainly on Uzbekistan. Articles on Kazakhstan did not emerge in the journal until 1926 and became more prominent in 1928 and 1929, with the introduction of the Five Year Plan.

---

<sup>22</sup> All references in this section to *Kommunistka*



In 1928, *Kommunistka* featured a significant debate in the run-up to an All-Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in December of that year. Coverage on the Soviet East rose to almost a fifth of the journal that year. This pattern was reversed in 1929, with less than 10% of the journal dedicated to discussion of work among Eastern or Central Asian women. Also in 1929 there was a shift away from reports on Uzbekistan or other parts of Central Asia to themes concerned with the implementation of the Five Year Plan and the War on Religion throughout the Soviet East. In March 1930, the final issue of *Kommunistka* was published, with an article announcing the re-organisation of work and the closure of the Zhenotdel.

An analysis of coverage over the decade reveals that the Central Asian experience, though highly specific, was a microcosm of a greater, multi-layered history of how the new Soviet State attempted to transform local societies and cultures, specifically in relation to women and gender relations. This thesis demonstrates not only how Central Asian Zhenotdel activists tailored their strategy to the broader project of the Zhenotdel, but also, how they tried to impact on, and give specific meaning to that broader project. It shows how the Central Asian Zhenotdel's attempt to articulate its vision interacted with local and central Party policy and the attitudes of the local and central male membership. Finally this thesis aims to demonstrate that, while the fundamental problems of male chauvinism and authoritarianism the Zhenotdel grappled with were not unique to Central Asia, they had a particular expression within a society deeply divided on grounds of gender.

In using *Kommunistka* to trace the experience of the Zhenotdel in Central Asia, I should stress that I am not treating this journal as an unbiased reflection of historical reality. While it published statistical material on the way of life, social and economic interaction of indigenous women, analysis of the relevance of this material varied according to the individual author's own views or the agreed line of the Zhenotdel or Party on schools, women's clubs, childcare provision etc. At times claims of the "potential for revolution" among indigenous Central Asian women or of their support for Soviet and Zhenotdel policies were clearly exaggerated - along with a minimisation of the hurdles which needed to be overcome. This does not lead to the conclusion that there was any deliberate motivation to mislead. Instead, the articles on Central Asia and *Kommunistka*

itself must be seen as the voice of an organisation committed to bring about what it described as the “emancipation” of women against the odds. It was a partisan project, committed to the programme of introducing Zhenotdel Socialism to Central Asia, and the analyses and views published in *Kommunistka* were situated within the parameters of this programme.

An analysis of the Zhenotdel activist base in Central Asia illustrates some of the contradictions at the core of its project. The regional department was initiated by Russian female members of the CPSU, dispatched there by Alexandra Kollontai to “awaken” the women of the East to the news of the revolution and their impending liberation.<sup>23</sup> These women were relatively recent recruits to the Party, and came from urban working class or middle class backgrounds. Women like Serafima Liubimova and Zinaida Prishchepchik had worked in the Central Department of the Zhenotdel before being sent to Central Asia. They were young women who burned with enthusiasm for the challenge ahead, but had little or no experience of working with Muslim women, or within a peasant community. They did not speak indigenous languages and had to engage translators.<sup>24</sup>

From 1924 there appears to be a shift within the Russian speaking activist base in Central Asia. While *Kommunistka* does not distinguish between those sent from Moscow and those from the local Russian population, a number of writers emerge who focus on local issues alone and appear to have a more nuanced understanding of local culture. A recruitment drive to train Uzbek, Kirghiz and Turkmen women as Zhenotdel organisers coincided with a reported increase of Russian speakers who could also speak indigenous languages.<sup>25</sup> However, this appears to have been simply a secondary layer of leadership, and the Central Asia Zhenotdel continued to be dominated by women from outside the region.

A major boost to the organisation of indigenous women came in 1924, with the launch of an Uzbek language journal, *Yangi Yol* (meaning ‘New Life’) by the *Zhenotdel*. Sobira Xoldarova, a young Jadid radical was appointed as its first

---

<sup>23</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s’ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>24</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan* p. 267, where she identifies Oiposho Jalilova, a prominent Jadid and teacher from Tashkent as one of Liubimova’s translators.

<sup>25</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp.62-67

editor.<sup>26</sup> In terms of age and social profile Xoldarova reflected a group of urban based Jadid women who merged their aspiration for modernity with the Soviet project. Kamp describes how Xoldarova was unique among them in being able to speak Russian and how, as editor, she translated articles by Russian Zhenotdel leaders into Uzbek as the lead articles in *Yangi Y'ol*. Unlike *Kommunistka*, *Yangi Yo'l* was a mass popular journal and aimed to win the female population over to uniquely indigenous notions of modernity.

The divisions between Russian and indigenous Zhenotdel activists were based on nationality, ethnicity, language and political ideas. Having two separate journals in different languages did not assist the overcoming of divisions. And while *Kommunistka* was aimed at educating activists, it could not reach the majority of indigenous women. The lack of indigenous women who joined the Communist Party was an additional barrier. The percentage of women members of the Party in the CPSU as a whole was tiny, remaining below 10% before 1927 then rising to 13.9% in 1929.<sup>27</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 6, this number was even smaller in Central Asia, in large part because of the seclusion of women within that society. Of the 12,401 members of the Uzbek Communist Party, less than half were of indigenous origin. Women of both Russian and indigenous origin - comprised less than 3% of that membership in 1927, with approximately 400 female members. No official membership figures appear to be available, but from an analysis of *Kommunistka* and secondary sources, it seems that less than a dozen of Communist Party members were Uzbek women.<sup>28</sup> The indigenous membership of the Kirghiz Party was 80%, with 1,401 members. Of these only three were women.<sup>29</sup> I will explore the reasons behind these low figures in chapter 6, along with a discussion of debates and conflicts around the failure to recruit indigenous women to the Communist Party.

*Kommunistka* provides fascinating insights into the conflicts engendered by the issues of nationality, race and gender described above. And, as well as reflecting

---

<sup>26</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan* pg. 100-107 for a history of the leading women involved in *Yangi Yol*

<sup>27</sup> T.H Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR 1917-1967* (Princeton University Press) Princeton New Jersey, 1968 pg 361 table 31 Sex Structure of CPSU Membership 1922-1967

<sup>28</sup> A. Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan, Nation Empire and Revolution in the early USSR* (Cornell University Press), Ithaca & London 2015, pg. 176

<sup>29</sup> T.H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership*, pg. 360 note 16

the tensions, it reveals surprisingly creative approaches taken by Russian activists in adapting their methods of work, and in learning from indigenous activists. It also reveals the frequent frustration of activists at lack of support from the Central Committee and local Party organisations.

*Kommunistka* also has a wider significance in reflecting the fluctuating political climate of 1920s Soviet Union, from the confusion and indifference of the NEP years to the instigation of dictatorial methods to mobilise women in 1927. *Kommunistka* illustrates how Stalin's growing dominance over the Central Committee impacted on Zhenotdel activists and how they responded to the increasing interventionism of the Central Committee and Sredazburo in their work. Through the publication of a range of views, from both Party loyalists and more oppositional voices, *Kommunistka* provides unique insights into the Zhenotdel's struggle for change in Central Asia.

My research methodology involves following the focus of debate and work in Central Asia reflected in *Kommunistka* over the decade of its existence. Thus, after reading the initial articles on Muslim women, I moved on to consider discussion of Central Asia within articles on the Soviet East, and then to examine Central Asia specifically, as it emerged more clearly within coverage of the Soviet East. In 1927 and 1928 I concentrated on articles which dealt with Uzbekistan or the debates around questions which involved that region. This approach was prompted because the majority of coverage focused on Uzbekistan during this period and I was able to follow the main themes in the debate. I did consider including other parts of the Soviet East within my research and translated articles on Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tartaria. Azerbaijan also experienced the unveiling campaign in 1927. However, I finally decided to narrow my research to Central Asia, because the Zhenotdel's experience in that region has been at the centre of significant academic debate and is of great interest in terms of the treatment of the 'woman question' in the Soviet Union.

I accessed the majority of *Kommunistka* on microfilm with the assistance of Glasgow University Library. There were a number of significant gaps in the earlier years of the Zhenotdel and I obtained access to these issues at the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. I began translation from a broad chronological

perspective. I considered Central Asia through the prism of the Soviet East and mapped the shifts in the views and work of the Zhenotdel over the decade. On completion of translation, I pinpointed the themes which reflected the experience of the Zhenotdel in the region. I reconsidered translated articles a number of times in order to explore these themes more fully and to ascertain if there were other matters which could throw light on the views of leading activists and the interaction with the Soviet project as a whole. I focused in particular on the views of Liubimova, because of her centrality to the project, and also because of the overlap between many of her views and those of Alexandra Kollontai, the driving force behind the Zhenotdel and initiator of its work in Central Asia.

### **Thesis Structure**

In chapter one of this thesis, I consider the secondary literature on the Zhenotdel's genesis as an organisation and the main influences on the ideas of its leading members. I consider, in particular, the views of Alexandra Kollontai, the most important proponent of Zhenotdel Socialism as well as the most pro-active advocate of a separate women's bureau within the Party. I then examine the resistance of Zhenotdel activists to being described as feminists and their fears that advocacy of women's rights would be dismissed because of this apparent association in the minds of Bolshevik leaders. I then proceed to consider the contradictory position of the Zhenotdel as a self-appointed voice for women's rights within a Party that was extremely dismissive of practice around the 'woman question', despite its formal programmatic adherence. This chapter concludes with a summary of the experiences of Zhenotdel Directors and what this reflects regarding their struggle for autonomy throughout the decade.

In chapter two, I consider the existing literature on the role of the CPSU in Central Asia, and, in particular, the various attempts to politically and socio-culturally incorporate the region into the Soviet Union. I analyse the views of the Zhenotdel on indigenous women and the organisational initiatives that it was involved in prior to 1927. I argue that I believe there is a contradiction between the methods of the Zhenotdel before 1927 and the claims made by some historians that it was an enthusiastic supporter of the Hujum. To this end, I refer to existing studies, in

particular that of Marianne Kamp, which shows the disquiet of Russian activists when informed that they were to lead a mass unveiling campaign.<sup>30</sup> I then explore existing literature on the call for a ban on the veil in the aftermath of the Hujum, and the fact that despite apparent support from the Uzbek government, no decree was ever passed. I point to the various inconsistencies in accounts that see the Zhenotdel as a voice of the Central Party leadership, before turning to the articulation of my original view on the organisation's role in the events, discussed in the following chapters.

In chapter three I consider the views on and strategy for women's emancipation of Zhenotdel members as expressed in *Kommunistka*. I look initially at the difficulty of adapting its core programmatic goal of transcending the traditional family to the conditions of Central Asia. I analyse how the Zhenotdel originally believed that the Russian revolution would spread to the region and inspire indigenous women to rise up against their oppression. This conviction connected with its establishment of non-Party forms of organisation among indigenous women in this period, as the Zhenotdel leadership hoped that indigenous women would develop their own forms of struggle. I explore the loss of the initial leadership with the deaths of Inessa Armand in 1920 and Konkordiia Samoilova in 1921 and the expulsion of Alexandra Kollontai in 1922, and the shift to a more paternalistic approach to indigenous women. I illustrate how the Zhenotdel's methods connected with the view that there should be incremental change that did not put indigenous women in any jeopardy from their family and community. This culturally sensitive approach contrasted with a continuing negative interpretation of indigenous society and the manner in which women lived. I then consider the response to the Hujum as reflected in *Kommunistka* and the various problems which this campaign presented for the Zhenotdel, not least the destruction of its existing work.

In chapter four I undertake a detailed examination of reports of the organisational initiatives developed by the Zhenotdel. I consider the discussions on how to develop economic independence among indigenous women and how to provide them with a support system to allow them to become involved in Soviet society. I

---

<sup>30</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp.164-165.

consider the various problems encountered by the Zhenotdel in developing these initiatives, the breakthroughs that began to emerge after 1924, and the growing involvement of indigenous women. I then explore the impact of the Hujum on this work and the continued efforts to sustain earlier initiatives despite the odds. Finally, I discuss the new situation which emerged in 1929 and the forced collectivisation of indigenous women.

In chapter five, I consider the legal strategy of the Zhenotdel and how it sought to implement a programme of transformation through Soviet law. I trace how activists began with interventions in the indigenous Court system and then rejected this work because of the obstacles involved, only to face the same problems in the Soviet People's Courts. I explore the contradiction between facilitating women's economic and social engagement in a culturally sensitive way, while at the same time attempting to impose a European family form on them. Returning to a central theme of the thesis, I consider claims made by Gregory Massell and Douglas Northrop that the Zhenotdel's legalism and negativity toward indigenous culture led it to embrace the Hujum.<sup>31</sup> I show that this is not evidenced in my study of *Kommunistka* and that, in fact, the Zhenotdel wanted to use legislation in an incremental way and believed that it could provide indigenous women with safety. Thus, the debate in the aftermath of the Hujum reflects calls for a legal ban on the veil in order to send a message out that indigenous women were protected by Soviet society.

In chapter six, I explore the difficult and contradictory relationship with the Central Committee, Sredazburo and the local indigenous membership. I show how the Zhenotdel was able to act with a degree of autonomy precisely because of its isolation from local Party organisations. I also discuss the continued struggles for support and the refusal to accept that the Central Committee had no genuine interest in advances for indigenous women. The negative attitudes of Zhenotdel activists toward indigenous Party members and the frustration with the obstacles to the recruitment of women are also discussed. I then analyse the debate on autonomy which emerged in 1928 and the struggle over that question within the Zhenotdel. Finally I explore the clampdown on debate within *Kommunistka* and

---

<sup>31</sup> G. J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp. 185-212 and D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pp. 46-68

the consequent involvement of the Zhenotdel in a purge of male communist party members in the region.

In each of the chapters outlined above, I note the significant shifts in the final year of the Zhenotdel's existence and how *Kommunistka* changed from being a journal where criticisms and debate could be expressed to one where the only issue was the successful implementation of the Five Year Plan. The Zhenotdel went from being of no interest to the Central Committee to being forced into giving up its own programme and instructed to lead a campaign which many members opposed.

Overall, the material presented in this thesis demonstrates that, rather than being willing servants of the Central Committee, Zhenotdel activists in Central Asia had their own independent aspirations which were generally in conflict with, or of no interest to, the Central Party leadership. Their work was based on a commitment to incremental change. However their simultaneous commitment to the Soviet project and the belief that the CPSU represented the only way forward meant that they would find themselves in perpetual conflict. By the end of the 1920s, in a situation where the balance of forces was ranged against them, Zhenotdel activists were finally forced to give up on their programme of transformation and, instead, to try to survive the dictatorial environment of 1929 and 1930. It was only in these years, when all avenues for discussion were closed, that the Zhenotdel eventually suspended its criticism of the Central Committee and its separate approach to the woman question in Central Asia. Thus, an in-depth study of the Zhenotdel and *Kommunistka* does much more than simply offer an organisational history: it maps the tensions inherent in the early Soviet ambitions to enact profound socio-cultural change; it traces what became of such aspirations in the context of turbulent political upheaval across the USSR and in the Party; and it explores the complex local impacts of attempts at utopian construction and destruction.

I use the term 'activist' to describe members of the Zhenotdel. While Zhenotdel leaders were undoubtedly members of the CPSU, it does not appear that all members of the Zhenotdel were members of the Party. Being a journal for activists, *Kommunistka* assumes a level of knowledge on the part of the readership



about general events in the Soviet Union at that time. It therefore does not always provide background and context in the way a more general publication might. It does not provide a great deal of information on the Communist Party sections in the region, perhaps because of its general isolation from those organisations. Finally, I use the term 'Hujum' and 'unveiling campaign' interchangeably throughout this thesis, denoting that in my view they were essentially the same policy. I have translated the Russian word 'soveshchanie' as 'meeting' throughout this thesis, making it clear when these are all-Union or local meetings.

## Chapter One

### The Zhenotdel and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

#### 1.1 The Origins of the Zhenotdel

The establishment of the Zhenotdel (Women's Department) in August 1919 was a critical moment for Russian revolutionary women. It was the first time an organisation of this type had been permitted within the Bolshevik Party or its predecessor, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). And, crucially, the Zhenotdel was created in an environment still reverberating from the impact of the 1917 revolution, in a time of unprecedented social initiative. In 1918 Vladimir Lenin had proclaimed that the world was entering a new historical epoch - "the period of *transition* to socialism". It was a time "unprecedented in history" which could not be "studied from books."<sup>1</sup> The Russian working class had, though its revolutionary sweep to power, inaugurated a:

...long period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the break-up of all that belonged to the past, the ruthless destruction of all forms of capitalism, the co-operation of the workers of all countries, who would have to combine their efforts to ensure complete victory.<sup>2</sup>

In line with the Bolsheviks' programmatic commitment to women's equality, the Soviet state announced unprecedented legislative changes for women. The Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship, introduced in 1919, ended the religious sanction of marriage and legalised divorce on demand for both men and women. It pronounced men and women equal under the law and guaranteed equal pay for equal work. It legalised abortion and abolished illegitimacy, set the minimum

---

<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'Speech to Third All Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers, Soldiers & Peasant Deputies', Pravda February (1918) in *Lenin's Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Volume 26 (1972), pp. 453

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Speech to Third All Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers, Soldiers & Peasant Deputies*, pg. 453

marriage age at 18 for males and 16 for females, and required the consent of both parties to marry.<sup>3</sup>

Bolshevik advocates of women's rights found themselves in an unprecedented position. Women such as Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, Konkordiia Samoiloa, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Klavdiia Nikolaeva, and Lyudmila Stal all shared a history of struggle. They were veteran members of the Bolshevik wing of the RSDLP, with the exception of Kollontai who had joined shortly before the revolution.<sup>4</sup> Yet despite being a relative outsider, Kollontai was enormously influential, and had already made her mark on Russian politics by becoming the Commissar for Welfare in the first Soviet government.<sup>5</sup> She was a prolific writer, and had published books and pamphlets on a range of topics, most notably on women's oppression, the role of the family and the tasks of women's emancipation under socialism, many of her works being republished after the revolution.<sup>6</sup> Kollontai was particularly vocal in her demands for radical change in the traditional family, and had fought tenaciously for a separate women's organisation since 1905.<sup>7</sup> She saw the establishment of a women's bureau within the Party as a major personal achievement, describing its formal endorsement by the Eighth Soviet Congress in March 1919 as "an enduring victory" in her struggle.<sup>8</sup>

The creation of a separate organisation to work among women had been discussed on numerous occasions for over a decade and Kollontai had not been its only proponent. Nikolaeva had co-founded the short-lived Women's Mutual Aid Society with Kollontai in 1907, despite the opposition of the RSDLP St Petersburg Committee, in order to assist working women in the poor districts of the city.<sup>9</sup> She had also worked with Samoiloa in various initiatives to organise Russian women from 1913 onwards, including the Bolshevik women's journal *Rabotnitsa* and

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia – Feminism Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press 1990), pp. 362-363

<sup>4</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge University Press 1997), pp.12-21

<sup>5</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai A Biography* (Merlin Press 2015), pp.269-292 on her time as Commissar for Welfare

<sup>6</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Indiana University Press 1979), pp.40-81 for a description of her activity before 1917

<sup>7</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pp. 342-346 for an example of these views

<sup>8</sup> A. Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* (Schocken Books 1975), pg. 43

<sup>9</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp. 38-53

Women's Day events.<sup>10</sup> However, the response from the RSDLP and the Bolsheviks to such efforts to organise women separately has been described as almost uniformly hostile.<sup>11</sup> Another attempt to form a specific women's organisation was made following the February Revolution in 1917, when long-term Bolshevik Vera Slutskaya, made a proposal to the Petrograd Party Committee that a "Bureau of Women Workers" be set up. Her proposal was rebuffed and it was made clear to her that "no independent women's organisation whatsoever will be created" and that "all work will be carried out in full accordance with the decisions of the Petrograd Committee."<sup>12</sup>

Antipathy toward separate organisation also stemmed from the official Bolshevik position that 'the woman question' was a collective task for the entire Party. Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, was a leading proponent of this view. In her pamphlet *The Woman Worker*, first published in 1901, she argued that all men "must help the women workers to organise themselves, to awaken class consciousness in them, as conscious and organised women will be less receptive to the employers' demands and will not allow themselves to be twisted around the boss's little finger."<sup>13</sup> The struggle for women's equality had to be part of the general struggle for socialism. Krupskaya had always worked closely with Lenin and, with his support, had convinced the RSDLP to include a demand for women's equality in its programme in 1903.<sup>14</sup> She was thus of pivotal importance in establishing formal adherence to women's rights within the Party and believed very firmly that Communist men had an obligation to take up the fight for women's rights as a central part of the struggle for socialism.<sup>15</sup> Her loyalty was very firmly to the Bolsheviks, and subsequently to the CPSU, and she was wary of anything which would split the Party.<sup>16</sup> In late 1917 Krupskaya along with other leading Bolshevik women, such as Samoilova and Nikolaeva, were concerned that separate organisation would bring about disunity within the Party and that they would be

---

<sup>10</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, pp.253-255

<sup>11</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender & Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge University Press 2002), pp. 33-70 for a description of the antipathy experienced by women activists before the revolution

<sup>12</sup> Pervyi legal'nyi Peterburgskii komitet Bol'shevikov v 1917 g. (Moscow, 1927), p. 40 cited by M. Donald, 'Bolshevik Activity Amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917' in *International Review of Social History* Vol. 27 Issue 2 (August 1982), pp. 129-160 pg. 134

<sup>13</sup> N.K. Krupskaya, *The Woman Worker*, Manifesto Press Cooperative Ltd. Britain 2017 pg. 19

<sup>14</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, pg. 242

<sup>15</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp.109-116

<sup>16</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp.109-116

denounced as splitters. Thus they rejected Kollontai's initial effort to organise a separate women's organisation at a women's conference held in November 1917.<sup>17</sup>

The individual who was to become the first Director of the Zhenotdel, Inessa Armand, had been a close collaborator of Krupskaya and Lenin before 1917. However, she had shown herself to be far more radical than either of her two comrades in her views on marriage and women's sexual emancipation. Armand begun her political journey within the Russian women's movement, and her views on women's sexual autonomy in 1915 bore a close resemblance to Kollontai's writings.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, both these women had left their own marriages in order to pursue their revolutionary careers and had lived unconventional personal lives.<sup>19</sup> Armand believed strongly in the need to revolutionise conventional marriage and sexual relationships, and had been attempting to develop her perspectives in a pamphlet in 1915. She was forced to abandon this project partly, because of the outbreak of war, but also, according to her biographer, RC Ellwood, because of Lenin's active opposition to what he considered to be a libertarian and bourgeois project.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Ellwood asserts, Armand had not abandoned her convictions, and that she used her appointment to the position of Director of the Zhenotdel in 1919 to test out her ideas in practice.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to February 1917, those women who were to become the leadership of the Zhenotdel had struggled to maintain work among Russian women in conditions of political repression. Krupskaya, Kollontai, Armand and Stal had all been forced to live abroad as political emigres, while Nikolaeva and Samoilova continued to organise women workers through underground activities in Russia.<sup>22</sup> In February 1914, Samoilova joined forces with Anna Ulyanova (Lenin's sister) and others on the Russian section of the editorial board of *Rabotnitsa*, the first Bolshevik women's journal. Ulyanova and Samoilova liaised with Krupskaya, Armand and Stal

---

<sup>17</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, pg. 38

<sup>18</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist* (Cambridge University Press 1992), pp.145-151

<sup>19</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pp. 40-43; M. Pearson, *Inessa – Lenin's Mistress* (Gerald Duckworth & Company 2001) for Armand's personal life; B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, pp.3-39 and C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pp.7-37 for Kollontai's background

<sup>20</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pp.145-151 for a description of Lenin's opposition

<sup>21</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pp.231-261 for her activity in the Soviet women's movement

<sup>22</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp.55-91 for the women of the Bolshevik underground movement

outside Russia in producing and distributing a journal aimed at working women.<sup>23</sup> Stites described *Rabotnitsa* as a crucial step towards women's organisation among Bolshevik women.<sup>24</sup> Battling state suppression, including the arrest of the majority of the editorial board on the eve of publication of the first issue, those involved managed to produce seven issues of the journal between February and June 1914, when the Tsarist police finally shut *Rabotnitsa* down.<sup>25</sup>

Following the upsurge of activity among women in the February Revolution of 1917, *Rabotnitsa* was re-launched. Its first issue was published in May and activists organised around under the leadership of Nikolaeva and it became the centre of Bolshevik organisation among women during a period of intense struggle for women's rights. The "thirteen issues published from May 1917 to January 1918 each sold around 50,000 copies."<sup>26</sup> A conference was organised by Petrograd *Rabotnitsa* activists on November 12 1917, attended by 500 delegates representing 80,000 women from local soviets, factories, trade unions and youth organisations.<sup>27</sup> At that conference Kollontai's calls for a separate women's organisation were rejected because this approach was still seen by leading Bolshevik women as unnecessary and divisive. Nikolaeva declared that "class conscious women workers know that we have no special women's interests and that there should be no separate women's organisations."<sup>28</sup> She was emphatic that "[W]e are strong only when organised together in one fraternal proletarian family with all workers in the struggle for socialism."<sup>29</sup> Samoiloa supported Nikolaeva and refused to agree to separate organisation. A compromise was agreed, with *Rabotnitsa* to form a secretariat from its editorial board to lead work among women, but with that work to be limited to what was considered possible in local conditions. The conference also called on the Bolshevik leadership to convene "an All-Russian Congress of Women Workers" early the following year.<sup>30</sup> This conference can be seen as an important staging post on the way to the creation

---

<sup>23</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pg. 104

<sup>24</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, pg. 252-258 for women's organisational initiatives between 1913 and 1914

<sup>25</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp.102-105 and K. Turton, *Forgotten Lives: The Role of Lenin's Sisters in the Russian Revolution 1864-1937* (Palgrave Macmillan 2007), pp.61-70

<sup>26</sup> M. Donald, 'Bolshevik Activity Amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917', pg. 134

<sup>27</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party' in *Russian History III, 2 (1976)*, pp. 153-155

<sup>28</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pp. 153-155

<sup>29</sup> M. Donald, 'Bolshevik Activity Amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917', pg. 157

<sup>30</sup> M. Donald, 'Bolshevik Activity Amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917', pg. 157

of the Zhenotdel. Yet leading women's rights activists remained very wary of taking too decisive a step in the direction of women's organisation.

It was not until the following year, when *Rabotnitsa* had ceased publication and the planned Congress of Women Workers had not taken place, that she, Armand, Samoiloova and Krupskaya, finally admitted that formal steps were needed to create an organisation dedicated to women's rights. The experience of the civil war had shown them that loyalty to the Soviet project would not necessarily result in an advance in women's rights. As Kollontai stated "the revolution has brought rights for [women] on paper but in fact it has only made life hard for them."<sup>31</sup> It was time to accept the need for a separate women's organisation.

## 1.2 Anti-Feminism

The antipathy expressed by Nikolaeva and Samoiloova towards feminism was not new. Wendy Goldman has argued that "the Bolsheviks regarded 'feminism' - the idea of separate women's organisations designed to advance women's interests - with hostility and mistrust."<sup>32</sup> According to Marxist ideology, women could only be emancipated through socialism, which itself could only be achieved by the working class. For the Bolsheviks, it followed that an ideology which based itself primarily on a challenge to male supremacy would weaken the unity of the working class by placing women against men. Women activists were thus apprehensive of accusations of separatism.<sup>33</sup> Kollontai stated later that "Comrade Samoiloova could not endure anything that smelled of feminism; she regarded with great caution any organisational scheme, which in her opinion introduced a 'division according to sex' in the proletariat."<sup>34</sup> Samoiloova and Nikolaeva had initially not drawn any comfort from Kollontai's record of strident anti-feminism. Similarly to Klara

---

<sup>31</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pg. 300

<sup>32</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, pg. 36

<sup>33</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pp.150-155 for a description of the concerns of Bolshevik women

<sup>34</sup> A. Kollontai, "Tvorcheskoe v rabote tov. Samoilovoi," in Tsentral'nyi komitet RKP(b), komissiiia po istorii oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i RKP(b), *Revoliutsionnaia deiatel'nost' Konkordii Nikolaevnoi Samoilovoi. Sbornik vospominanii* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1922), pp. 8-9 cited by C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pg. 152

Zetkin, the German revolutionary and champion of women's self-organisation, Kollontai had fought for recognition of the need for special organisation among working class women, while, at the same time strenuously opposing feminist groups. In a speech in 1913 Kollontai condemned feminism as an anti-working class ideology of the women of the capitalist class. She claimed that it sought merely "to achieve the same advantages, the same power, the same rights within capitalist society as those possessed now by their husbands, fathers and brothers."<sup>35</sup> Leaders of groups such as The League for Women's Equality and the All-Russia Women's Society were condemned for cynical manipulating working class women to advance their own bourgeois ambitions.<sup>36</sup> Feminism was seen as a dangerous diversion for working class women, producing illusions in capitalist reforms and inciting antagonism towards male workers. Along with Zetkin, Kollontai would not brook any collaboration with the feminists.<sup>37</sup>

Kollontai's animosity toward feminism reflected a frustration with the fact that the broader Russian women's movement was playing a very significant role among the working women of urban Russia by 1913, and had far surpassed the RSDLP in terms of recruitment.<sup>38</sup> In 1905 the Union for Women's Equality had 80 branches and a membership of 8,000. It had its own left wing, including women such as Lyubova Gurevich and Olga Volkenstein, the latter belonging to the Socialist Revolutionary tradition.<sup>39</sup> In 1909 the Union was supplanted by the League for Women's Equality, also a mass organisation with support among working women. The Union, and latterly the League, held meetings in working-class areas to win support for the suffrage campaign. They, and the more radical Women's Progressive Party were able to attract working class women to meetings because they listened to the specific problems which they faced in the workforce. Kollontai was irritated that these organisations continued to have such influence, especially as she had made such efforts to undermine their hegemony between 1905 and 1908.<sup>40</sup> Before fleeing the Tsarist police for Germany in 1908, she organised a

---

<sup>35</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Women's Day February 1913' in *Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Articles and Speeches*, (Progress Publishers 1984)

<sup>36</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, pp. 282-293

<sup>37</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, Chapter Six 'Heckling the Feminists'

<sup>38</sup> B. Fieseler, 'The Making of Russian Female Social Democrats, 1890-1917' in *International Review of Social History* XXXIV (1989), pp. 193-226

<sup>39</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement*, pp. 282-293

<sup>40</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, pp. 212-232



militant intervention at the first Russian women's Congress in December that year. A small group of 40 working class women, calling themselves the "Workers Group" were sent to disrupt this attempt to create a broad alliance between women from all sections of Russian society.<sup>41</sup> The event has been described as a chaotic affair, with the Workers Group using every opportunity to stir up arguments amongst the 1,000 Congress delegates and finally staging a walk-out. The Congress collapsed in confusion as the police moved in to attempt arrests of RSDLP members. Kollontai, who had been present as an observer, was forced to escape from the police and left Russia immediately afterwards. She later described the intervention of the Workers Group with pride and argued that it had drawn "a clear line of demarcation between the bourgeois women's movement and the women's liberation movement of the working class in Russia."<sup>42</sup> It had cleared the way for a working-class women's organisation to take root.

Unfortunately for Kollontai and her supporters, the RSDLP had little interest in giving leadership to the tens of thousands of women in factories of St Petersburg and Moscow. In her autobiography, Kollontai expressed her disappointment at "how little our Party concerned itself with the fate of the women of the working class and how meagre was its interest in women's liberation."<sup>43</sup> Advocates of women's rights were still being told that women's liberation would come about because of the inevitable triumph of future communism. In the meantime they should sacrifice their immediate demands for sexual, social and economic freedom in the interests of working-class unity. Despite the programmatic commitment to women's equality inserted into the RSDLP programme in 1903, both the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the Party were apathetic or antagonistic to specific organisational initiatives among women. Perversely, and despite their avowed anti-feminism, Communist women were often denounced as splitters.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> L. Edmondson, *Russian Feminists and the First All-Russian Congress of Women in Russian History* III 2 (1976), pp.123-149

<sup>42</sup> A. Kollontai, *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, pg. 16

<sup>43</sup> A. Kollontai, *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, pg. 13

<sup>44</sup> J. Lokaneeta, 'Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism' in *Economic & Political Weekly* Vol.36 No 17 (Apr28-May 4 2001), pp. 1405-1412 pg. 1407 for a discussion of the contradictory position of women rights advocates in the Bolsheviks

By 1918 feminist organisations in Russia were fragmented and in disarray, in part because of their support for a deeply unpopular war.<sup>45</sup> They could no longer be described as an “independent political and intellectual current”<sup>46</sup> of any significance. However, an antagonism among the Bolsheviks towards anything that could be considered feminist had not disappeared and most male comrades were apathetic or even hostile to women’s rights, seeing demands for maternity rights or childcare as trivial matters in the face of the civil war. They failed to grasp the need to support the mass of women who had been drawn into the workforce.<sup>47</sup> The majority of the Party leadership appeared disinterested in implementing the decrees on women’s equality. When publication of *Rabotnitsa* was closed down in January 1918 ostensibly because of a lack of printing paper, and the Women’s Congress due to be held on March 8<sup>th</sup> was cancelled, there was great disappointment among Bolshevik women. It became evident that, for the majority of women, their new found rights existed only on paper. While being expected to sacrifice all for in the cause of winning the civil war, Russian working women were still being treated as second class citizens.<sup>48</sup>

This realisation was a decisive turning point in the thinking of Armand, Nikolaeva and Samoiloa. They had lost *Rabotnitsa* and were aware that many thousands of women workers were very quickly becoming very disillusioned with the Bolsheviks. Barbara Evans Clements states that by 1918 women workers “were not turning out *en masse* to support the Bolsheviks.” “[G]enerally they were more suspicious of the party than were their menfolk...”<sup>49</sup> Armand, Samoiloa and Nikolaeva worked together with Kollontai and Krupskaya to organise an all-Russian Congress of Women Workers and Peasants in November 1918 to address the persistent structural inequalities.<sup>50</sup> The 1,200 delegates, who had travelled from the furthest corners of the Soviet state, saw themselves as representing a mass mandate for change. They committed themselves to overcome “the double standard of morality” in Soviet society, to “refashion woman and to ‘give communist society

---

<sup>45</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pp.295-297

<sup>46</sup> B. Alpern Engel, ‘Engendering Russia’s History: Women in Post-Emancipation Russia and the Soviet Union’ in *Slavic Review* Vol.51 No. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 309-321, pg. 316

<sup>47</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, pg. 11-12 for problems within female employment

<sup>48</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pg. 300-301 for details of these setbacks

<sup>49</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, pg.150

<sup>50</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 154-156

a new member’.”<sup>51</sup> This dual goal reflects that the Zhenotdel believed it was just as important to recruit women to the Soviet project as it was to liberate them. There was now no further hesitancy about the need to put a permanent organisation in place.<sup>52</sup> Bolshevik women were convinced of the necessity to implement Kollontai’s proposal.<sup>53</sup> A leadership was elected, which included Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai, and they began the immediate formation of a network of women’s commissions. They were given formal approval by the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in March 1919. Carol Eubanks Hayden states that the impulse behind the Zhenotdel came from activists themselves, with the Moscow commission demanding in May that the Central Committee “upgrade its status to department (otdel) and give it more organisers.”<sup>54</sup> Although these demands were initially refused, further complaints resulted, firstly, in a Moscow women’s bureau and then, in September 1919 the Central Committee conceded to calls for support, and brought these commissions together in the Zhenotdel, a Bureau of the Central Committee, which reported to directly to the Central Committee. Paradoxically, this success in achieving official status was to become the most serious obstacle to making serious progress. Being under the direct control of the Central Committee would profoundly damage the Zhenotdel’s efforts to organise and ultimately lead to its liquidation. I will critically examine how this conflictual relationship expressed itself in Central Asia in chapter six.

From the beginning there was ambivalence regarding the Zhenotdel’s relationship to the rest of the Party. From the perspective of its leaders, the new structure was to serve as an advocate for women. From the Party leadership’s view it was a means of ensuring that the women’s movement remained under its control. RC Ellwood argues that the creation of the Zhenotdel was simply “a product of organisational housekeeping by the Central Committee itself.”<sup>55</sup> This analysis is supported by points made by Lenin in his interview with Klara Zetkin in 1920 where he stated that the Zhenotdel’s formation was necessary to “arouse the masses of women workers, to bring them into contact with the Party, and to keep them under its influence”. For Lenin, separate organisation of women was merely a

---

<sup>51</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 330

<sup>52</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 331

<sup>53</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 154

<sup>54</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 157

<sup>55</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 441

matter of “practical, revolutionary expediency.”<sup>56</sup> However, others have argued that, in spite of Lenin’s claims of ‘business as usual’, the Zhenotdel was actually completely at odds with Bolshevik policy up until this point in time. Carol Eubank Hayden contends that it was a breach within the belief system expounded by Lenin which “understood anti-feminism to include opposition to any separate organisation.”<sup>57</sup> I will examine the Zhenotdel’s relationship to the Party in more detail in the last section of this chapter. First, it is necessary to look more closely at the theoretical basis of the Zhenotdel’s programme to transform the lives of Soviet women.

### 1.3 Zhenotdel Socialism

Studies of the Zhenotdel, or of its leading members, often use the term “socialist feminist”, “Bolshevik feminist” or “Marxist feminist” to describe the ideology which grounded their programme.<sup>58</sup> This distinguishes the Zhenotdel from the wider women’s movement, at the same time, locating it as a component of First Wave feminism. Yet, as I have illustrated, Zhenotdel leaders had been very much in conflict with the wider Russian women’s movement. Richard Stites has made the point that the feminist movement in this period saw suffrage for women as its ultimate political aim.<sup>59</sup> And it was precisely this limited goal which women such as Armand and Kollontai were so disparaging of, as they were committed to the liberation of the entire working class.<sup>60</sup> One of the most commonly repeated arguments against the women’s movement was that it aimed at achieving rights under capitalism, thereby sowing illusions among working class women in an impossible project. Kollontai warned in *Social Basis of the Woman Question* that “Class instinct - whatever the feminists say - always shows itself to be more powerful than the noble enthusiasms of ‘above class’ politics.”<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, the

<sup>56</sup> K. Zetkin, *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin* (Progress Publishers 1977)

<sup>57</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 152

<sup>58</sup> For example, B. Clements Evans describes them as “socialist feminists” in *Bolshevik Women* and in *Bolshevik Feminist* she describes Kollontai as a “Bolshevik feminist”. J. Lokaneeta in *Alexandra Kollontai* discusses the failures of Marxist feminism and R. Stites in *The Women’s Liberation Movement* has described the Zhenotdel as “socialist feminist”

<sup>59</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 332-333

<sup>60</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, pp. 51-53 for the attraction of Marxism for Zhenotdel women

<sup>61</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘The Social Basis of the Woman Question’ in *Alexandra Kollontai on Women’s Liberation* (Bookmarks 1998), pg.22

only way forward was through an overthrow of class society and the creation of a collectivised alternative whereby women could escape the chains of the family.<sup>62</sup> The Zhenotdel identified with Marxism and hoped to show to the rest of the world that socialism, as opposed to ‘bourgeois feminism’ would liberate working class women.

I use the term, ‘Zhenotdel Socialism’, to describe the approach of the Bureau to the post-revolutionary Soviet project. This is a useful definition in that it combines concepts of gender emancipation and socialism within a state-building programme. Barbara Evans Clements has argued that the Bureau had “crafted from the Marxist analysis of women’s emancipation a vision of the socialist future and the means to achieve it that diverged in very significant ways from those articulated by the Party’s male leaders.”<sup>63</sup> As communists, Kollontai, Armand, and Krupskaya all looked to their own movement for theoretical and ideological underpinnings. In particular they were deeply influenced by the ideas of August Bebel and Frederick Engels who had both written on primitive communism and the woman question in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup>

The centrality of the writings of Bebel and Engels for Zhenotdel leaders lay in the connection they made between attaining a communist society and securing women’s freedom. Their consideration of studies of tribal and early human societies had led them to believe that primitive communism had been an ideal form of societal organisation for women. Women’s role in communist production and reproduction had been equal, if not more important, than that of men as all family ties were traced through the mother. It was not only “a general community of women and men but also a community of children.”<sup>65</sup> All society shared collective benefit and responsibility for children. Members of the commune shared in the produce of the labour of both men and women. However, the emergence of private property through agriculture had destroyed the communal bonds and concentrated property in the hands of a minority, ultimately leading to state rule,

---

<sup>62</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘The Social Basis of the Woman Question’ in *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, A. Holt, (Allison & Busby 1977), pg. 64-73 for Kollontai’s views on the necessity to supersede the family

<sup>63</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’ in *Slavic Review* Vol 51 No 3 (Autumn 1992), pg. 487

<sup>64</sup> A. Bebel, *Women under Socialism* (Schocken Books Incorporated 1971); F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (International Publishers 1975)

<sup>65</sup> A. Bebel, *Women Under Socialism*, pg. 16

the privatised family and the supremacy of men over women. In Engels' words, the collapse of primitive communism symbolised the "historical downfall of the female sex."<sup>66</sup> Women became marginalised and isolated from civil society and enslaved by domestic labour and childcare. The monogamous family of 19<sup>th</sup> century was just the most recent example of a repressive family form within which women were themselves treated as property. Both class society and the conventional family had therefore become an impediment to the progress of humanity.<sup>67</sup>

This analysis was a very powerful one for women seeking emancipation within the socialist project. It provided a means to link their ambition for personal emancipation from the restraints of convention with the broader fight for socialist change.<sup>68</sup> Advocates of women's rights were able to point to Bebel's critique of the bourgeois family as "a place of darkness and superstition" in their attacks on that institution. On sexual morality they could refer to his claim that "the sexual impulse is neither moral nor immoral; it is merely natural like hunger and thirst; nature knows nothing of morals."<sup>69</sup> In demanding freedom from state restrictions on divorce they could quote Engels on the need to recognise that in the absence of love "separation is a benefit for both partners as well as for society - only people will then be spared having to wade through the useless mire of a divorce case."<sup>70</sup> And to back their demands for economic and sexual independence they could refer to his view that not only was women's entry into productive labour essential but that involvement in "social production would transform sexuality" and challenge the roots of the bourgeois family.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly the connection between women's economic activity and the supersession of the family was made. It showed that under socialism women would attain economic freedom and equality with men. Freedom from the drudgery of domestic labour and childcare would allow them to enjoy a free social, political and sexual life.

---

<sup>66</sup> F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, pg. 94

<sup>67</sup> A. Bebel, *Women Under Socialism*, pg. 186

<sup>68</sup> B. Evans Clements, 'Emancipation through Communism: The Ideology of A.M. Kollontai' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 32 No. 2 (June 1973), pp.323-338 for an exploration of how radical women linked their desire for personal freedom with the ideology of socialism

<sup>69</sup> A. Bebel, *Women Under Socialism*, pg. 82

<sup>70</sup> F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, pg. 145

<sup>71</sup> E. Waters, 'The Bolsheviks and the Family' in *Contemporary European History* Vol. 4 Issue 3 (November 1995), pp. 275-291, pg. 280

Klara Zetkin, who collaborated with Bebel within the SDP, is an example of someone for whom these ideas were central. She lauded Bebel's work as of ground-breaking significance in revealing "for the first time the connection between the woman question and historical development" of class society and particularly capitalism.<sup>72</sup> Zetkin utilised the theoretical authority of Bebel and Engels in her fight for recognition of 'the woman question' and to assist her to persuade the German SDP to set up special women's commissions at the Erfurt Conference in 1891.<sup>73</sup> She became the leading women's advocate within the Second Communist International, and was described as a pugnacious and determined figure who was not afraid to condemn socialist men for their reactionary views on the woman question.<sup>74</sup> She won over the Second International to a commitment to campaign for women's suffrage and the establishment of International Women's Day as part of the socialist calendar.<sup>75</sup> As a member of the left wing of the German Social Democratic party and a close ally of Rosa Luxemburg, Zetkin was held in high esteem by Lenin and the Bolshevik party leadership.<sup>76</sup> A strong supporter of the Zhenotdel, Zetkin drafted a resolution to the newly formed Third International in 1921 calling on all parties of the International to form their own Zhenotdels.<sup>77</sup> She discussed and agreed this resolution with Lenin and claimed that he was a backer of the initiative.<sup>78</sup>

Although Zetkin was an important ally because of her support for a separate organisation, she was more moderate in her views on the family than either Armand or Kollontai, the two individuals most intrinsic to the Zhenotdel's programme.<sup>79</sup> Both these women had played a central role in the Zhenotdel's creation and leadership in the formative years. Barbara Clements Evans argues

---

<sup>72</sup> W. Thonnesson, *The Emancipation of Women, The Rise & Decline of the Women's Movement within German Social Democracy 1863-1933* (Pluto Press 1973), pg. 48

<sup>73</sup> W. Thonnesson, *The Emancipation of Women*, pg. 48

<sup>74</sup> W. Thonnesson, *The Emancipation of Women*, pp39-45 for a description of Zetkin's combative approach on question of women in the labour force

<sup>75</sup> G. Notz, 'Clara Zetkin and the International Socialist Women's Movement' in *Clara Zetkin Letters and Writings, Revolutionary History* (Merlin Press 2015), pp. 14-27 for a summary of Zetkin's activities and profile

<sup>76</sup> W. Thonnesson, *The Emancipation of Women*, pg. 69

<sup>77</sup> C. Zetkin, 'Guidelines for the Communist Women's Movement' in *Clara Zetkin, Kunst und Proletariat in Revolutionary History* No 1 (Merlin Press Limited 2015), pp 42-61. See also 'Third Congress Methods & Forms of Work among Women' in *Theses Resolutions & Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (Humanities Press 1980)

<sup>78</sup> K. Zetkin, *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin* (International Publishers 1966)

<sup>79</sup> J. Lokaneeta, 'Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism', pg. 1405

that the Zhenotdel leaders can be distinguished from the rest of the Bolsheviks because of their avowal of a “distinctive form of utopianism”, which was also “widely shared among less prominent zhenotdelovki.”<sup>80</sup> In 1908 Kollontai wrote that to “become really free, women had to throw off the heavy chains of the current forms of the family, which are outmoded and oppressive.”<sup>81</sup> Socialism implied radical changes to the traditional family, which was “not only useless but harmful” to the development of socialism.<sup>82</sup> Kollontai saw herself as a trailblazer for women’s rights within the Marxist movement and leaned more towards Bebel’s libertarianism than the more conservative Engels. In contrast to Engel’s hope that “monogamy would become real” in socialist society, she posited a “theory of free love and differing types of love relations.”<sup>83</sup> All relationships short or long should be based on “a comradeship of mutual interests and deep feeling in a “communist society unified by platonic and erotic love.”<sup>84</sup>

Kollontai echoed Bebel in a speech in 1921 where she argued sex “should be natural like the satisfying of hunger or thirst”.<sup>85</sup> Such a view was strongly condemned by Lenin.<sup>86</sup> Kollontai had also enriched her thinking on human relationships through reading Freud and Nietzsche, both of whom were dismissed as bourgeois ideologues by the Bolsheviks.<sup>87</sup> For Armand’s part, her biographer has argued that “[t]here is no doubt that her 1915 pamphlet, had it appeared, would have advocated sexual emancipation and sexual equality.”<sup>88</sup> In her letters to Lenin that year she had argued for him to recognise the importance of connecting the struggle for women’s sexual freedom with the class struggle. She bemoaned the position of a married woman who:

---

<sup>80</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’ in *Slavic Review* Vol 51 No 3 (Autumn 1992), pg. 487

<sup>81</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘The Social Basis of the Woman Question’ in *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai* A. Holt, editor (Allison & Busby 1977), pg. 64

<sup>82</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle’ in *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*

<sup>83</sup> J. Heinen, ‘Kollontai and the History of Women’s Oppression’ in *New Left Review* 1/110 (1978), pp.43-63, pg. 44

<sup>84</sup> J. Heinen, ‘Kollontai and the History of Women’s Oppression’, pg. 45

<sup>85</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘Emancipation through Communism: The Ideology of A.M. Kollontai’ in *Slavic Review* Vol. 32 No. 2 (June 1973), pg. 323

<sup>86</sup> K. Zetkin, *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin* (International Publishers 1966)

<sup>87</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pg. 143; K. Zetkin, *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin* for Lenin’s negativity towards psychology and psychiatry

<sup>88</sup> R. C. Ellwood *Inessa Armand*, pg. 149



...does not exist for herself, as befits a human being, but only to bear children and keep house. Not only love but often respect are out of the question - she is simply the head slave of her husband.<sup>89</sup>

Human relationships were of as much importance to Armand as the economic position of human beings. In her speech to the 1918 Congress, Armand argued that the revolution had laid bare both the capitalist economic system and the 'bourgeois-capitalist family.'<sup>90</sup> Ellwood argues that for Armand "the time had now come to replace the household economy and free women as housewives so that they could participate in party, soviet and other communal activity".<sup>91</sup> She wrote in 1919 that until the old institution of the family was abolished "it is impossible to obliterate exploitation and enslavement; it is impossible to create the new person; impossible to build socialism."<sup>92</sup>

Among the Bolsheviks who supported the supersession of the conventional family, there was a great deal of divergence over the pace of change. Lenin, Krupskaya and Samoilova were much more cautious than Kollontai and Armand. Indeed, Lenin was particularly harsh on what he termed "the obsession with sexual relationships."<sup>93</sup> Kollontai was by far the most audacious and impatient for change. At a series of lectures at Sverdlov University in 1921 she dismissed those who claimed she was too impatient and argued that the quest for a new morality could not be postponed. For Kollontai, "the ideology of a social group, and consequently of sexual morality, is accomplished in the very process of the highly difficult struggle of given social groups with hostile social forces."<sup>94</sup> A new socialist man and woman involved in "less traditional forms of sexual relationships" would come into being as a result of a radical challenge to existing norms.<sup>95</sup> Kollontai believed that the Soviet state should lead this challenge by developing new moral standards.

---

<sup>89</sup> I. F. Armand, *Stati, rechi, pis'ma*, Moscow 1975 pp.246-250 cited by R. C. Ellwood *Inessa Armand*, pg. 150

<sup>90</sup> I. F. Armand, *Stati, rechi, pis'ma*, Moscow 1975 pp.117-118 cited by R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 238

<sup>91</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 238

<sup>92</sup> Blonina E [I.F. Armand] 'Usloviia polnogo osvobozhdeniia rabotnits i krest'ianok ', *Kommunistka* 1920 no. 1-2 pp 5-7 cited by R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 249

<sup>93</sup> K. Zetkin, *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of VI Lenin*

<sup>94</sup> A. Kollontai, 'The New Morality and the Working Class'

<sup>95</sup> E. Naiman, 'Revolutionary Anorexia (Nep as a Female Complaint)' in *The Slavic and East European Journal* Vol. 37 No. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp.305-325, pg.317

Alongside a belief in the necessity of radical action to shape change, the Zhenotdel leadership also adhered to the notion of women as the agents of their own liberation, connected with the Marxist notion of working class self-liberation. However, there was a tension between that ideal and an adherence to a vision of a 'New Soviet Woman'. Women were described by both male and female members of the CPSU "as more backward, ignorant, superstitious, resistant to change, susceptible to incorrect influences than men."<sup>96</sup> 'Backwardness' was an idea central to Bolshevism and used to distinguish the 'advanced' section of the working class who supported their political aims from those others who had not been won over. It also was used to describe the peasantry and their lives. At the bottom of the pyramid of backwardness were peasant women, viewed as "the 'darkest', most backward layer of the Russian population, a dead weight and a potential source of counterrevolution."<sup>97</sup> Their lives were perceived as being engulfed by ignorance and superstition. A key aim of the Zhenotdel was to awaken these women to an understanding of their historical destiny in the socialist revolution. However what began as a campaign of enlightenment became, under conditions of growing intolerance, increasingly negative. With the introduction of the Five Year Plan in 1928, latent bigotry towards rural women in particular assumed very authoritarian forms.

The influence of Kollontai's views on Serafima Liubimova, Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel from 1923 to 1926, is apparent in the leading role assigned by Liubimova to Soviet law as an instrument of change. Like Kollontai, Liubimova had a fundamental conflict in her thinking in terms of one the one hand encouraging self-activity, and on the other hand, urging indigenous women to adopt a Soviet model of the family. This tension was aggravated by the deeply negative attitude towards many aspects of the lives of indigenous women. While the Zhenotdel did attempt to facilitate self-sufficiency among indigenous women, its advocacy of Soviet law as a model for their personal lives was deeply intrusive and culturally insensitive. It sought to organise women's cooperatives around carpet making and silk-weaving, which had traditionally been done by women. It also sought to

---

<sup>96</sup> E. A Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997), pg. 28

<sup>97</sup> B. Farnsworth, 'Village Women Experience the Revolution' in *Russian Peasant Women* B Farnsworth & Lynn Viola editors (Oxford University Press 1992), pg. 145

organise culturally sensitive women-only clubs and ‘corners’ for women to meet.<sup>98</sup> But within these forums, the Zhenotdel promote the implementation of European family forms, and for indigenous women to prosecute their fathers and brothers to Soviet Courts for breach of laws prohibiting kalym (bride-price) and polygyny. This was tantamount to demanding that indigenous women break with their families and communities. I will address these contradictory policies and the impact on indigenous women in chapters three, four and five.

#### 1.4 The relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Communist Party

For the only organisation dedicated to pursuing women’s emancipation to be under the direct control of the Central Committee was certainly not ideal. All the more, given that the majority of members of that Committee lacked any more than a formal commitment to the ‘woman question’. The lack of interest among leading male Bolsheviks is evidenced in the failure of those like Zinoviev, Bukharin or even Trotsky to debate or develop the original visions of Engels and Bebel. Elizabeth Woods notes that, with the exception of Kollontai, the Bolsheviks “wrote virtually nothing original on the woman question before 1917.”<sup>99</sup> While Lenin complained about the chauvinism of his comrades, he himself had done little to direct his own attention to women’s equality in his writings - something which would have been of enormous importance in influencing ordinary male Party members.<sup>100</sup> The Bolshevik Party was in power with a membership that, largely, viewed the promotion of women’s issues as irrelevant or trivial, or were antagonistic to the Zhenotdel’s very existence.

Thus, while it had won the right to exist, the Zhenotdel most certainly had not won the Party majority to its programme. Wendy Goldman has argued that the Party leadership only established the Zhenotdel because it “was shoved unwillingly toward change by the spontaneous militancy of women workers themselves and the tenacious efforts of women like Kollontai, who refused to

---

<sup>98</sup> See chapter 4 for details of clubs and cooperatives

<sup>99</sup> E. A Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, pg.14

<sup>100</sup> T. Vesala, ‘The Hardening of Cement: Russian Women and Modernisation’ in *NWSA Journal* Vol. 15 No.3 (Autumn 2003), pp.104-123

ignore women as a constituency.”<sup>101</sup> The Zhenotdel may have caused annoyance with its demands, which were considered impracticable by many, but it was preferable to the demands of an autonomous women’s movement, particularly in a period of civil war.<sup>102</sup> Carol Eubanks Hayden argues that the Zhenotdel’s attempt “to serve both the interests of the Party and those of Russian women at the same time” meant that when there was a conflict between the two “the needs of Russian women received a very low priority.”<sup>103</sup> The Bolsheviks were thus able to absorb the energy and enthusiasm of women and curb their autonomy.

There is no doubt that the lack of autonomy was a profound problem for the Zhenotdel’s ambitions, and one of the key issues which this thesis addresses. Yet I take issue with Hayden’s further claim that “despite periodic rebelliousness”, “in the course of the 1920s [the Zhenotdel] came to serve primarily as a vehicle for Party influence among women.”<sup>104</sup> Wendy Goldman has addressed this point, and has demonstrated from her research into the activities of Zhenotdel industrial activities in the 1920s, that “Hayden is right to highlight this tension but wrong to assume that it was resolved by 1924, for the struggle between party goals and women’s issues continued well into the 1930s.”<sup>105</sup> Hayden describes Kollontai as arguing that the role of the Zhenotdel was not just “to popularise the general line of the party among women, but to introduce into the building of the new state principles based on the interests of women.”<sup>106</sup> This would require it being able to bring about “unprecedented changes in the nature of sexual relations” and “a revolution in the outlook, emotions, and the inner world of working people.”<sup>107</sup> I consider that this goal persisted among Zhenotdel activists after Kollontai’s removal from the position of Director. Indeed, my research shows how a commitment to acting as a voice for indigenous women reflected itself in Central Asia right up to the end of 1928. At the same time, however, it is an inescapable fact that the Zhenotdel was directly under the control of the Central Committee,

---

<sup>101</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics, Peasant Revolution and the Death of the Proletarian Women’s Movement in the USSR’ in *Slavic Review* Vol. 55 No 1 (Spring 1996), pp.45-77, pg. 51

<sup>102</sup> A. Bobroff, ‘The Bolsheviks and Working Women’ in *Soviet Studies* Vol. 26 No.4 (October 1974), pp. 540-567 for a discussion of the hostility of the Zhenotdel to separate organisation of women

<sup>103</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 173

<sup>104</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 173

<sup>105</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’, pg. 53

<sup>106</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 162

<sup>107</sup> J. Levi Martin, ‘Structuring the Sexual Revolution’ in *Theory and Society* Vol. 25 No 1 (February 1996), pp. 105-151, pg. 110 quotations from Kollontai’s ‘Make Way for Winged Eros’

and was vulnerable to decisions taken, not only by the leadership, but also by regional committees.<sup>108</sup>

While the Zhenotdel attempted to utilise the authority of the leadership for its own agenda, it was unable to convince the male Party membership to assist it in achieving its aims. The Zhenotdel was not accepted as a legitimate part of the Party and the perception of it as a feminist enclave persisted right up until its demise. What is more, Lenin himself accepted that the majority of his members remained deeply hostile to women's rights: "unfortunately we may still say of many of our comrades, 'Scratch the Communist and a philistine appears'. To be sure you have to scratch their sensitive spots, such as their mentality regarding women", which, he contended, was that of the "slave-owners."<sup>109</sup> It did not help that even Lenin, the highest ranking supporter of the Zhenotdel, saw the organisation in purely functional terms. He made clear in the same interview that the Bureau's role was "to arouse the masses of women workers, to bring them into contact with the Party, and to keep them under its influence."<sup>110</sup> These "unpolitical, unsocial, backward" women had to be brought under the sway of the Party. No doubt Lenin's narrow approach to the question of organising women presented a major barrier to the Zhenotdel gaining any legitimacy or acceptance as a permanent body within the Party.<sup>111</sup> This atmosphere made its continued survival insecure, while also burdening the Zhenotdel with the workload of recruiting women to the party. Although there was a formal obligation on the part of all party members to assist the Zhenotdel's work, in practice this rarely happened.<sup>112</sup>

During the years of the civil war a perception existed among Zhenotdel members that viewed women's emancipation as advancing as an intrinsic component of the Soviet struggle. There was little conflict between the Zhenotdel and the rest of the Party on the need to mobilise women to defend the Soviet Union.<sup>113</sup> Barbara

---

<sup>108</sup> W. Z. Goldman, 'Industrial Politics' shows the struggle against liquidation

<sup>109</sup> K. Zetkin, 'The Emancipation of Women'

<sup>110</sup> K. Zetkin, 'The Emancipation of Women'

<sup>111</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and The Comrade*, pg. 38-39 for a critique of the functional approach to organising women

<sup>112</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba & the Comrade*, pp. 131-169 for descriptions of the difficulties it faced within the party

<sup>113</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg.246 where he states that Armand's first action as director was to organise women in the Civil War

Evans Clements writes that the concentration of the Party on military matters in this period left the Zhenotdel “free to champion all the elements of female emancipation that had been laid down by the founders of Marxism: Zhenotdel publications openly endorsed the radical restructuring of the family and sexual liberation, and prophesied the imminent creation of a new woman.”<sup>114</sup> It pioneered a raft of new measures to assist women in achieving this ideal, with public canteens, literacy courses, employment training, workshops and cooperatives. However, the end of the civil war, the return of men from the front and the introduction of market forces in the New Economic Policy (NEP), revealed a far more sobering reality to that they had imagined existed. The pages of *Kommunistka* contained numerous articles bemoaning the re-emergence of reactionary attitudes toward women, their expulsion from the workplace, and the undervaluing of the Zhenotdel’s local initiatives, such as canteens and cooperatives, referred to above. Because of its commitment to NEP, and the lack of priority given to women’s rights, the Party leadership failed to take a stand against the instrumental treatment of Zhenotdel members and women workers.<sup>115</sup>

Yet despite being consistently disregarded, the Zhenotdel continued to insist that it had a legitimate right to receive support as part of the Soviet project. From 1921 it fought continuous attempts to close down sections of its organisation.<sup>116</sup> Wendy Goldman argues that the efforts of Zhenotdel activists to implement its programme of transformation “conflicted constantly with the entrenched prejudices of local party and union officials.”<sup>117</sup> After the First Five Year Plan was announced by Stalin in late 1927, many Zhenotdel members were apparently relieved that the days of NEP were over and hoped that the leadership had at last accepted their arguments for the full and equal participation of women in the economy.<sup>118</sup> Paradoxically, and most certainly unwittingly, the Zhenotdel’s persistence in calling for backing from the Central Committee led the Zhenotdel to promote the direct intervention of a profoundly dictatorial leadership in its

---

<sup>114</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’ in *Slavic Review* Vol. 51 No. 3 (Autumn 1992), pg. 489

<sup>115</sup> M. Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Harvester Wheatsheaf 1989), pp. 60-64 for a description of the controversial NEP policy and its implications for the Zhenotdel

<sup>116</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, chapter 5

<sup>117</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’, pg. 76.

<sup>118</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, chapter 5.

organisation.<sup>119</sup> However, when it did become involved finally in 1927 and 1928, the support that activists had hoped for did not transpire. Instead, the Central Committee began moves to close down the Bureau. 1928 saw the steady liquidation of Zhenotdel branches reproached for “parallelism” - whereby the Zhenotdel was accused of duplicating the work of other Soviet organisations.<sup>120</sup> Wendy Goldman describes how “[b]y June the rationalisation committees set up to eradicate organisational waste had swept through wide sections of the country, leaving local Zhenotdels in ruins.”<sup>121</sup> The protests by Anna Artiukhina, national director of the Zhenotdel, fell on deaf ears.<sup>122</sup>

It is interesting to note that in 1928, in a period of mass repression and the purging of many members, a vigorous debate on the need for women’s separate organisation took place in *Kommunistka*. Russian members made clear that they were unhappy with the closure of Zhenotdels within trade unions and regions which was taking place under a “rationalisation” exercise.<sup>123</sup> This debate was also reflected in Central Asia, with proposals coming forward to set up an organisation independent from the CPSU.<sup>124</sup> Such criticism of the Party was not unusual in *Kommunistka*. But while previously the Zhenotdel had been so marginalised that these debates had gone unnoticed, they were now in full view of a Central Committee determined to crush all opposition. It was not coincidental that the Politbureau “declared frankly that the organisation interfered with the new tasks of the Five Year Plan.”<sup>125</sup>

## 1.5 Action to transcend the family

When the Zhenotdel project was approved by the party in March 1919, Kollontai declared to the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that it was necessary to take immediate action “to begin the abolition of the unproductive household economy and replace it with

---

<sup>119</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’, for Artiukhina’s appeals to the central committee.

<sup>120</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’, pg. 56.

<sup>121</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’, pg. 56.

<sup>122</sup> E. A Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, chapter 5.

<sup>123</sup> E. A Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, chapter 5.

<sup>124</sup> See chapter 6 for the debate on autonomy from the CPSU in Central Asia.

<sup>125</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’, pg. 46.

a network of communal consumer establishments.”<sup>126</sup> Armand launched a campaign to begin this process, recruiting women to the civil war effort, to the workforce, political and social life and education. She also organised communal services, laundries, crèches, and public canteens to support this transition.<sup>127</sup> She sent brigades to every region of the Soviet Union to recruit women, create delegate meetings and initiate childcare and other facilities.<sup>128</sup> Samoilova was one of the best known leaders of this programme, a popular figure who “sailed up and down the Volga with a plea for support and a promise of liberation which she proclaimed from the decks of the Red Star.”<sup>129</sup>

Armand created a flexible and democratic form of organisation for the Zhenotdel.<sup>130</sup> Delegate meetings operated as representative bodies, discussion forums and training centres. Women were to be delegated as apprentices in factories, unions and government bodies for a period of six months after which they returned to share their new found skills with local women and allow another delegate to go forward. Wendy Goldman describes how it employed a two-fold strategy. It sought both to recruit women to the Party and Soviet organisations and “more fundamentally, to transform the very nature and structure of daily life (byt).”<sup>131</sup> It “actively promoted a programme for women’s liberation based on the women’s full and equal participation in public life through the socialisation of the domestic sphere.”<sup>132</sup> It aimed to improve working conditions for working women and issued a demand “requiring that every enterprise have at least one woman delegate appointed to the factory inspectorate.”<sup>133</sup>

It is unclear to what extent the Zhenotdel’s demands took effect in this period. Certainly, with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March 1921 activists found themselves in real difficulties. Elizabeth Wood describes how the Zhenotdel “faced perhaps the most difficult problem of all, trying to find a new identity now that the revolution and civil war were over.”<sup>134</sup> The sense of

---

<sup>126</sup> A. Kollontai, *‘Vos’moi S’ezd RKP (b) Mart 1919 Goda Protokol (Moskva 1959)*

<sup>127</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 251

<sup>128</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 331-332

<sup>129</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 332

<sup>130</sup> R. C. Elwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 239

<sup>131</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Women at the Gates’, pg. 40

<sup>132</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Women at the Gates’, pg. 40

<sup>133</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’, pg. 150-173

<sup>134</sup> E. A Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, pg. 142



making progress receded quickly with the mass expulsion of women from factories to make way for returning soldiers. The Zhenotdel took initiatives to provide economic independence, by setting up small cooperatives, often known as artels, to employ women.<sup>135</sup> Stites described an artel as an initiative which directly reflected the philosophy of the Nihilist movement of 1800s, which had sought to develop small groups of economically active women as part of its “consciousness raising.”<sup>136</sup> These initiatives were significant, and provided models for the silk-weaving, carpet making and other co-operatives set up in Central Asia from 1923.

Yet even these initiatives were hampered by cuts in funding for communal facilities such as childcare and public canteens.<sup>137</sup> Lack of state subsidies meant that the Zhenotdel had to organise support for women through its own efforts. Rather than government funding, local cooperatives set up, financed and controlled their own services. Barbara Evans Clements states that this led to a strengthening of loyalty to collective provision. Clements quotes from Alexandra Artiukhina, director of the Zhenotdel from 1926-30, who expressed her opposition in 1930 to reports of investment in better household appliances for individual housewives instead of communal facilities: “It is better now to suffer with old dish mops, flat irons, frying pans, so that we have the means and strength to put into the construction of new social institutions - cafeterias, nurseries, kindergartens, laundries.”<sup>138</sup> Again this model of self-sufficiency would be an important influence on the Zhenotdel’s programme in Central Asia.<sup>139</sup>

When the economic drive of the Five Year Plan was announced in late 1927, many Zhenotdel members may have seen it as a sign that women would finally achieve sustainable economic independence. However, the move from small cooperatives to large-scale factories and collective farms would seriously undermine the autonomy of working and peasant women. In chapter four I will describe the

---

<sup>135</sup> B. Clements Evans, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’, pg. 49

<sup>136</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 92

<sup>137</sup> E. A. Waters, *The Baba & The Comrade*, pg. 151 for where Lenin insisted that the “government must resolutely, even ruthlessly, choose higher production over social reform”

<sup>138</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Za sotsialisticheskuiti peredelkuL byta’, *Rabotnitsa*, no. 4 (1930) pg. 3 cited by B. Clements Evans, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’, pg. 494

<sup>139</sup> See chapter 4 for the manner in which clubs and women’s shops organised facilities and activities

negative impact of the Five Year Plan on the Zhenotdel's work in Central Asia, and in particular, how the safe and culturally sensitive working environments of clubs and shops were annihilated.

## 1.6 The Zhenotdel leadership and the Central Committee

The treatment meted out by the Party leadership to Zhenotdel Directors illustrated the problems implicit in its position as a Bureau of the Central Committee. The role of the Director was central in providing leadership for the entire organisation. Armand's selection by the Central Committee as the first Director in August 1919 has been described as a clear move to control the ambitions for radical change articulated by Kollontai. The leadership which had been elected at the November 1918 Congress was replaced by an appointee who was under the direct control of the Central Committee. Kollontai was snubbed for the more trustworthy Armand, who according to her biographer, was not only "far less flamboyant, mercurial and unpredictable than Kollontai. [s]he also was less independent politically."<sup>140</sup> In fact, however, Armand was not the tame servant that she was perceived as by the Central Committee. She held very similar views on women and the family and created a very democratic and assertive organisation.<sup>141</sup>

With Armand's death in September 1920, Kollontai was appointed as Director. Richard Stites has described her time as Director as the time when the "more aggressive stand in defending women's rights reached its highpoint."<sup>142</sup> Kollontai "declared that the Zhenotdel would serve as an advocate for women within party and government".<sup>143</sup> An illustration of her ambition can be seen in her decision to extend the ambit of the Zhenotdel to Central Asia and other parts of the Soviet East. Kollontai and Samoilova put plans in place for an all-Union Non-Party Meeting of Eastern women in April 1921. The nature and aims of this planned event, along with its ultimate cancellation, are dealt with in chapter three. However, at this juncture it sufficient to note that, as is clear from both secondary sources and her

---

<sup>140</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 243

<sup>141</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand*, pg. 243

<sup>142</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pg.162

<sup>143</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, pg. 171

own writings, Kollontai was completely out of step with Party policy in this period. She battled the introduction of NEP and played a leading role in the Worker's Opposition which launched a factional battle against the leadership. The defeat of the Worker's Opposition at the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1921 led to Kollontai's political and personal humiliation, her removal as Zhenotdel Director and banishment abroad to the diplomatic corps.<sup>144</sup> Under the direct control of the Central Committee, the Zhenotdel lost its most dedicated and politically independent leader. Her sacking, along with the deaths of Armand and then Samoilova is said to have "robbed the Zhenotdel of its most aggressive, influential and prestigious leadership."<sup>145</sup> Kollontai's removal also sent out a clear warning that forceful criticism of the Central Committee would not be tolerated.<sup>146</sup>

Thus, it was not unsurprising that her replacement, Sofia Smidovich, distanced herself from her predecessor and made clear that all discussion on radical changes to the form of the family was firmly in the past.<sup>147</sup> But despite her loyalty, Smidovich found it virtually impossible to gain support for work among women. Soon after her appointment in 1922 she expressed anger about the Central Committee's indifference to work among women, complaining that it "would be better to liquidate" the local Zhenotdels "than drag out the miserable existences which they are leading in the majority of the provinces."<sup>148</sup> She also faced direct discrimination. In a report in the same year, it was stated that, unlike representatives of other Central Committee bureaux, the Zhenotdel director "was told to wait in the hall" and "allowed into the meeting only when a point arose concerning women, and then she was sent outside to wait again."<sup>149</sup> That the Central Committee had such little respect for the Director of the Zhenotdel spoke volumes about its attitude to 'the woman question'.

During the NEP years from 1921 to 1928, Zhenotdel activists engaged in a ceaseless fight against liquidation. Regional and factory Party committees persistently

---

<sup>144</sup> B. Allen, *Alexander Shlyapnikov 1885-1937, Life of An Old Bolshevik* (Haymarket Books 2016), chapter 6 and C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, chapter 16

<sup>145</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pg.163

<sup>146</sup> S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press 1984), pg. 97

<sup>147</sup> B. Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', pg. 491-492 for Smidovich's announcement that there would be a clampdown on "theoretical discussions" of sexuality within the pages of *Kommunistka*

<sup>148</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pg.165

<sup>149</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', pp. 150-173.

resolved to close down Zhenotdel branches.<sup>150</sup> Smidovich finally resigned in 1924, no doubt demoralised by the difficulty of making progress, despite official Central Committee support. Her successor, Klavdiia Nikolaeva, a former supporter of Kollontai, suffered a similar fate to her erstwhile colleague. She became involved with the anti-Stalin Leningrad Opposition led by Gregory Zinoviev.<sup>151</sup> In a purge of all Zinoviev supporters after 1925, Nikolaeva was removed from her position as Director.<sup>152</sup> Again the Central Committee made it clear that the Zhenotdel Director should not criticise its leadership.

Aleksandra Artiukhina, who later was to become the last Director of the Zhenotdel, demonstrated a similar commitment to effective organisation to that of Armand. From 1925 to 1930, she succeeded in dramatically increasing the Zhenotdel's membership. Barbara Evans Clements describes how between 1926 and 1927 "620,000 women attended the delegate conferences stretching right across the Soviet Union."<sup>153</sup> Its publications were read widely and thousands "of Zhenotdel workers preached the visions of Kollontai, Armand and Samoilova from Kiev to Omsk."<sup>154</sup> She is also described as being as committed as her predecessors to create the conditions for the emergence of an economically independent Soviet Woman.<sup>155</sup> Artiukhina was also very active in developing work in Central Asia and she appears to have visited the region on a regular basis. Yet Artiukhina was no more able than her predecessors to win the backing of the Central Committee for the Zhenotdel programme. In 1928 she reported in *Kommunistka* that despite a large number of resolutions committing the Party to improve the conditions of women, "the status of work among women has not only not improved but in the majority of cases has become worse."<sup>156</sup> She expressed similarly strong criticism of the destruction of Zhenotdel initiatives in Central Asia by Soviet organisations in 1927 and 1928.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, pg. 132

<sup>151</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, pg. 210

<sup>152</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Woman*, pg. 268

<sup>153</sup> B. Evans Clements *Bolshevik Women*, pg. 270; K. Zetkin, 'The Emancipation of Women'

<sup>154</sup> B. Evans Clements *Bolshevik Women*, pg. 270

<sup>155</sup> B. Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', pg. 493

<sup>156</sup> A. E. Gorsuch, 'A Woman is Not a Man: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia 1921-1928' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 55 No. 3 (Fall 1996), pg. 636-660 and C. Scheide, 'Born in October: the Life & Thoughts of Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina 1889-1969' in *Women in the Soviet Era* editor Melanie Ilič (Palgrave Macmillan 2001), pp.9-28

<sup>157</sup> See Chapter four for details of this criticism

Two years after the Central Committee finally to intervene in the work of the Zhenotdel, it decided to close it down. It was “no longer a progressive organisation but a hindrance.”<sup>158</sup> Instead of a specific organisation dedicated to women’s rights, the entire Party would now take over these issues. In reality, this meant that the entire project was over, and work among women collapsed soon afterwards.<sup>159</sup> Many Zhenotdel members objected and argued that the Party leadership was destroying work among women. However in the new conditions of life under Stalin there was no place for opposition to the party line.<sup>160</sup>

## 1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered the ideology of the Zhenotdel and its relationship to Party and state. I argued that it distinguished itself from what it considered to be ‘bourgeois feminism’ and instead claimed that women could only be liberated within the struggle for socialism. This was to be a collective struggle for working class men and women and indeed the struggle for women’s rights implied a fundamental revolution in social relations which could only be to the benefit of both men and women. Yet the commitment of the Zhenotdel to the Soviet project was not reciprocated by the Communist leadership either centrally or regionally. While its place in the Party allowed it a voice in conditions where an autonomous organisation may not have survived, this came at a price. Attempts to make progress were hindered at every turn by apathy and hostility from Party the membership.

Yet - and this is where I aim to make an original contribution - I argue that it was not an abject servant of the Central Committee. It had its own distinct and fervently held goal to liberate women from the restraints of the family. Wendy Goldman has illustrated how the Zhenotdel continued to fight for its programme within increasingly repressive conditions and in the face of constant attempts to close it down.<sup>161</sup> The fact that it largely survived the constant attacks on its

---

<sup>158</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, pg.54

<sup>159</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, pp. 60-63

<sup>160</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement*, pp. 343-345 for the closure of the Zhenotdel

<sup>161</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’ for a description of the commitment of Zhenotdel activists to the organisation and their opposition to its closure.

existence illustrated that there was real support among the grassroots for this project. It was in the challenging context of Central Asia, where some of the most acute dilemmas facing the organisation in its practical and programmatic work were revealed most clearly, particularly around the question of women's autonomy and the scope(or lack of it) for bottom-up initiatives.

## Chapter 2

### The Zhenotdel in Soviet Central Asia

In chapter one I argued that the central premise of the Zhenotdel was its conviction that women's emancipation could only be achieved through a collective struggle for communism. I set out how this belief both distinguished it from orthodox feminist organisations in that period and from the Realpolitik of the Bolsheviks. Its leaders, in common with other prominent women revolutionaries, had fought a battle on two fronts before 1917; for recognition of women's rights within their own movement and against self-declared feminist organisations.<sup>1</sup> In post-revolutionary Russia they anticipated a momentous breakthrough for their programme. However, the conflict for Zhenotdel activists between their charter for woman-centred socialism and the realities of Soviet Russia besieged their project from the beginning and finally led to its dissolution in 1930.

In this chapter I move on to consider the existing literature on the Zhenotdel's role in Soviet Central Asia. I begin with a brief consideration of pre-Soviet Central Asia and the position of women within that society. I then consider academic analyses of the Zhenotdel's ideology and attitudes towards indigenous women; the Hujum and the Zhenotdel's role within it, the interplay between its programme and Central Asian women; and finally the relationship between the Zhenotdel and the Party. The majority of the literature is based on Uzbekistan, as this appears to have been the principal focus of Soviet political activity within Central Asia before 1929. It was also the Soviet Republic within which the fiercest political struggles took place during that period.

---

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Quartet, 'Unequal Partners in an Uneasy Alliance: Women and the Working Class in Imperial Germany' in M. J. Boxer & J. H. Quartet (eds) *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Elsevier 1978), pp.112-145

## 2.1 Central Asia before the revolution

Central Asia was forcibly incorporated into the Russian empire between 1860 and 1880 as part of the Tsarist military programme of eastern expansion. A largely peasant society, it has been described as having a highly diverse population. Massell paints it as a social order “rent by primordial attachments of tribe, clan and village community” and characterised by “linguistic and geographical separatism and localized micro-cultural lifestyle.”<sup>2</sup> Five main ethnic groups, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Kazakh and Tajik, were spread across large agricultural expanses, city states (khanates) and nomadic tribal regions. Islam was the dominant religion and the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand were prized as holy sites of learning within the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup> Central Asian Islam was profoundly embedded within indigenous cultural identity. Being Muslim was a “communal identity...played out through the communal celebration of august ancestors, annual holidays and life cycle events.”<sup>4</sup> Religious identity went hand in hand with being Uzbek, Tajik, Kirghiz, Kazakh or Turkmen and “for most people there simply could not be a distinction, let alone a contradiction, between Islam and local custom.”<sup>5</sup> In the absence of a state, the Muslim clergy in pre-Soviet Central Asia played an essential role as educator, law enforcer and welfare provider. Islam was the official ideology of the khanates and deeply intertwined with local law in the urban, agricultural and nomadic regions.<sup>6</sup>

Central Asia was also a society deeply segregated on grounds of gender. In the part of the region which was to become Uzbekistan, the majority of women lived in seclusion and were not allowed to interact with men who were not their immediate relatives. This strict partition between the lives of men and women has been described as specifically “designed to prevent unapproved sexual relations and protect family honour - that is women’s sexual purity.”<sup>7</sup> Among the

---

<sup>2</sup> G. J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pg. 9.

<sup>3</sup> L. Polonskaya & A. Malenshenko, *Islam in Central Asia* (Itacha Press Reading 1994), Chapter one for a discussion of the role of Islam in pre- Russian times.

<sup>4</sup> A. Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion & Politics in Central Asia* (University of California Press 2007), pg. 22.

<sup>5</sup> A. Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pg. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Liudmila Polonskaya & Alexei Malenshenko *Islam in Central Asia* Itacha Press Reading 1994 chapter one for a discussion of the role of Islam in pre- Russian times

<sup>7</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam Modernity and Unveiling Under Communism* (University of Washington Press 2006), pg. 29



nomadic Kazakh, Turkmen and Kirghiz tribes, women did not wear the veil but similar gender-specific cultural practices dominated their lives.<sup>8</sup> In Uzbek towns and villages women wore a long cloak known as a Paranji and a face covering known as the Chachvon whenever they left their homes.<sup>9</sup> Marianne Kamp describes how veiling became even more strictly enforced as a defensive response to the incursion of Russian imperialism in the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> The safeguarding of female virtue from the invader was imperative.<sup>11</sup>

Adeeb Khalid has argued that the Tsarist occupation of Central Asia presented little threat to the established clergy, which “gradually accommodated itself to the New Order”, in return for an agreement from the Russian state not to encroach into its power structures, to interfere in local traditions, or pose any threat to the integrity of the Islamic family and the position of women.<sup>12</sup> However hostility within the population towards a remote and arrogant imperial power began to gather momentum in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> The introduction of large scale landlordism under the Tsarist regime had resulted in the mass migration to towns of impoverished peasants. Those who remained on the land were either forced to subsist on tiny plots of land or to become part of a growing body of landless agricultural workers. These intolerable conditions and attempts at forced conscription during World War I led to a deep antagonism towards the Russian rulers.<sup>14</sup>

In the midst of World War I, a nationalist movement against conscription sparked the creation of soviets in Bukhara, Tashkent and elsewhere in Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> National self-determination had been a key plank of the Bolshevik programme in 1917.<sup>16</sup> Calls for national self-determination made by leading Bolsheviks like Grigory Zinoviev at the Baku Conference of Peoples of the East in 1920 inspired

---

<sup>8</sup> A. L. Edgar, ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule 1924-29’ in *The Russian Review* Vol. 62 (January 2003), pg. 132-149 for a comparative discussion of the lives of unveiled and veiled women

<sup>9</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 29-30

<sup>10</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman In Uzbekistan*, pg. 29

<sup>11</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 29

<sup>12</sup> Adeeb Khalid *Islam after Communism* ibid pg. 40

<sup>13</sup> Massell ibid pg. 16-18

<sup>14</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp.16-18

<sup>15</sup> Reference to the soviets in 1917 -1919 Central Asia

<sup>16</sup> Reference to the national question in G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat* and T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*

those in the Jadid modernist movement.<sup>17</sup> This urban based movement had been initiated by Tatar intellectuals and maintained a commitment to national rights, radical reform of the clergy and modern scientific education. Jadidists had a strong commitment to the promotion and education of women within a modernised Islamic nation.<sup>18</sup> Many identified the Soviet revolution as a conduit to the attainment to their own vision and participated in uprisings, including the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic from 1920 to 1924.<sup>19</sup>

In 1920 the Red Army was still fighting a war against Basmachi peasant forces who were resisting the continued presence of Russian forces in the region. This war which was not concluded until 1923 with the routing of the Basmachi.<sup>20</sup> The Soviet government was determined not to lose the territory of Central Asia to the Basmachi. However it also recognised that it had to compromise with nationalist forces. The policy of self-determination was a key plank to the Bolshevik vision of global socialism and the resolution of the national question. Terry Martin describes the National Delimitation Programme initiated in 1923 as being the articulation of this policy in the aftermath of the Civil War. The creation of self-government for the Eastern nations of the Soviet Union would show that the Soviet government was the ally of the oppressed people of the world. By leading through example, the Soviet Union could become a beacon of hope for those seeking national rights against the forces of imperialism.<sup>21</sup>

Self-determination within the wider Soviet state was perceived as an essential weapon against nationalism, as it would appease any sense of national grievance and voluntarily unite the peoples of the world in common cause.<sup>22</sup> Gregory Massell has stated that Lenin and Stalin were both in agreement on the need to “make Central Asia into a showcase of Soviet achievements for the entire East.”<sup>23</sup> They both advocated the creation of modern secular nations in the region. The Soviet East would show the world that humanity “could only proceed towards the

---

<sup>17</sup> Congress of Peoples of the East reference

<sup>18</sup> A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, University of California Press 1998 pg. 89-93 for a description of the movement

<sup>19</sup> Shoshana Keller, *The Soviet Campaign*, chapter 3 and Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism* pp. 55-69

<sup>20</sup> Alex Marshall reference

<sup>21</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp.4-6

<sup>22</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 4-6

<sup>23</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 181

inevitable fusion of nations through a transitional period of the complete freedom of all oppressed nations.”<sup>24</sup> With the stabilisation of Soviet rule in the region in 1923, plans were put in place to create national republics and regions under the National Delimitation Programme.<sup>25</sup> In 1924 the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics along with the Kirghiz Autonomous Region were created, later to be joined by Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.<sup>26</sup> Francine Hirsch describes how the Jadid were drawn into local government and how the “Muslim Communists’ supported Bolshevik claims to power, and the Bolsheviks supported their claims to leadership against those of traditional Muslim authorities”.<sup>27</sup>

National Delimitation was part of a policy of ‘Indigenisation’ or ‘Korenizatsiia’ which aimed to co-opt the population into the Soviet regime by promoting national groups to positions within the soviets and Party, and thus reversing the sense of being ruled by a distant power.<sup>28</sup> Terry Martin describes the programme as a defining moment in the implementation of a Soviet model for the peoples of the region.<sup>29</sup> In practice self-determination in the Soviet Union was far more restrictive than the policy which the Soviet leadership advocated outside of its borders. Terry Martin argues that in reality, “national republics only had the same powers as Russian provinces” and Delimitation did not equate to “devolution of political or economic power.”<sup>30</sup> The construction of Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics and the Kirghiz Autonomous Oblast in 1924 was therefore but the first phase of a strategy to assuage national aspirations while retaining central control over the region.<sup>31</sup> Yuri Slezkine argues that Russification remained the de facto policy, and the “personal (if usually unselfconscious) strategy for most officials.”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> T. Martin *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press 2001), pg. 5

<sup>25</sup> R. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism & Nationalism 1917-1923* (Harvard University Press 1980 ), pp.155-193 for a summary of nationalities policy in Central Asia

<sup>26</sup> T. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 33-45

<sup>27</sup> F. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Cornell University Press (2005), Itacha & London pg. 68

<sup>28</sup> A. Khalid, ‘A Secular Islam: Nation, State and Religion in Uzbekistan’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 35 No.4 (Nov. 2003), pp.573-598 for a discussion of the policy applied in Uzbekistan

<sup>29</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 14

<sup>30</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 14

<sup>31</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp1-27 for an exposition of this theory

<sup>32</sup> Y. Slezkine, ‘Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism’ in *Russian Review* Vol 59 No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 227-234, pg. 23

The policy of Korenizatsiia thus aimed to satisfy the ambitions of native elites and resolve the tensions within a multi-nation state - while ensuring the continued authority of Russia. Thus what Terry Martin describes as an “Affirmative Action Empire” replaced the traditional Tsarist imperial power.<sup>33</sup> In this description he locates a crucial contradiction at the heart of Soviet government nationalities policy - its attempt to connect a Russian modernisation programme to notions of self determination. For Central Asia this meant that the alleged “backwardness” of the indigenous population had to be overcome so as to transform it into a modern nationality which expressed Soviet ideology.<sup>34</sup> Thus the relationship between Moscow and Central Asia was from the beginning “an unequal marriage”.<sup>35</sup> Loyal non-Russian national elites were never allowed any real autonomy. And with the turn away from Korenizatsiia toward ‘class politics’ at the end of the 1920s, many members of the national elite were purged.

Nowhere was lack of genuine autonomy so apparent as on the question of Central Asian women. Terry Martin and Ronald Grigor Suny point to a central contradiction in Korenizatsiia in that while “Uzbek nationality was defined in terms of gender relations and customs of female seclusion that were marked as backward, dirty and oppressive”, at the same time these same social practices were to be eradicated.<sup>36</sup> The cultural intolerance evidenced itself within the process of creation of republics, when indigenous Uzbek women were required to strip naked in front of Russian male ethnographers and anthropologists so that their body parts could be measured and photographed.<sup>37</sup> Paula Michaels writes of similar incidents in Kazakhstan and claims that the process of modernisation “denigrated traditional Kazakh social, cultural and economic structures”<sup>38</sup>. The woman of Central Asia was viewed as “a primitive and oppressed creature of patriarchal despotism”.<sup>39</sup> She was a deeply backward individual who lived a life of drudgery and superstition - a life that needed fundamental transformation. Douglas Northrop describes how Uzbek women “served as the exemplars of their

---

<sup>33</sup> Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, Introduction.

<sup>34</sup> T. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 126

<sup>35</sup> R.G. Suny & T. Martin, Introduction in *State of Nations; Empire & Nation Building in the Age of Stalin & Lenin*, Editors R.G. Suny & T. Martin Oxford University Press (2001) New York pg. 10

<sup>36</sup> R.G. Suny & T. Martin, Introduction in *State of Nations; Empire & Nation Building* pg. 11

<sup>37</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire* pg. 52-55

<sup>38</sup> P. A. Michaels ‘Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan 1928-41’ in *Russian Review* Vol. 59 No. 2 pg. 160

<sup>39</sup> A.L. Edgar ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled’ *ibid* pg. 132

people...by showing the dirt, disease and ignorance that gripped the Uzbek nation".<sup>40</sup>

However, the assuagement of national aspirations meant the promotion of those who would previously have been denounced as 'petty bourgeois nationalists' to positions of power within Central Asia.<sup>41</sup> The Zhenotdel had an interesting relationship with the policy of Korenizatsiia in Central Asia. As this chapter shows there was no doubt that its Russian members believed indigenous women to be profoundly ignorant and backward. However, as I show in chapter four, such negative views did not automatically lead to an intolerant approach to all aspects of indigenous culture. The experience was - like Korenizatsiia itself - a contradictory one. Activists aimed to provide indigenous women with autonomy, while at the same time expecting them to adopt Russian practices in their personal lives. Another interesting finding in my research is the impact of the Moscow government's concern not to offend the sensibilities of indigenous male elites in respect of the woman question before 1927. This reluctance translated into a lack support for the Zhenotdel, despite official pronouncements to the contrary.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.2 The Debate on the Role of the Zhenotdel

A prominent strand of academic thinking has depicted Zhenotdel activists as loyal supporters of Soviet policy in Central Asia, and in particular the assault on indigenous society in 1927, known as the Hujum. According to Douglas Northrop, while mass unveiling had not been practiced by the Zhenotdel before 1927, its perception of "Muslim women as subject to unparalleled oppression by patriarchal Central Asian society" precipitated it "to support the turn to gender, through the Hujum, as an appropriate idiom for Soviet liberation."<sup>43</sup> Its view of Central Asian women as enslaved by seclusion thus led it to support unveiling as a form of emancipation.

---

<sup>40</sup> D. Northrop, 'Nationalising Backwardness: Gender, Empire and Uzbek Identity' in *State of Nations* pg. 206

<sup>41</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 154-156

<sup>42</sup> See in particular chapter six for a discussion of the Zhenotdel's relationship to indigenous male comrades

<sup>43</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press 2004): pp. 78-79

Douglas Northrop argues that Soviet policy on indigenous women was part of a modernisation strategy which was profoundly orientalist and imperialist in nature.<sup>44</sup> He further argues that the National Delimitation Programme divided indigenous people into national groups on the basis of arbitrary and ill-informed views of Soviet officials. Indigenous women found themselves facing prejudice and ill-treatment from these officials. Adrienne Lynn Edgar contends that the indigenous woman in particular was characterised as “a primitive and oppressed creature of patriarchal despotism”- a deeply backward individual who lived a life of drudgery and superstition.<sup>45</sup> Douglas Northrop argues that these stereotypes reflected a Soviet policy of:

...increasingly treated indigenous women as emblematic of what was wrong with their nations, as symbols of what had to be changed to make Central Asia modern.<sup>46</sup>

Women were perceived as the lynchpin keeping patriarchal society intact. Yet, as I previously argued in chapter one, the view of women as backward was not unique to Central Asia. In this regard, Elizabeth Wood describes how continued ties to village life meant that working women were perceived as backward and “more likely to be illiterate, superstitious, religious, and attached to older ways of doing things and to older kin relations” than men.<sup>47</sup> The conception of overcoming backwardness in the East was therefore simply an extension of a widely held view among Communist Party members of working class and peasant women in general.

Northrop contends that Zhenotdel members were enthusiastic supporters of the Soviet colonising strategy. He argues that they shared a view of Central Asia as a dark and backward corner of the USSR, with a population that was dirty, barbaric and even savage.<sup>48</sup> In particular, in common with their Russian male comrades, they saw the veil as the exemplar of everything that was reactionary. Northrop describes one Zhenotdel leader, Anna Nukrat, as being especially derogatory in

---

<sup>44</sup> F. Hirsch, ‘Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities’ in *Russian Review* Vol 59 No 2 (April 2000), pp 201-226

<sup>45</sup> A. L. Edgar ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled’, pg. 132

<sup>46</sup> D. Northrop *Veiled Empire*, pg. 46

<sup>47</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and The Comrade: Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997), pg. 15

<sup>48</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 63-65

her view of a veiled woman as a degraded imprisoned creature who “‘literally does not see the sun’.”<sup>49</sup> Gregory Massell, who shared a similar analysis of the Zhenotdel to Northrop, referred extensively to Nukrat’s pronouncements in his treatment of the Hujum, including a statement that there was “no human being more ignorant, more downtrodden and enslaved” than the veiled woman of the East.”<sup>50</sup> It should be noted however that, according to Massell, Nukhrat was actually not Russian, but “one of the first Turkic leaders” of the Zhenotdel.<sup>51</sup> Her antagonism to the veil may well have stemmed from a connection with the Jadid movement, a modernist intellectual strand within Central Asian Islam.<sup>52</sup> Marianne Kamp’s study of indigenous women who joined the Communist Party in that period reveals an antagonism to veiling among many of them.<sup>53</sup> A negative view of the veil was not unique to Russian members of the Zhenotdel.

It is true, however, that Russian Zhenotdel leaders did consider Eastern women, particularly veiled women, to be the most repressed and backward of all women in the Soviet Union. In an article in 1920 *Kommunistka* entitled ‘*The Last Slave*’ Kollontai declared that an Eastern woman was “a chattel” owned “by her husband, who until now has been her master under law.”<sup>54</sup> She saw the veil as a marker of this repression, of the lack of human rights. Richard Stites has stated that Kollontai often encouraged Eastern women who had travelled to Moscow or Petrograd to unveil.<sup>55</sup> She believed that it was an important dramatic gesture of emancipation. That this view was shared by other women activists is illustrated by the response to a group of Eastern women who visited Moscow in 1921. The women were taken to an International Meeting of Communist women, where they walked onto the Conference stage and unveiled:

The applause did not fall silent. No one could speak; everyone wept with joy.  
The West opened its embrace to the working women of the East...Would

---

<sup>49</sup> D. Northrop *Veiled Empire*, pg.41

<sup>50</sup> A. Nukhrat, *Oktiabr’ i Zhenshchina Vostoka*, Moscow 1917, p. 8 cited by G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 96

<sup>51</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 96

<sup>52</sup> A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (University of California Press 1999), pg. 281- 300 for a summary of the relationship of Jadidism with Soviet Rule in Central Asia

<sup>53</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, chapter 2 ‘Jadids & the Reform of Women’

<sup>54</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26.

<sup>55</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press 1990), pp.333-334

there be sufficient strength to tear away so many sacrifices of age-long oppression?<sup>56</sup>

Northrop and Massell have argued that the repugnance expressed by Zhenotdel activists towards the veil, and their determination to be a civilising force in the East, motivated them to play a leading part in the Hujum. The Hujum was a campaign launched by the Sredazburo in 1927 at the behest of the Central Committee. It was a radical drive against all forms of what were considered to be reactionary vestiges of patriarchal life. In Uzbekistan, the focus was primarily on an authoritarian campaign against the wearing of the local form of the veil, the paranji. Removing the veil would apparently introduce physical and intellectual light into the lives of indigenous women and allow them to become part of the Soviet project. It would cure the many health problems said to result from wearing the veil, including a lack of exercise leading to toxicity, premature aging and poor muscle tone. It would result in healthier children and avoid problems caused by feeding infants with unhealthy breast milk - caused by restrictive clothing and darkness - and intellectual problems produced by having mothers who were mired in ignorance and superstition.<sup>57</sup> In Northrop's view, Zhenotdel members understood the veil to be "a 'prison' from which Uzbek women had to be freed."<sup>58</sup> In the light of this viewpoint, it stood to reason that Zhenotdel activists would be passionate supporters of collective public unveiling.

Yet a crucial flaw in this analysis is a failure to take proper account of *why* the Zhenotdel had never advocated collective unveiling before 1927. This thesis explores the years before 1927 and investigates the relationship between the pre-Hujum and post-Hujum Zhenotdel. It illustrates that the initial aspiration of Zhenotdel leaders for indigenous women to rise up in solidarity with the Russian Revolution.<sup>59</sup> When this state of affairs did not transpire, the Zhenotdel adopted a far more sober analysis of the possibilities of change in the region. The emphasis was placed on the need to draw indigenous women into safe women-only spaces where they could unveil and be at ease. Secluded women were to be drawn into initiatives which corresponded in some way with their traditional lives. Women-

---

<sup>56</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 142

<sup>57</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 63

<sup>58</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 63

<sup>59</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion of the programme of the early Zhenotdel leaders



only clubs, corners and co-operatives were initiated in the Uzbek republic and among the Tajik population. Women only 'red tents' were also sent out to the nomadic regions, in order to recruit Turkmen and Kirghiz women. Moreover, even in parts of the region where women were not veiled, they were generally brought together within women-only spaces, It was thus crucial to Zhenotdel policy before 1927 that work, particularly among veiled women, exclude men, including Russian men.<sup>60</sup> Within women-only or female dominated spaces, cooperatives were created around handicraft work, spinning, silk-weaving, carpet making and embroidery, with the aim of providing assisting women to have some economic independence.<sup>61</sup> Children's nurseries, schools and medical consultations were set up within clubs and cooperatives to provide support for the women who attended. Women only shops were initiated in 1925 to allow women to sell their goods, to shop and to socialise.<sup>62</sup>

Before 1927, veiled women marched alongside unveiled women on March 8<sup>th</sup> demonstrations. Indeed it was seen as a unique act of bravery for them to do so and photographs of Women's Day events show veiled women stand alongside their unveiled sisters.<sup>63</sup> Northrop claims that "Zhenotdel workers came to insist that Uzbek women publically - and sometimes at gunpoint - throw off their veils."<sup>64</sup> He argues that their attitudes toward indigenous women and support for laws against kalym and polygyny made it inevitable that they would support the Hujum.<sup>65</sup> Such purported enthusiasm begs the question of why *Kommunistka* contained no calls for mass public unveiling before 1927. My research on *Kommunistka* over the entire decade shows the Zhenotdel policy was implicitly opposed to premature unveiling, as it would undermine its work with secluded women and put these women at risk. A number of key activists expressed awareness of the need to make concessions to indigenous culture, and there was very significant stress put on the need for indigenous women to be able to come to events in safety and unveil in the presence of other women. The methods mirrored indigenous society in a sense, by creating secluded spaces within broader

---

<sup>60</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 109-112 on woman-only initiatives

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 4 for a discussion of these initiatives

<sup>62</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 144 and chapter 4

<sup>63</sup> D. Northrop *The Veiled Empire*, pg. 180 figure 18 shows for example a demonstration of veiled women with banners from the mid-1920s

<sup>64</sup> D. Northrop, *The Veiled Empire*, pg. 13

<sup>65</sup> D. Northrop, *The Veiled Empire*, pp. 81-82 for this argument.

society. My thesis highlights that the Zhenotdel's policy of transformation in Central Asia was directed toward enabling indigenous women to become independent, and to attain a sense of themselves as social actors in a protected environment. This was viewed as a step toward more direct involvement and integration. I argue that the Hujum in Uzbekistan was actually in direct conflict with Zhenotdel policy before 1927.<sup>66</sup>

### 2.3 The Hujum

It is generally accepted within the academic literature that the decision to launch a mass unveiling campaign did not come from the Zhenotdel, but from the Central Committee's instruction to the Sredazburo to launch a campaign against the social fabric of indigenous life.<sup>67</sup> In 1926 the Central Committee of the CPSU had solidified around Stalin's leadership, following intense factional fighting in the two years after Lenin's death. Under Stalin, a far greater prominence was given to rapid modernisation, which went hand in hand with a strict clampdown on inner Party democracy.<sup>68</sup> Massell has described how a Central Committee resolution of June 18 1926 demanded "an 'intensification' of the struggle against residues of feudal-patriarchal attitudes towards women" in Central Asia.<sup>69</sup> In response to this demand, the Hujum was formally launched by the Sredazburo in early 1927. The two men prominent in implementing this policy were Zelenskii, the Russian chair of the Sredazburo, and Manzbara, who was Turkic. Both of these men have been described by Massell as close supporters of Stalin, who were dispatched from Moscow for the purposes of preparing the launch of the Hujum.<sup>70</sup> The Hujum was to be an aggressive attack on Central Asian traditional culture, directed at all traditional family practices that were perceived as backward and an impediment to the project of Soviet modernisation. These practices included polygamy, arranged marriage and kalym. In the Uzbek republic and Tajik region the Hujum became synonymous with an attack on the practice of veiling.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> See chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

<sup>67</sup> D. Northrop, *The Veiled Empire*, pp.82-83; G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp.226-232

<sup>68</sup> R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia: From Nicholas II to Putin* (Penguin Books 1997) for a summary of the battle within the Central Committee and Stalin's triumph

<sup>69</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp. 226-228

<sup>70</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp. 225-233

<sup>71</sup> D. Northrop, 'Subaltern Dialogues: Subversion and Resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law', *Slavic Review* Vol.60 No 1 (Spring 2001), pp.115-139 for a discussion of the Hujum

Massell has argued that the hope of the central committee was that the Hujum “would forcefully” destroy gender segregation, “engage” and “shatter - the entire socio-cultural system directly, head-on.”<sup>72</sup> He used the term “Surrogate Proletariat” to encapsulate the manner in which the Central Party leadership aimed to mobilise women against the old order. According to his analysis, in the imagination of the CPSU leadership indigenous women were “a potentially deviant and hence subversive stratum susceptible to militant appeal - in effect a surrogate proletariat where no proletariat in the real Marxist sense existed.”<sup>73</sup> Women were at the core of the patriarchal family, and if they were mobilised to revolt against it, they could destroy not only the form of the family, but the entire community. A rebellion by indigenous women would deliver a resounding blow to Central Asian traditional society and provide a victory for Soviet rule.

To begin with, local Party members were instructed that their wives and other family members were to take part in public unveiling events on 8 March 1927.<sup>74</sup> Northrop argues that “Party optimists dared to hope that they would complete the liberation of Central Asian women very quickly” and the practice of veiling would be eliminated by the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution that October.<sup>75</sup> It was expected decisively to tip the balance of forces toward the Soviet regime.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> 1927 a reported 10,000 women gathered at demonstrations in cities throughout Uzbekistan to burn their veils. This figure was reported to have increased to 70,000 by the end of April, and by May the official count for Uzbekistan was 90,000 unveiled women.<sup>76</sup> However, the triumph expressed at this apparent success was short-lived. Almost immediately the vast majority of women retreated back under the veil as they found themselves the target of a major societal backlash.<sup>77</sup> It became apparent that the tactic had backfired. The Sredazburo had seriously miscalculated the balance of forces and the hostility to

---

<sup>72</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 216

<sup>73</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. xxiii

<sup>74</sup> D. Northrop, ‘Languages of Loyalty: Gender Politics and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan 1927-41’ in *Russian Review* Vol 59 No. 2 (April 2000), pp 179-200

<sup>75</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pp.82-83

<sup>76</sup> G. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 245

<sup>77</sup> S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca*, pg. 116

unveiling, particularly from local Party members.<sup>78</sup> Male communists were just as perturbed by clerical warnings of the divine retribution which would be unleashed on society because of their shameful actions in unveiling their wives.<sup>79</sup> Declaring the Hujum to be “a harbinger of the end of the world”, Mullahs directed men to prevent any further unveiling by their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. Zhenotdel activists were condemned as prostitutes who wanted to lead innocent Muslim women down that path to debauchery. Women who did unveil in defiance of their family were ostracised, attacked and even became victims of ‘honour killings’.<sup>80</sup> Estimates of those murdered between 1927 and 1929 range from hundreds to tens of thousands.<sup>81</sup> Uzbek women who unveiled have been described as been “caught most squarely in the middle of this struggle, and it was they who bore the brunt of social pressure.”<sup>82</sup> Many women disappeared completely from public life rather than face the danger of attack and ridicule.<sup>83</sup> It has been described as “a firestorm of violence against women”; a fury which lasted several years and cost hundreds even thousands of lives.<sup>84</sup> This turn of events also seriously damaged the advances that had been made by the Zhenotdel in involving women in clubs and cooperatives before 1927.<sup>85</sup>

Northrop reports that from the beginning men were encouraged to unveil their female relatives, rather than allow women to make that choice themselves. If the man was a Communist Party member he was ordered to do so. This led to circumstances where “husbands threatened divorce (which could leave a woman penniless living in the street), others used beatings, and others ripped Paranjis off by force, provoking shrieks, tears, and sometimes injuries.”<sup>86</sup> Women had no agency and Massell argues that the Party leadership turned a blind eye to the bullying of veiled women. There were reports of paranjis being pulled from women’s heads in meetings, of women being surrounded by armed soviet militia

---

<sup>78</sup> G. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 249 for a summary of the conflict inducing policy which he believes lay behind the Hujum

<sup>79</sup> D. Northrop, ‘Languages of Loyalty’, pp.181-182

<sup>80</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 92

<sup>81</sup> G. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, pp. 281-284; D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pp. 93-95 for discussion of the backlash against the Hujum

<sup>82</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 95

<sup>83</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 94

<sup>84</sup> S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia* (Praeger Press 2001), pg. 116

<sup>85</sup> See chapter 4 of this thesis

<sup>86</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 215

and ordered to unveil, of being held in groups and forced to unveil.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, a rather imperialist mind-set has been said to exist among Soviet officials toward unveiled women who asked for alternative clothing. For an Uzbek woman with no access to European clothing, going out without a paranji and chachvon (which covered the face), meant going out in underdresses which were the

...sociocultural equivalents of a Russian woman's brassiere, panties and slip." European clothing was promised but not provided. Instead women were told to forget about their vanity or social discomfort and go out in their underdresses."<sup>88</sup>

Marianne Kamp describes how unveiled women were very susceptible to ridicule and attack when appearing in public without the paranji.<sup>89</sup> Northrop points to the almost complete lack of support for unveiled women, who were ostracised by their communities because of their involvement.<sup>90</sup>

Previous studies provide fascinating insights into a regime which was prepared to cynically manipulate women as part of its clampdown on indigenous society. Shoshanna Keller's research deals with the targeting by the CPSU of the Islamic clergy and its enduring sway over the population. She believes that the elimination of organised religion in Central Asia was the central motivation of the Central Committee in 1926 and went hand in hand with the development of militant atheism in that period.<sup>91</sup> Adrienne Lynn Edgar has pointed to Soviet disquiet about its vulnerability to foreign threats because of the existence of a largely devout and 'untrustworthy' Muslim population on its border. It also feared that Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan might overtake the Soviet project in their secularising campaigns and it would suffer a serious diminution in status.<sup>92</sup> It may well be in fact that all of these factors played a part in this crusade to transform indigenous women overnight into "true modern Soviet citizens."<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 176-178

<sup>88</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 133

<sup>89</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg.169

<sup>90</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*

<sup>91</sup> S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca*

<sup>92</sup> L. A. Edgar, 'Bolshevism Patriarchy and the Nation: The Soviet 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective' in *Slavic Review* Vol 65 No 2 (Summer 2006), pp 252-272

<sup>93</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 19

In his and Massell's view the Zhenotdel was either a willing collaborator or a compliant servant of the Party. As I have shown in chapter one, other studies of the Bureau have shown that it did not fit into either of these categories. There is no reason to suppose that the conflicts which dominated its relationship with the Party in European parts of the Soviet Union would be any less germane to Central Asia. In my analysis, therefore, the role played by the Zhenotdel in the Hujum and any other aspect of similar Soviet activity in Central Asia needs to be understood by scrutinising the debates within the Zhenotdel itself, rather than simply assuming its collaboration with Party policies - a Party with which it was often in conflict.<sup>94</sup>

## 2.4 The Zhenotdel and the Hujum

While Northrop acknowledges that the impetus behind the Hujum did not come from local Zhenotdel members but from "high in the Bolshevik hierarchy", he believes that the majority of Zhenotdel members, acting as the troops on the ground, were very supportive of the unveiling campaign.<sup>95</sup> He also acknowledges that they did not abandon existing club and cooperative work for the Hujum.<sup>96</sup> However existing projects would be very difficult to maintain in the course of such a major assault on indigenous society and on women's autonomy. Zhenotdel activists who worked in clubs and co-operatives in the Uzbek region would have been well aware of the potential problems. It is interesting to note that Gregory Massell has claimed that the Central Committee's resolution to call for "an 'intensification' of the struggles against the residues of feudal-patriarchal attitudes towards women" was taken following a report given by Liubimova to it in 1926.<sup>97</sup> His suggestion was that she was supportive of this decision. Shoshanna Keller supports this analysis and contends that the report given by Liubimova to the Executive Committee of the Soviets in Moscow where she gave a report "on Party work concerning the liberation of women of Central Asia, which provided

---

<sup>94</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba & the Comrade: Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997) for a discussion of the derogatory manner the Zhenotdel was treated and also see Chapter one of this thesis

<sup>95</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 82-90

<sup>96</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pg. 83

<sup>97</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 226-227

the basis for the launch of the Hujum, in which “Liubimova and her deputies organised large demonstrations against the veil.”<sup>98</sup>

While it was undoubtedly the case the Liubimova gave a very strongly worded report about the depth of oppression that she believed existed for Central Asian women, the implication that she both called for and led the Hujum conflicts with both reports from Marianne Kamp and my own research. Kamp writes that when Zhenotdel leaders first discussed the Hujum at a meeting in Moscow in June 1926, Serafima Liubimova, then Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel voiced her strong opposition to unveiling. She argued it could ‘play into the hands of the basmachis [peasant anti Soviet insurgents]’.<sup>99</sup> Her reference to the Basmachi, who had been the peasant insurgent fighters of the Civil War, shows that she thought unveiling would produce a bloody conflict. It also does not tie in with the fact that Liubimova was removed from her position as head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel in late 1926. If Liubimova was a genuine supporter of the Hujum she surely would have remained in position, especially as she had hitherto been the driving force behind the Zhenotdel’s work in Central Asia and the most experienced leader in the region.<sup>100</sup> Liubimova’s removal from her post in late 1926 actually indicates the marginalisation of opposition to the Hujum.<sup>101</sup> At later regional meetings to promote the new turn, including the event “where Zelenskii announced the Hujum, as well as the follow-up meetings there was disagreement about unveiling within the Women’s Division.”<sup>102</sup> Some of the activists, who Liubimova had led, remained unhappy about the campaign that they were being ordered to lead. They may have been concerned about the impact of a backlash on existing work with indigenous women. *Kommunistka* reports from 1927 which I consider later in this thesis reflect a belief among a layer of activists that unveiling was premature.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> S. Keller, ‘Trapped between state and society: women’s liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941’ in *Journal of Women’s History* Vol. 10.1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 20-36 pg 20-21

<sup>99</sup> S. Liubimova, *Teoriia i praktika rabota Partii sredi zhenshchin*, Tashkent/Moscow: Turkpechat 1926 pg.35 cited in M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan*, pg. 164

<sup>100</sup> Chapters three-six will show Liubimova’s prominent role in Central Asia prior to 1927

<sup>101</sup> As well as being head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel Liubimova had written pamphlets on work in Uzbekistan – see chapter three of this thesis

<sup>102</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 164

<sup>103</sup> See chapter three and six of this thesis

However, despite the expression of disquiet from the Central Asian Zhenotdel, the Hujum Commission pressed on with the launch of the campaign. Anna Nukrat appears to have replaced Liubimova as Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel. Nukrat became the dominant voice from then up until the Zhenotdel's closure in March 1930. Zinaida Prishchepchik was reportedly appointed by Moscow to take over leadership of the Uzbek Zhenotdel.<sup>104</sup> Prishchepchik was one of only two women appointed to the seven member Hujum Commission, the other being Tojixon Shodieva, an Uzbek woman editor of *Yangi Yo'l*.<sup>105</sup>

The work of the Zhenotdel suffered very serious setbacks in 1927, particularly in the latter part of the year. In the midst of the communal violence which ensued in the aftermath of the mass unveilings, indigenous women were either forbidden from leaving the home or were terrified to do so. Fear of association with the Zhenotdel resulted in a dwindling of numbers at its events.<sup>106</sup> Zhenotdel members faced harassment, including even from male Communist Party members. Kamp describes how in the area of Shahrison, the Zhenotdel director who persuaded eighteen women to unveil was herself murdered the following week. When questioned about the murder by a news reporter, Party members replied "that all unveiled women were prostitutes and that respectable women would not unveil". Clearly fearing for their own lives, all eighteen women revealed.<sup>107</sup> My research confirms that Zhenotdel activists reported incidents of forcible unveiling by Soviet officials, a cause of concern even for supporters of the Hujum.<sup>108</sup>

It is important to analyse the fallout *within* the Zhenotdel following the Hujum campaign, something that has received less attention in the scholarship. The period immediately following the Hujum saw wide-ranging discussions among Zhenotdel members. Massell drew heavily on articles from *Kommunistka* in setting out what he described as a period of "re-assessment and retrenchment" which followed the Hujum's failure.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, in doing so, he did not make a distinction between the comments of Zhenotdel members and those of prominent

---

<sup>104</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 164-165

<sup>105</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 165

<sup>106</sup> I provide further information on the impact of the Hujum on clubs and co-operatives in chapter 3 and 4

<sup>107</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg.194

<sup>108</sup> See chapter 3 of this thesis

<sup>109</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 322



male Party members. He also did not perceive of the debate in *Kommunistka* in 1928 as being in its nature different from discussions within the Sredazburo and Central Committee. Massell's belief that there was a strong united Communist Party led him to see the Zhenotdel as its frontline defenders, as "one of the prime component parts of the Central Committee Secretariat, [which] had been assigned a crucial role in initiating and supervising all aspects of the campaign." Furthermore he believed that the Zhenotdel "played (or tried to play) this role vigorously at all levels of command."<sup>110</sup> The Zhenotdel was intrinsic to a "highly developed, radical, determined authoritarian" force which was engaged in a well-orchestrated war with the indigenous people of Uzbekistan."<sup>111</sup>

This incorrect interpretation led Massell to misunderstand the context of Krupskaya's speech to the All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in December 1928. Krupskaya set out her opposition to the Hujum in quite unambiguous terms in that speech. Massell specifically points to her condemnation of attempts to "impose a dead level" on Central Asian society.<sup>112</sup> He makes clear this speech was very significant - and very brave in a period where all opposition to the Central Committee was dangerous. However, he does not recognise that it was no coincidence that this speech was at a Zhenotdel meeting in a discussion on its work in the Soviet East. In fact, Zhenotdel members had been engaged in a discussion which had been highly critical of the Party throughout 1928.<sup>113</sup> Krupskaya was editor of *Kommunistka* and had played a lead in promoting that debate, as I will show in chapters 3 and 6 below. Massell's belief that *Kommunistka* was the mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Communist Party led him to view its contributors as simply dutiful Party activists. This means that his analysis, while providing extremely important insights into the policy of the Party leadership, misses out on the many contradictions between views expressed in the journal and that policy. Also his and Northrop's failure to see the contradiction between the Zhenotdel's activity before 1927 and the demands of the Hujum mean that its earlier work is not given proper consideration in defining the Bureau's relationship to the Party leadership.

---

<sup>110</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 355

<sup>111</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. XX

<sup>112</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp 361-367

<sup>113</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp 361-367

## 2.5 Interaction with Indigenous Women

Another critical aspect of this debate which is absent in the analyses of Massell and Northrop is the role played by indigenous women within the Central Asian Zhenotdel. Kamp's research shows that this section of indigenous women exerted an important influence on the Central Asian Zhenotdel. Moreover, that many of the Zhenotdel's policies on the law, education and economic initiatives resonated with the vision of modernisation held by this layer of indigenous women.

According to Kamp's research into Uzbek language materials from the time, including the Zhenotdel journal *Yangi Yo'l*, and her interviews with women who had taken part in the unveiling demonstrations, the project to modernise Uzbek society was not simply a top down experience.<sup>114</sup> Although there was force exerted by the Soviet authorities, the indigenous women who became involved in activity in the 1920s already aspired to a very different life to that of their mothers. Kamp claims that the majority of these women were from the modernist Jadid wing of Islam and joined the Zhenotdel because they believed that their vision of change could be achieved within its programme.

As discussed above, Jadidism was a movement of young intellectuals which had developed under the influence of Tatar Muslims. Its supporters stood for a radical reform of the clergy, modern scientific education, the introduction of civic institutions and the education of women.<sup>115</sup> Its leading members were most important for introducing 'new method' schools, where literacy, science and modern history replaced the memorisation and recitation of religious texts.<sup>116</sup> Despite differences with some aspects of Soviet national policies, most Jadids are reported to have supported the Soviet project until the latter part of the 1920s.<sup>117</sup> Many Jadids joined the Communist Party after 1917.<sup>118</sup> They were part of a literate and predominantly urban group, small in number but enormously influential,

---

<sup>114</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. ix-x

<sup>115</sup> A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, pg. 89-93 for a description of the movement

<sup>116</sup> A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, chapter 5 for a discussion on the importance of education

<sup>117</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp 58-75 for a description of Jadid involvement in creating the Uzbek SSR

<sup>118</sup> A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, pp.89-93

particularly as they were the section of society which joined the Soviet project and sought to shape it according to their agenda. For many Jadids it was a convergence of modernist projects.<sup>119</sup> Events such as the Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920 saw calls for democracy which were bound to resonate with Jadid hopes for national autonomy.<sup>120</sup> Marianne Kamp describes how many indigenous women who joined the Zhenotdel were educated in Jadid schools or by Otins (women home tutors).<sup>121</sup> These women were part of a literate progressive and predominantly urban group, small in number but enormously influential. It was common for a Communist Party member to describe him or herself as both Muslim and Communist. Leading Jadids such as Mirsaid Sultan Galiev and Abdalrauf Fitrat became prominent members and writers.

Similarly to their male counterparts, Jadid women believed that the post-revolutionary conditions gave them a unique opportunity to articulate “their own identities” within the boundaries of the Soviet project. In doing so they used “veiling and unveiling as well as many other strategies to define what being Uzbek would mean.”<sup>122</sup> These women, although only a couple of hundred in number, were educated and determined. Many of those who joined the Zhenotdel were educated in Jadid schools or by otins (women home tutors).<sup>123</sup> Kamp argues that “the ideas for changing women’s roles that most profoundly shaped Uzbek activists, whether men or women, expressed continuity with Jadid thought far more than a deep reflection of Bolshevik agendas.”<sup>124</sup> They believed that they were putting their own mark on society. Thus she sees incidents such as the unveiling of Uzbek women at the Communist International Women’s Conference in Moscow in 1921 as part of a journey of self-liberation for these women. It was “a pilgrimage of transformation” for women who believed themselves to be at the heart of shaping society on their own terms, and not as servants in the cause of Russian women.<sup>125</sup> Just as male Jadid members immersed themselves in the

---

<sup>119</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 32-52 for a discussion of this process

<sup>120</sup> J. Riddell, *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920-First Congress of the Peoples of the East*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1993

<sup>121</sup> Marianne Kamp ‘The New Woman in Uzbekistan’ *ibid* pg. 76-83

<sup>122</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 14

<sup>123</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 76-83

<sup>124</sup> M. Kamp, *New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 32

<sup>125</sup> M. Kamp, ‘Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol 34 No 2 Special Issue Nationalism & the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East & Central Asia (May 2002), pp 263-278

National Delimitation programme, in an attempt to achieve their goal of building a modern Muslim nation, so too did female Jadid members enter into activity around their own vision, of forging a population of educated independent Muslim women. This vision included the view that veiling was a relic of the past, unsuitable in a modern Muslim nation. Tatar women, who had been at the forefront of the spread of Jadid ideas to Uzbek women, were unveiled and far more educated than others in that part of the world. These women provided an example of how indigenous women could progress, while retaining their identity as Muslim women.<sup>126</sup>

By 1927, the participation of indigenous women in the Zhenotdel, according to Marianne Kamp, had increased significantly.<sup>127</sup> This would have coincided with the increased involvement of Jadid intellectuals in Soviet institutions at that time, as part of the formation of Uzbek state bodies as part of national delimitation. Also, this increased participation was assisted by the launch by the Zhenotdel of a programme to recruit indigenous women and train them as organisers.<sup>128</sup> Other methods of work were introduced that year, including the setting up of women only shops in Uzbekistan, described in *Kommunistka* as the most successful initiative of the Zhenotdel in the region.<sup>129</sup> Also, an Uzbek language women's journal, *Yangi Yo'l*, was established by the Uzbek Zhenotdel in 1925, promoting the involvement of indigenous women in co-operatives, clubs, education and provision of childcare. Kamp states that this journal presented the Zhenotdel as "a positive progressive organisation and directed its criticism toward other Party organisations for providing inadequate support and toward all enemies of progress for women."<sup>130</sup> *Yangi Yo'l* was clearly a vital means of communication with the indigenous female population and gave the Zhenotdel a major advantage in its strategy in the region. *Yangi Yo'l's* editorial board is reported by Kamp as originating largely from within the Jadid intelligentsia.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 35-36

<sup>127</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 35-36

<sup>128</sup> See chapter 4 of this thesis

<sup>129</sup> See chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>130</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 99.

<sup>131</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 99.

The Zhenotdel attracted thousands of native women to its meetings and clubs, and to taking part in its work in shops and cooperatives. Many of those women were no doubt attracted by the fact that the leadership of the Uzbek Zhenotdel included Tatar and Uzbek women and also that a growing number of local Russian women who spoke the native language were involved.<sup>132</sup> An Uzbek woman, Tojixon Shodieva, editor of *Yangi Yo'l* was promoted to the local Communist Party leadership in 1925 and made a member of the Hujum Commission in late 1926. In common with a significant number of young Uzbek women she believed that she had a vested interest in promoting unveiling in order to bring about her modernist ideals.<sup>133</sup> Shodieva's role on the Hujum Commission and as editor of *Yangi Yo'l* was undoubtedly a crucial factor in events which followed.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> 1927, reportedly thousands of “tempestuous female demonstrations” took place in Uzbek cities.<sup>134</sup> There were dramatic accounts of women throwing off and burning their paranjis at official launches, described as “the first great marches of female crowds in public.”<sup>135</sup> Rahbar-oi Olimova, one of the women activists who formed part of Kamp's study, recounted her role in the demonstration in Tashkent where she made a speech declaring an “end to slavery, an end to the paranji, long live freedom”. Throwing her paranji on a fire, she declared her commitment to Uzbek President Yo'ldosh Oxunboboev.<sup>136</sup> Kamp argues that the surge in support provides evidence that an audience for unveiling existed among a section of young Uzbek women who wanted liberation from their traditional roles. These protests were accompanied by a significant upturn in the number of young indigenous women participating in Soviet organisations in this period.<sup>137</sup> The Hujum presented not only an opportunity to unveil, but also to link unveiling with their ideals of freedom. It was therefore not simply the case, as Massell argues, that unveiling was entirely coerced. He is correct that the “entire male aktiv of the Uzbek apparatus and their wives and other female relatives were ordered to appear at special convocations to mark Soviet Woman's Day.”<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 98.

<sup>133</sup> M. Kamp, 'Pilgrimage and Performance', pg. 269

<sup>134</sup> G. Massell, *Surrogate Proletariat*, pg.241

<sup>135</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 262

<sup>136</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 158

<sup>137</sup> M. Kamp, 'Three lives of Saodat: Communist, Uzbek, Survivor' in *The Oral History Review* Vol. 28 No. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2001) for a description of the experiences of one such indigenous woman

<sup>138</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg 241

However, alongside coercion, many women were also led to the demonstrations by indigenous Zhenotdel activists. At the core of this group were indigenous female Party members, who represented approximately 200 out of a total indigenous membership of 25,000.<sup>139</sup> Marianne Kamp argues that, despite their small number, these women played a highly significant role. Their participation showed that the transformation project was greeted with enthusiasm and commitment by Uzbek women intellectuals.<sup>140</sup> The Uzbek President, Yo'ldosh Oxunboboev, Party secretary Akmal Ikramov and Uzbek Soviet leader, Faizulla Xo'jaev of the Hujum commission also attended some of the demonstrations.<sup>141</sup> Thus these events can be seen also in the context of a nation building exercise.

In the debates which followed the Hujum, both Russian and Uzbek Zhenotdel members called for a state ban on the veil. Serafima Liubimova was one prominent advocate of such a ban. She believed that it would provide the protection of the Soviet state for indigenous women. It would give women “an argument to convince their husbands, who wanted them to maintain social standards, and Islamic clergy who claimed that women would go to hell for unveiling.”<sup>142</sup> Kamp suggests that Liubimova showed a great deal of insight into indigenous protocols by arguing that “a decree would make unveiling significantly easier for women who might want to unveil.”<sup>143</sup> She argues that indigenous women felt that they had formal permission to unveil with the benefit of a state decree. Kamp describes how *Yangi Yo'l* conducted a tenacious campaign for a decree until 1929, with various marches organised in support. It was finally evident that the Uzbek state would not be permitted to pass any such decree. Under the leadership of Stalin, the Third Congress of Soviets in April 1929 made it clear that there would be no legal prohibition on the veil.<sup>144</sup>

## 2.6 The Zhenotdel relationship with Party and State in Central Asia

---

<sup>139</sup> D. Northrop, 'Languages of Loyalty', pg. 183

<sup>140</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 97

<sup>141</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 164

<sup>142</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg.207

<sup>143</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 207-208

<sup>144</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 211

While expressing opposition to mass public unveiling, Liubimova had no such difficulty with direct legal intervention against indigenous family practices. Both Massell and Northrop have made important points in their studies on legalistic attitudes within the Zhenotdel. I examine in detail how this tendency was expressed in *Kommunistka* in chapter five of this thesis.<sup>145</sup> For the moment, I consider points which have been made in the secondary literature about the Zhenotdel's orientation toward state-led transformation.

Up until 1923 Central Asia continued to reflect the dominance of the patriarchal family through Sharia and Adat legal codes and practices.<sup>146</sup> Initially the Zhenotdel represented women in Sharia and Adat (customary) courts as well as the newly formed Soviet People's courts.<sup>147</sup> There was a significant shift in this situation in 1924 with National Delimitation. This process included the drafting of Soviet legislation for the new republics. Under Liubimova's leadership, the Zhenotdel lobbied for existing Soviet law to be adapted to conditions in Central Asia and specifically to ban practices such as polygyny, kalym, under-age marriage and abduction of women, the latter being a practice in nomadic regions. She also fought for the right of indigenous women to obtain divorces and live independently. In 1926 the Sharia and Adat courts were abolished completely by the Uzbek government.<sup>148</sup> In the same year the Uzbek Criminal Code banned kalym and polygamy. Northrop argues that the criminalisation of indigenous practices was a major act of oppression. Furthermore, he suggests that some Zhenotdel members were "willing to employ coercion, duress, even, if necessary violence in pursuit of the overarching goal of women's liberation, without being unduly slowed by attention to legal niceties."<sup>149</sup> Yet, while it was undoubtedly repressive to utilise criminal law to deal with established norms, the Zhenotdel, at least up to 1926 had not advocated jailing or other punitive measures against indigenous men. Instead, as my thesis argues, law was seen as providing a model of social behaviour which could be enforced through the People's Courts.

---

<sup>145</sup> In chapter five I show how this strategy was introduced by Liubimova in 1923

<sup>146</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp. 101-102 for women's status

<sup>147</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 138-139 and chapter 5 of this thesis

<sup>148</sup> S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca*, pp. 81-85

<sup>149</sup> D. Northrop, *The Veiled Empire*, pg. 247

Thus, the continued practice of polygyny, kalym and child-marriage among native Communist Party members was perceived by Zhenotdel activists as a major obstacle to winning over the general population. My research reveals persistent attempts by the Central Asian Zhenotdel to win support from the Party leadership in addressing this question. But, reflecting the problems already described in chapter one, Zhenotdel demands were largely ignored or dismissed. Activists experienced great difficulty making progress in the face of opposition from, it appears, virtually all male Party members.<sup>150</sup> The deeply gendered nature of that society exacerbated its isolation, as the Zhenotdel was initially very dependent on male comrades to convince indigenous men of the importance of women's rights. On some occasions - as will be seen - Party members were described as far worse than other workers.<sup>151</sup>

The fundamental problem was that the Zhenotdel was demanding intervention from a state that had become extremely authoritarian, and whose real socio-cultural impact on the population had been exposed as limited. Its demands were either ignored, or used as a justification for an attack on indigenous society and a major purge of Communist Party members. Northrop describes how the local Communist leadership conducted loyalty tests based on how the indigenous membership lived. Those who refused to comply were considered enemies and criminally prosecuted or expelled. The Central Committee deemed "supposed misdeeds such as polygyny, underage marriage and the payment of bride-price" as "incompatible with party or Soviet membership, and taken to reveal an 'anti-Soviet' character."<sup>152</sup> At the same time official attitudes towards moderate and even secular Muslims changed very radically during 1926. Determined to deal with the question of religion in an ever more confrontational way, the Central Committee held a conference on anti-religious policy that year, out of which emerged the League of the Militant Godless. This was an organisation with an agenda to aggressively destroy all manifestations of religion and to promote atheism throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>153</sup> Along with this call to battle, came the criminalisation of Islamic traditional practices such as kalym and child marriage

---

<sup>150</sup> See chapter 3 of this thesis

<sup>151</sup> See chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis

<sup>152</sup> D. Northrop, 'Languages of Loyalty', pg.181

<sup>153</sup> D. Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Cornwell University Press 1998), chapter 6 for a discussion of the relationship of the League to Bolshevik political culture



together with a purge of those Party members who continued to practice these traditions.<sup>154</sup> The Hujum, therefore, converged with a general attack on religious practices throughout the Soviet Union. The focus of the Central Committee was on Islam in Central Asia and on the Russian Orthodox Church in European parts of the Soviet Union. The deep roots of religion within Soviet society were perceived as a major threat to the revolution from above in the form of the Five Year Plan.<sup>155</sup> All critical voices or autonomous forces were to be quelled and the Party made into an atheist combative fighting force, with no room for discussion or questions about the way forward. The Zhenotdel, with its culture of debate and tendencies towards autonomy, became a victim of this authoritarian clampdown.

## 2.7 The Zhenotdel leadership in Soviet Central Asia

As discussed previously, those who formed the core of the Russian speaking leadership in Central Asia did not come from the region itself. Serafima Liubimova, the most prominent figure until 1927, was 25 when she arrived in Tashkent in 1923. The daughter of a state functionary, Liubimova was born in Saransk in the Mordovia region of Russia. She had joined the Communist Party in 1919, and became a journalist and Zhenotdel organiser, attending lectures given by Kollontai in Sverdlov Communist University in 1921, and working in the national office under Kollontai's leadership in 1922. I have already referred in chapter one to the strong impression made on Liubimova by Kollontai and will deal later in the thesis with the manifestation of that influence in the policies she adopted as Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, a post she held from September 1923 to November 1926.<sup>156</sup> Following her removal from the leadership of the Central Asian Zhenotdel in 1926, Liubimova was relocated to the Eastern section. In late 1928 she was again moved to Kaluga in Russia and then to Moscow in 1929, where she worked in various relatively minor positions in the Moscow Soviet administration until her retirement.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> D. Northrop, 'Subversion & Resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law' in *Slavic Review*, Vol 60 No. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 115-139

<sup>155</sup> D. Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, chapter 6

<sup>156</sup> See pg. 30 paragraph 2

<sup>157</sup> Spravochik po istorii Kommunisticheskoi Partii i Sovetskogo Soiuz 1898-1991 Moskve <http://www.knowbysight.info/LLL/13691.asp>; S.D Garhiuk, *Moskovskaia Vlast': Sovetskie organy upravleniia. Mart 1917- Oktiabr' 1993: Spravhogo Moskve, Glavnogo arkhivhogo upravleniia ropoda Moskvv 2011*

The woman who took over effective leadership from Liubimova in 1927 fitted a similar profile to her predecessor except in terms of ethnicity. Antonina Nukhrat was of Chuvash Turkic origin and was from the Bashkiria region of Russia, where her father was an Orthodox Church sexton. Nukhrat had initially worked as a teacher and joined the Communist Party in 1920. She became active in the Chuvash Zhenotdel and was then moved to the Central Zhenotdel in Moscow. From here she was sent to Central Asia when she was 26, with special responsibility to report directly to the Communist Party Central Committee. She remained in position in the region until 1930 with the closure of the Zhenotdel. She then went on to become the deputy editor of a journal, *Revoliutsiia i Natsional'nosti*. Nukhrat was arrested in 1938 in the political purges orchestrated by Stalin, but survived the gulags and was released in 1945.<sup>158</sup>

The third principal figure in the Russian speaking Central Asian Zhenotdel was Zinaida Prishchepchik. Prishchepchik was born in Minsk, in the Belarus region of the Empire, in 1899. She joined the Communist Party in 1917 and, like Liubimova, attended lectures at Sverdlov Communist University in 1921. She worked in various Party positions in Moscow and Viatskoi and was sent to Uzbekistan in 1925 to become the Head of the Uzbek Zhenotdel. Like Nukhrat, she remained in position until the closure of the Zhenotdel in March 1930. From then she continued to be dispatched to various district committees, and in 1937 was the secretary of the Yegorvevsk district of the Moscow region. Prishchepchik also fell victim to Stalin's purges and was arrested in 1937 and charged with involvement in anti-Soviet terrorist activities. Prishchepchik was convicted and executed on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1937.<sup>159</sup>

These women were talented and ambitious activists. Like their sisters in Russia, they appear to have worked tirelessly to create momentum around the Zhenotdel's programme in Central Asia. They dedicated their lives to the Zhenotdel and must have been deeply disappointed to see it closed down in 1930.

---

<sup>158</sup> E. Zaitseva, 'v Bashkortostane Chtiat predstavitelei Chuvashskogo naroda' in Sovetskaia Chuvash (finish reference)

<sup>159</sup> Bd 'Zhertvy politicheskogo terror v USSR' Moskva rasstrel'nye spiske Donskoi Krematorii

Little did Nukhrat and Prischepchik know that an even worse fate awaited them in the decade to come.

## 2.8 Conclusion

In 1930 the Zhenotdel was closed down on the basis that Soviet women had achieved their emancipation and any further struggles for women's rights were required to be conducted by the Party as a whole. Anna Artiukhina, the Zhenotdel Director at the time, was given no choice except to state that her commitment to the struggle for women's equality would go on in other forms. A form of women's organisation was permitted to continue in Central Asia, due to the special conditions which were described as continuing to exist there. But these 'Zhensektory', as they were called, were simply technical units of the Party, possessing no room to develop their own policies.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, I argue that, from 1929, all semblance of autonomy is missing from discussions within *Kommunistka*.<sup>161</sup> Under Nukrat's leadership in Central Asia, Zhenotdel activists were told that the only option was to concentrate on obtaining the best possible results for the Five Year Plan. They were required to promote the unveiling of women as a precondition for their transmission into the industrial plants and collective farms.

In the context of Stalinist collectivisation of the 1930s, women found themselves without an organised voice. There were no advocates for women, who were forced to work long hours in the most demeaning and dirty jobs, generally reserved for them. The entry of women on mass into the workforce was no liberating experience. They were ghettoised in the worst sections of production and agriculture - not unlike how the working women of pre-revolutionary Russia had been forced to work in the abysmal conditions of the textile factories.<sup>162</sup> It must have seemed to some that little had changed. Women were declared as equal but in reality they had to shoulder a double burden of labour and enjoyed few rights. The banning of abortion and the 'Cult of Motherhood' introduced by Stalin were

---

<sup>160</sup> W. Z. Goldman, 'Industrial Politics', pp 46-77

<sup>161</sup> See chapter 3 of this thesis

<sup>162</sup> W. Z. Goldman, 'Babas at the Bench', pp. 71-78

indications of just how repressed women had become. Although over time the majority of Central Asian women unveiled, became educated and entered production, it appears that the process was dictated by the needs of Soviet industrialisation rather than by a deeper commitment to women's emancipation.<sup>163</sup>

The experience of the Zhenotdel in Central Asia reflected its programme in a way that was specific to that region. Isolated from local and Central Party structures from 1920 to 1926, its policy diverged very significantly from that of the Party leadership. Its incremental approach, and the commitment of activists, allowed it to survive and even to make slow progress in those early years. The work it carried out, largely on the basis of its own resources, from 1920 to 1927, was directed at the slow and patient drawing in of indigenous women into society. It was perceived as crucial for women-only initiatives to develop that the relationship of the Zhenotdel with wider society was a harmonious one. Indigenous women should not be put at any risk and the ability to go to a club or shop should fit in with everyday life. Activists believed that change would come about through the slow transmission of ideas into the family.

1925 marked a turning point in the fortunes of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, with the publication of an Uzbek language journal, *Yangi Yo'l* and the consequent involvement of many more indigenous women in its meetings, clubs and shops. This was the highpoint of Zhenotdel policy and showed that, with the direct involvement of a layer of indigenous women, a real connection could be made between the Zhenotdel and the indigenous female population. Central Asian women came with their own views, experiences and had an important impact on the Zhenotdel. This meant that the Zhenotdel could no longer be just described solely as a Russian organisation.

Another feature of this process was the strengthening in identification among indigenous women with the Soviet project. Their involvement in the Zhenotdel laid the basis for their recruitment to the Hujum. Thus, the participation of a layer of Uzbek women in the unveiling marches reflected a genuine impulse. An impulse which was manipulated by a Central Committee, intent on crushing local culture

---

<sup>163</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman*, pp. 218-228

and religion. Criticisms made by women, such as Liubimova, suggest that some Russian Zhenotdel leaders were fearful for their Central Asian sisters and believed that the Hujum would be a damaging experience. However, the co-option of Shodieva, editor of *Yangi Yo'l* onto the Hujum Commission sent an important signal out to those indigenous women who were seeking change. They undeniably believed that the mass unveiling marches would prompt a profound transformation in their lives. It was not afterwards that they saw that it had been a completely counter-productive exercise from the point of view of their own autonomy. The backlash against unveiled women and the closure of women-only initiatives created deep resentment and fear among those who have previously been confident and enthusiastic.

In 1926, for the first time, the Central Asian Zhenotdel became of some interest to the Central Committee and the Sredazburo. But this did not signal an enhancement in the Bureau's prestige. It was relegated the task of organising women to unveil, but provided with no economic or social investment to provide any practical assistance to unveiled women.<sup>164</sup> It was ordered to conduct a campaign designed to throw Central Asian society into upheaval; to assault the roots of that society and eliminate the hold of religion over it. In the meantime, its own projects were abandoned or closed down without its knowledge or agreement. The position of the Zhenotdel within the Party lay at the heart of the problem. As I have argued in chapter one, it was in a contradictory position from the outset. Despite its determination to be a strong voice for women, the Zhenotdel was ultimately under the firm control of the Central Committee. My research demonstrates that the struggle for indigenous women in Central Asia went on until 1929. It was only then that all critical voices were silenced.

Its attempt to combine semi-autonomous separate organisation for indigenous women with utilisation of the law as an instrument of change illustrated a profound contradiction at the heart of the Zhenotdel. This belief reflected a belief in the possibility of state-led radical change inherited from Alexandra Kollontai. In Central Asia it meant using the Soviet state as a weapon against customary family practices. Intolerance toward indigenous norms also led to complicity in a

---

<sup>164</sup> D. Northrop, *The Veiled Empire*, pp.129-136 for his discussion of lack of economic infrastructure and social support for unveiled women

mass purge of Party members in 1928 described by Northrop, and also reflected in my research.<sup>165</sup> In her speech to the Congress of Women of the East in December 1928, Krupskaya not only railed against those “who want to impose a dead level on society” but she also criticised Zhenotdel members who believed that the law could be an instrument of change without the support of the population and the necessary social and economic measures to make it a reality.<sup>166</sup> She warned that attempts to confront the population in this way would only lead to defeat for the Zhenotdel and suffering for indigenous women. Her views harked back to an earlier debate between Lenin and Kollontai on the risks of upsetting traditional culture in a quest for institutional revolution.<sup>167</sup>

My detailed review of the secondary literature clearly demonstrates that the Zhenotdel cannot easily be described as a loyal servant of the dictates of the Central Committee. Ultimately, as Hayden has remarked, the conflict between the needs of the Party and those of women resulted in women losing out. Yet the struggle for the Zhenotdel’s programme to change the lives of indigenous women continued to be expressed in *Kommunistka* right up until 1929, when it became clear that no further debate was allowed. The Zhenotdel in Central Asia became the antithesis of what those who had founded the organisation had aspired to. Indigenous women came to be seen not in any sense as the agents of their own liberation, but as a tool of the Stalinist regime.

---

<sup>165</sup> See chapter 6 of this thesis

<sup>166</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 362

<sup>167</sup> See chapter 5 of this thesis

## Chapter Three

### The Zhenotdel Programme in Central Asia

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the main themes and arguments that emerge from *Kommunistka* on the Zhenotdel's programme for socio-cultural transformation in Central Asia. I begin by elaborating the views expressed by Alexandra Kollontai on pioneering new forms of the family under socialism. I then proceed to consider the views of Zhenotdel activists on the position of women in Central Asian society, the family forms and the strategies proposed to supersede this society. I will map the shifts in views and strategies in the context of the changing economic and political conditions of the Soviet Union, in order to consider how the Zhenotdel programme diverged from that of the Communist Party and how the Zhenotdel fought to carve out an autonomous space in ideological and programmatic terms.

#### 3.1 The Zhenotdel's views on the Family

As discussed in chapter one, the first leaders of the Zhenotdel subscribed to a strand of Marxism which originated in views expressed by Friedrich Engels and August Bebel on the family under communism. A central goal that flowed from their ideology was the involvement of women as equals in the workforce. Kollontai believed the transition of Russian women from the peasant homestead to the factory in pre-revolutionary times had stimulated a "radical change within family life."<sup>1</sup> Yet while women had gained more financial and social independence, they had struggled to cope with childcare, domestic labour and paid work - "a triple burden."<sup>2</sup> They had broken free of the confines of domestic life but not achieved

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Sem'ia i kommunizm', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>2</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Sem'ia i kommunizm', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

real equality. Such equality could only be won through the elimination of “commodity production and the institution of private property.”<sup>3</sup>

The coming to power of the Bolsheviks in October 1917 was seized on by Kollontai as an unprecedented opportunity to implement that vision. Now Russia could begin the transition to a society within which all “production of commodities will be socialised; it will become a production for and by society.”<sup>4</sup> In 1919 the newly formed Zhenotdel set out not only to facilitate women’s entry into the workplace, but also to provide them with communal childcare and domestic labour support to liberate them from these burdens. All tasks carried out previously by a woman within the domestic sphere would become the collective responsibility of society. By 1920, Kollontai claimed in *Kommunistka* that these initiatives were already taking effect and the conventional form of the family was being replaced with communal forms, including public canteens and laundries. Also childcare was being communalised as “the task of bringing up the children [was] passing more and more into the hands of the collective.”<sup>5</sup> Kollontai claimed that already the Soviet was providing “hospitals and health spas for sick children, restaurants, free lunches at school and free distribution of text books, warm clothing and shoes for schoolchildren.”<sup>6</sup> And alongside practical measures to liberate women from domestic drudgery, women could now easily bring an end to an unhappy marriage. Kollontai declared that Soviet society was so liberalised that divorce “by mutual agreement now takes no longer than a week or two to obtain.”<sup>7</sup> All of these innovative measures, along with the legal and economic equality of women, allowed the previous form of the family to be supplanted by “a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal members of communist society, both of them free, both of them independent and both of them workers.”<sup>8</sup>

Kollontai had only recently succeeded Armand as Director of the Zhenotdel when she wrote this article, and it should be interpreted as her charter for radical and

---

<sup>3</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sem’ia i kommunizm’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>4</sup> A. Bebel, *Women Under Socialism* (Schocken Books Incorporated 1971); F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (International Publishers 1975), pg. 16

<sup>5</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sem’ia i kommunizm’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>6</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sem’ia i kommunizm’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>7</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sem’ia i kommunizm’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>8</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sem’ia i kommunizm’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19



interventionist social change.<sup>9</sup> The article evinces points made by Richard Stites on the extremely challenging and pro-active nature of Kollontai's leadership.<sup>10</sup> Yet she was not willing to limit her project to these measures and contended that socialised forms of domestic labour and childcare would, on their own, be insufficient to facilitate the necessary revolution in the family. Addressing Zhenotdel activists in October 1920, Kollontai argued that "our job is to decide which aspects of our family system are outdated and to determine what relations between the men and women of the working and peasant classes and which rights and duties would best harmonise with the conditions of life in the new workers' Russia."<sup>11</sup> The Bureau would play a pioneering role in creating a society where in "place of the individual and egoistic family, a great universal family of workers will develop, in which all the workers, men and women, will above all be comrades."<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2 Attitudes to the Family in Central Asia

Kollontai's programme appears extremely ambitious, if not virtually impossible, in impoverished conditions of Civil War Russia, particularly given the vast swathes of the Soviet Union which were still dominated by peasant agriculture. And while Kollontai acknowledged that the peasant family diverged significantly from her idealised proletarian model, neither Kollontai nor any other Zhenotdel leader appear to have developed a theory of how a peasant woman could be liberated from her position within the family in the absence of even the limited economic and social opportunities which existed in urban Russia.

It is clear, however, that Kollontai saw the peasant family as even more repressive than the family under capitalism. And, in her view, the position of women within the Muslim population of the Soviet East was the most oppressed of all. She

---

<sup>9</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Indiana University Press 1979) where Clements discusses Kollontai's approach to social change.

<sup>10</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930*, (Princeton University Press 1990), pp. 332-334

<sup>11</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Sem'ia i kommunizm', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>12</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Posledniaia rabynia (k s'ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

declared in a further article in the same issue of *Kommunistka* that the woman of the East was “a mere chattel owned by her husband who until now has been her master under traditional law.”<sup>13</sup> The Eastern woman was burdened by domestic duties, childcare and farm-work while also providing income for the family through producing “handicraft work, spinning, silk-weaving, carpet making and embroidery.”<sup>14</sup> And central to this oppression was “the prohibition of female equality within Sharia law, and the strong influence of tradition and religion in everyday life.”<sup>15</sup> Kollontai directed her strongest criticism at the practice of seclusion, which she argued made a prisoner of a woman. She was forced to remain hidden “behind the stifling folds of the veil, behind the solid walls of the harem.”<sup>16</sup> This pejorative view of seclusion was echoed by other *Kommunistka* contributors, including a Putilovskaya who described the secluded woman as an “eternal slave...isolated from the world within the stuffy life of the harem, her face covered by the veil”, an “utterly dependent creature.”<sup>17</sup> Nomadic women of Central Asia were also considered to be profoundly repressed. Konkordiia Samoiloa, who was at the forefront of work in the East in 1920, claimed that in the vast nomadic regions women remained “to this day completely without rights.”<sup>18</sup>

These views persisted and in 1923 a comrade Kislova described nomadic Turkmen women as immeasurably more backward, subjugated and uneducated than the working woman of Russia.<sup>19</sup> She had hitherto been treated as less than human; a lowly creature who “receives less attention than her husband’s horse and lives in worse circumstances than that horse.”<sup>20</sup> This woman who “has no rights, no property and no control over any aspect of her life” needed strong guidance and leadership in order to learn to understand her own oppression.<sup>21</sup> Such views were certainly very crude and paternalistic. They exhibited a tendency to see family

---

<sup>13</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>14</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>15</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>16</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>17</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>18</sup> K. Samoiloa, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp.31-32

<sup>19</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela robotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>20</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela robotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>21</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela robotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

relations in very simplistic terms and a failure to appreciate the allegiance women would feel to their families and communities. As I have highlighted in previous chapters, the perception of women as backward was not unique to Central Asia. As shown by Elizabeth Wood, working and peasant women were seen as “more likely to be illiterate, superstitious, religious, and attached to older ways of doing things and to older kin relations” than men.<sup>22</sup> In Central Asia this backwardness had an additional dimension because of the lack of formal rights for women within existing family relations. Thus, Liubimova expressed her horror that “the custom of buying and selling a wife even extends to a widow being transferred along with other family possessions to the nearest relative” usually a brother or cousin of the deceased.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, from the commencement of Zhenotdel’s work in the East, its leaders saw indigenous women as prisoners of their own culture and community. *Kommunistka* writers displayed extreme disapproval family norms which they considered to be mere vestiges of a backward society that needed supersession. These views reflected their own prejudice toward indigenous life, betraying an insensitivity toward the deeply imbedded cultural forms within that society. Tineva described in 1924 how the aim of the Zhenotdel continued to be enable an indigenous woman “to raise her voice loudly in demanding freedom and equality.”<sup>24</sup> This terms on which equality and freedom were to be achieved shifted in line with the political and economic conditions in Central Asia and will be examined in the next section.

### 3.3 The Language of Transformation

Tracing the language of transformation within the journal over the decade of the Zhenotdel’s involvement in Central Asia aids a fuller understanding of the tensions in its programme. Initially Kollontai believed that indigenous women would be “awoken” from their slavery to liberation. In announcing a programme to bring about that awakening in November 1920, she stated that the Russian Revolution

---

<sup>22</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and The Comrade: Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997), pg. 15

<sup>23</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pis’ma iz Turkestana’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

<sup>24</sup> Tineva, ‘Vostok i 8 Marta’, *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924), pp. 48-49

would be taken to these women by the Zhenotdel and would “rouse the masses of the East in bright and brilliant numbers.”<sup>25</sup> It would bring them news of liberation from slavery:

[she], who has been a semi-human, treated like a household object, submissive and mute, a helpless drudge, is now summoned by the power of the working class, by the red banner of communism, called to equal work and equal property rights and to the gains of the revolution.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the struggle was one of consciousness-raising. Konkordiia Samoilova concurred with this approach. In her view indigenous women who were still mired within oppression and religious fanaticism needed to “be raised to an understanding of their own mission”, as “the revolutionary fighters for their own liberation.”<sup>27</sup>

The development of revolutionary consciousness would be facilitated by drawing women toward experiences of life outside the home. The creation of opportunities for work, social and political engagement and education outside the home would mean that “life itself will provide the impetus for their awakening.”<sup>28</sup> Effective methods had to be found to draw indigenous women toward the Zhenotdel, through cooperatives, “women’s schools, clubs and other forms of agitation” being “the best way to attract Eastern women to the struggle for communism.”<sup>29</sup> As a highly respected and popular leader, Samoilova’s demand that “the liberation of the women of the East must be the work of their own hands” would have carried considerable weight among activists.<sup>30</sup> In 1920, Samoilova argued that all education was to be targeted at enabling “the women of the East to come to an understanding of their own tasks.”<sup>31</sup> In 1921, Putilovskaya described “cultural education” for indigenous women as including basic literacy, professional skills training and an introduction to world affairs. The “Zhenotdel must educate [an

---

<sup>25</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s’ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>26</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s’ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>27</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp 31-32

<sup>28</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp 31-32

<sup>29</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp 31-32

<sup>30</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp 31-32

<sup>31</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp 31-32

indigenous woman] in the spirit of the common interests and goals which unite her with the international working class.”<sup>32</sup> She needed to be made aware of the world that lay outside the village and of her place in a global struggle for socialism. This promotion of internationalism accorded with a general view within the CPSU that the project was still going forward despite the hardships of the Civil War. This optimism was still apparent in 1922 with one activist announcing in January that the birth of a new woman” was in progress in the East.<sup>33</sup> Another report described nomadic women as ecstatic at “the news that the Soviet government cares about them and wants to create a new life for them, like all other working women.”<sup>34</sup> There was thus a belief that the women of Central Asia were part of a global project of liberation.

With the fading sense of revolutionary potential, however, Zhenotdel leaders began to accept that indigenous women were not about to flood into struggle. The initial buoyancy of 1920 gave way to frustration with the “accursed legacy of the Tsarist past, with poverty, illiteracy and economic backwardness.”<sup>35</sup> Instead of acting as a catalyst for indigenous women to escape their oppression, Zhenotdel activists now appeared to see themselves as their liberators. This shift in focus is reflected in claims that indigenous women needed to be rescued from “centuries of darkness and religious prejudices.”<sup>36</sup> They had to be “released from a life shrouded in religious fanaticism and an uncivilised culture” and directed toward Soviet organisations.<sup>37</sup> They were trapped within the patriarchal family and “vile conditions” of life which had led to “profound ignorance and religious prejudices” among indigenous women.<sup>38</sup> The clergy too were blamed for keeping women “hidden in the harem and wrapped in the veil.”<sup>39</sup> There was a subtle shift here, in that such statements suggest a belief that indigenous women had not managed to break out of their chains of bondage and needed their Russian sisters to emancipate them. This language illustrates a deeply negative attitude toward indigenous culture, in particular aspects of that culture that were perceived as

---

<sup>32</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>33</sup> Dryzhinina, ‘Probuzhdenie zhenshchiny vostoka’, 18 (1) (1922), pp.19-20

<sup>34</sup> RT, ‘O rabote sredi Kalmychek’, *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1922), pp. 36-37

<sup>35</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>36</sup> E. Ralli, ‘Zhenskie musul’ manskie kluby’, *Kommunistka*, 6-7 (1922), pp. 30-32

<sup>37</sup> RT, ‘O rabote sredi Kalmychek’, *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1922), pp. 36-37

<sup>38</sup> RT, ‘O rabote sredi Kalmychek’, *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1922), pp. 36-37

<sup>39</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

key obstacles to women's liberation - the patriarchal family and the clergy. The cities of Uzbekistan were the primary focus of the Zhenotdel's organisational initiatives, where many women were veiled and lived in seclusion. Yet nomadic women were also seen as very backward, with women from the Kirghiz, Turkmen and Kalmuck regions needing to be "freed" from a "profoundly uncivilised life."<sup>40</sup>

Yet in 1924 a definite optimism began to creep back into the language of *Kommunistka* writers. In June that year a comrade Tineva wrote of how "in the past the Eastern woman was a non-person but now she raises her voice and demands freedom and equality". The "slave of yesterday, today this woman speaks out against the powers that oppress her and breaks her ties with those men who do not agree to her demands for change."<sup>41</sup> There were reports of the "brave women who have taken action against their enslavement" and left their families to attend training courses organised by the Zhenotdel.<sup>42</sup> In February 1925 it was reported that indigenous women were becoming increasingly involved in Zhenotdel activities, with "peasant women in many villages enthusiastically attending meetings, discussions and readings."<sup>43</sup> In March 1925 Kasparova argued that "the first period of awakening of Eastern women is now complete."<sup>44</sup> By June 1926 Zavaryan was describing with pride the success of women only shops and clubs and the "drawing in of even broader sections of the female population."<sup>45</sup> She proclaimed that "yesterday's voiceless slaves are now striving for knowledge and an independent life."<sup>46</sup> These reports of greater participation of indigenous women confirms the trends described by Marianne Kamp and discussed in chapter two.

Despite the apparent breakthrough in recruiting indigenous women based on the twin strategy of broad education and practical training, a more instrumental approach emerged in 1927. Some writers, in particular Anna Nukhrat, who had

---

<sup>40</sup> RT, 'O rabote sredi Kalmychek', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1922), pp. 36-37

<sup>41</sup> M. Seifi, 'K trekhletnemu iubileiu komm. universitetu trudiashchikhsia vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924), pp.46

<sup>42</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Kursy volostnykh organizatorov', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pg. 49

<sup>43</sup> G. Semenova, 'Soveshchanie sekretarei iacheek i organizatorov v zhenshchin v Samarskom uezde', *Kommunistka* 2 (1925), pg.61

<sup>44</sup> V. Kasparova, 'K vostochnomu soveshchanaiu', *Kommunistka* 3 (1925), pp.21-27

<sup>45</sup> N. Zavaryan, 'Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

<sup>46</sup> N. Zavaryan, 'Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

begun to write on Central Asia late in 1926 was extremely disparaging about the ability of indigenous women to dictate their own lives and be involved in debates about the general direction of the Soviet East. She complained in July of 1926 that the work of the Zhenotdel was too focused on intellectual education and argued that “no native woman can be stuffed full of knowledge on issues of world significance”. Her primitive nature had to be acknowledged and it had “to be remembered that she is in the habit of thinking in certain ways” and “might not be able to understand the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat and class struggle.”<sup>47</sup> For Nukrat there should be no attempt to educate such women while they apparently remained mired in filth and backwardness.

Nukrat welcomed the announcement of the Five Year Plan as an important opportunity for the Zhenotdel, and demanded that activists step up to play “a decisive role in the necessary re-education of the mass of enslaved and culturally backward women of the East.”<sup>48</sup> She warned that conservative attitudes to this task would not be tolerated.<sup>49</sup> The term ‘emancipation’ was now deployed in a drive to mobilise women into factories and collective farms. In an article in June 1928 on the Five Year Plan, Nukrat stated that “it is necessary to train the woman of the East to properly become a builder of socialism”. This meant “raising her up from a deeply indoctrinated native life” to be able to operate within industry.<sup>50</sup> A comrade Sachudri complained of “the low cultural level of native women and their failure to understand industrial discipline.”<sup>51</sup> We “need to eliminate the disparities in cultural levels between European and native women workers in the shortest possible time.”<sup>52</sup> There was a need to immediately eradicate “backward practices such as sitting on the floor of factories and talking” and the “tendency not to go to work when the weather is bad.”<sup>53</sup> Central Asian peasant and nomadic women were expected to transform themselves into a Soviet working class and to adopt habits in keeping with the new industrial programme. By 1929 the litmus test for an indigenous woman was “not only if she has unveiled but if she is taking

---

<sup>47</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>48</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘XV s”ezd i zadachi raboty sredi vostochnits krest’ianok’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 53-56

<sup>49</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘XV s”ezd i zadachi raboty sredi vostochnits krest’ianok’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 53-56

<sup>50</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

<sup>51</sup> Sakhudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

<sup>52</sup> Sakhudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

<sup>53</sup> Sakhudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

part in all aspects of building a cultured society.”<sup>54</sup> Women were expected to “learn how to deal with dirt in the home, with superstition, with illness and with ridding themselves of the darkness of their past lives.”<sup>55</sup> They were to be perfect housewives and perfect workers. The concept of self-liberation had given way to a demand for conformity.

My research illustrates that while it is true that Central Asian women were viewed by the Zhenotdel as uniquely backward, the policy of transformation aimed to overcome that backwardness was not inevitably repressive. Instead, it was believed that through voluntary participation in social and economic activities in women-only facilities, indigenous women would achieve the confidence to take action on their own behalf. It was hoped that once women experienced a different environment to their domestic life, and had been educated about the world outside and the achievements of the Russian Revolution, they would begin to become conscious of their own oppression. As put by Dryzhinina in 1922, this “voiceless slave who has been nearly beaten to death by her husband will want to break free of her economic dependence on him and begin her road to self-liberation.”<sup>56</sup> But in 1927 this policy was overridden by the demands from the Central Committee and Sredazburo that indigenous women be coerced into adapting to the plan for mass industrialisation. Previous notions of liberating indigenous women to fulfil their own potential were absent in the new political conditions of Soviet Central Asia.

### 3.4 The Programme of transformation in Central Asia

Despite the negative perception of Central Asian indigenous life, the practical work of the Zhenotdel from 1920 until 1927 appears from *Kommunistka* to have been conducted in a culturally sensitive environment and aimed at promoting self-activity among indigenous women. In 1920, a number of non-Party meetings were held across the Soviet East, with an All Union Non-Party Meeting of Eastern Women

---

<sup>54</sup> A. Babaev, ‘Mesthye rabotniki: ob izdanii dekreta’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.32-33

<sup>55</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

<sup>56</sup> Dryzhinina, ‘Probuzhdenie zhenshchiny vostoka’, 18 (1) (1922), pp.19-20



planned to take place during the following February in Moscow. Samoilova predicted that this event would be unprecedented and would “play a crucial role in the world history of the liberation movement.”<sup>57</sup> Its significance would be in the fact that the “delegates who will attend this meeting come from that section of humanity which has for centuries been kept in a position as the lowest slave of all.”<sup>58</sup> Now the Eastern woman at last had an opportunity to “learn to use the new political rights achieved through the revolution” and “to find her own way towards a fully rounded emancipation.”<sup>59</sup> Putilovskaya wrote that significant preparations had been made in the region for the meeting, including “elections at non-party meetings to select delegates to go to the meeting on behalf of native women.”<sup>60</sup> Zhenotdel activists had visited the homes of indigenous women informing them of the changed political environment and “calling them forth from centuries of dispossession to a conscious life.”<sup>61</sup> A draft agenda was drawn up by Kollontai which included discussion of the legal position of Eastern women, organisation of handicraft work, maternity and education. The meeting also intended to debate “the current period” and “Soviet power and Eastern women.”<sup>62</sup> Kollontai hoped the meeting would “stimulate the interest of women in becoming involved in Soviet work and in building the Soviets...”<sup>63</sup> Although the Zhenotdel had a framework for organisation and political ideas that it believed indigenous women should adopt, it wanted to win them over to these views through the activation of an autonomous movement.

However following over six months of planning and organising and the selection of delegates from right across the region, the event was suddenly halted. After an initial postponement to June, the event was finally cancelled on the basis that it was impossible due to food rationing in Moscow. Of note the Third International women’s events were not abandoned and took place in the same period.<sup>64</sup> A great

---

<sup>57</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Vseross s”ezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka* 6 (1920), pp 31-32

<sup>58</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Vseross s”ezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka* 6 (1920), pp 32-33

<sup>59</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Vseross s”ezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka* 6 (1920), pp 32-33

<sup>60</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’ *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>61</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’ *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>62</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>63</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>64</sup> A. Rosanova ‘Priезд zhenshchin narodov Vostoka v Moskvu’, *Kommunistka*, 14-15 (1921), pg. 36-37

deal of confusion was reported around the cancellation of the All-Union Non-Party Meeting of Eastern Women and many local groups were not informed. Thus a group of delegates, mainly Uzbek, Kirghiz, Turkmen and Tatar women, arrived in Moscow from Central Asia in June 1921.<sup>65</sup> On arrival the delegates were paraded around to meetings of the Comintern and met with Lenin briefly and then with Kollontai. Rosanova, the report writer, describes in very patronising terms how impressed these delegates were to be present. How they “cried at the sight of Lenin as their hearts were so full of joy they could not speak.”<sup>66</sup> How one delegate “thanked the Red Army for the liberation of the women of the East.”<sup>67</sup> How they caused a great stir when they unveiled in front of a Comintern Women’s Conference. Those present “could not hold back tears, and in keeping with the general mood, the Red Army orchestra began to play the *Internationale* and all rose to their feet to welcome the women with unstoppable applause.”<sup>68</sup>

The cancellation of the All Union Non-Party Meeting of Eastern Women was a serious setback for the programme of autonomous organisation among women in Central Asia. It coincided with a shift toward greater centralism that year, with the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the subsequent clampdown on inner Party democracy. Kollontai herself was at the centre of the battle against NEP and, as noted earlier, would be removed in disgrace from her position as Director of the Zhenotdel in early 1922. Samoilova’s death in June from cholera, following that of Inessa Armand in October 1920, had left the national leadership without its most confident and experienced leaders. The absence of these key figures was undoubtedly a major factor allowing the cancellation of the meeting.<sup>69</sup> It was not re-scheduled and indigenous women would never again given this type of opportunity to come together nationally.

In advance of the planned All Union Non-Party Meeting, in April 1921 a Meeting for Activists among Women of the East was held in Moscow, presided over by Alexandra Kollontai. She put a resolution to that meeting which proposed a

---

<sup>65</sup> A. Rosanova, ‘Priezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka v Moskvu’, *Kommunistka*, 14-15 (1921), pg. 36-37

<sup>66</sup> A. Rosanova, ‘Priezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka v Moskvu’, *Kommunistka*, 14-15 (1921), pg. 36-37

<sup>67</sup> A. Rosanova, ‘Priezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka v Moskvu’, *Kommunistka*, 14-15 (1921), pg. 36-37

<sup>68</sup> A. Rosanova, ‘Priezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka v Moskvu’, *Kommunistka*, 14-15 (1921), pg. 36-37

<sup>69</sup> W. Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender & Industry in Stalin’s Russia*, (Cambridge University Press 2002), pp. 42-50 on the difficulties experienced by the Zhenotdel

different way of organisation for indigenous women in the East to that in Russia. Women involved in the Russian Zhenotdel were organised through delegate meetings, based themselves primarily around workplaces. The circumstances of women in the Soviet East were acknowledged to be very different and it was agreed that women-only clubs would be set up instead.<sup>70</sup> These would be “schools where women become involved in Soviet work through their own self-activity and begin to develop communism within themselves.”<sup>71</sup> Above all the clubs were to seek connections with women handicraft workers and begin the organisation of workshops, “while assisting alongside this the development of class consciousness among women handicraft workers.”<sup>72</sup> It is worthwhile noting that the April meeting would still have expected the broad Non-party Meeting to take place and therefore that indigenous women themselves take a lead in this work.<sup>73</sup> As with the proposals for the Non-Party Meeting, the aim was self-organisation among indigenous women.

In the aftermath of Kollontai’s removal as Director, little headway was made for the next two years in Central Asia. On her appointment as head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel in April 1923, Serafima Liubimova wrote of the difficult struggles to retain some presence in the region between 1921 and 1923.<sup>74</sup> Activists had worked hard to make links with women who had attended the non-party meetings in 1920 and 1921. Liubimova also blamed NEP for the lack of staffing and support for organisation. In 1923 she re-launched the Zhenotdel in Central Asia with a call for action to implement the project begun in 1921.

It was agreed that the method of organisation in Russia was not suitable for the East “where the majority of poor women are completely uninvolved in social and political life and have not been drawn into the building of communism.”<sup>75</sup> Clubs were initiated in sedentary Uzbek regions and also among the nomadic Kazakh and

---

<sup>70</sup> R. C. Ellwood *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary & Feminist*, (Cambridge University Press 1992), pp. 248-254 on the creation of delegate meetings under Armand’s leadership

<sup>71</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii i vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>72</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’ *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>73</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’ *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>74</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>75</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

Turkmen peoples, with the latter having the form of travelling tents, known as Red Yurts. It had been agreed at the April 1921 Meeting for Activists among Women of the East that these clubs needed to “include a range of measures to assist women, including crèches, facilities for older children, public laundries and schools for women and girls.”<sup>76</sup> The Ali Bairamova club in Baku, one of the first clubs to be created, was held up as the model for other Zhenotdel branches to aspire to. An official visit to the Ali Bairamova by the Zhenotdel Central leadership in 1922 reported that it had a wide range of facilities, including a medical clinic, sewing and wool spinning workshops, literacy classes, a drama club, a choir and a dance group. Crèche and other childcare facilities were provided to the club membership which in 1922 numbered just over 400.<sup>77</sup> A number of clubs were set up in urban areas of Uzbekistan in 1924 which tried to emulate the Baku example. Where no resources existed to set up a club, women’s groups called Red Corners were set up.<sup>78</sup> In chapter four I will examine the details around the formation of women-only organisations in Central Asia, and particularly in Uzbekistan. These initiatives lasted until 1928 when shops and then clubs collapsed in the course of the mass unveiling campaign. While they continued, the clubs offered economic and education opportunities, medical consultations, childcare, political education and cultural activities. They were supplemented from 1926 with women-only shops in Uzbekistan which offered some of the same facilities, while providing women with opportunities to buy and sell their goods in a safe and culturally appropriate environment.<sup>79</sup>

Clubs struggled from the outset because of lack of financial assistance from the Soviet state, despite official Central Committee support. Liubimova complained that the lack of available funding under NEP had “completely knocked the Eastern department off course.”<sup>80</sup> For her “the only reason the clubs are not better is lack of finance.”<sup>81</sup> The Bureau was dependent on government funding to set up cooperatives, purchase equipment and train local women. Areas which apparently could have been financially successful, such as in traditional carpet making among

---

<sup>76</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>77</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>78</sup> K. Kasparova., ‘Itogi I Perspektivy raboty na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp.45-48

<sup>79</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>80</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30

<sup>81</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp.13-14

Turkmen women, were stymied by lack of funds. They also faced isolation. One activist complained that the “joint regional traders cooperatives which should be assisting us are providing no support at all.”<sup>82</sup>

In 1926 proposals emerged which directly challenged the existing strategy of work and demanded that Zhenotdel work be brought under the authority of the local Party. The rise of these views coincided with the Sredazburo’s decision to put the woman question at the centre of the forthcoming Hujum. In July 1926, Zavaryan complained of “a tendency to confine all our work to clubs and corners.”<sup>83</sup> This view was in complete contrast with the views of a number of Zhenotdel activists, who continued to support Liubimova’s strategy. In March 1925 Kasparova had claimed that the Zhenotdel leadership fully supported the current strategy and believed that “club work [had] proven itself in practice.”<sup>84</sup> Kasparova also contended that women-only organisation had been successfully extended “with the opening of women-only shops.”<sup>85</sup> She had called on activists to build on the successes “by holding meetings, lectures, festivals and training courses” for indigenous women.<sup>86</sup> Despite these apparent successes, however, Zavaryan, was adamant in her opposition to the continuance of club work and demanded that “we must eliminate this completely incorrect approach to organisation and begin setting up delegate meetings in Central Asia.”<sup>87</sup> Yet advocates of clubs and women-only shops refused to make concessions to these demands and defended their policy. In May 1927, Bolshakov pointed to the crucial role of the women-only shops as co-operatives for women who wanted to sell their vegetables, food stuffs and handicrafts. She argued that not only should women-only spaces not be closed down, but they should be extended. Furthermore she contended that the Zhenotdel must “find better methods to facilitate women playing a full part in these cooperatives, holding meetings among members and non-members of cooperatives to discuss various questions, holding conferences and literature and to increase the number of members in the governing bodies of cooperatives.”<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>83</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

<sup>84</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘K vostochnomu soveshchanaiu’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1925), pp.21-27

<sup>85</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘K vostochnomu soveshchanaiu’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1925), pp.21-27

<sup>86</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘K vostochnomu soveshchanaiu’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1925), pp.21-27

<sup>87</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘K vostochnomu soveshchanaiu’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1925), pp.21-27

<sup>88</sup> V. Bolshakov, ‘Koooperirovanii zhenshchin v Vostochnykh natsional’nykh raionakh’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp.53-55

The view of Liubimova and other supporters of clubs and women-only shops was that they provided a unique way of allowing women to become involved in economic and social life, without endangering their physical safety. Kasparova argued that they showed flexibility as it was important “not to be rigid in our approach to a woman’s traditional life, as it leads to a malevolent attitude from men towards our work and even more difficulties for the woman.”<sup>89</sup> Incremental change was the priority and nothing should damage the successes which had been achieved. This view conflicted sharply with the demands of the Hujum, and it took courage for these leading Zhenotdel activists to take such a stand in a time of intensifying authoritarianism. They were prepared to openly defend their strategy, as opposed to extolling the virtues of the Hujum and following the dictates of the Sredazburo. Such independent-minded positions contrast with Massell and Northrop’s depiction of all Zhenotdel activists as loyal servants of the Party leadership which I discussed in chapter two.

In late 1926 Liubimova was removed as head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel. It appears from *Kommunistka* that Anna Nukrat replaced her. From the beginning, it was clear that Nukrat was opposed to the semi-autonomous clubs and women-only shops. She made it clear that the focus of activists had to change away from the previous strategy and to ensuring direct Party control and involvement in the Zhenotdel’s work. Nukrat counter-posed delegate meetings to clubs precisely because they could provide a more direct link with the Party. She insisted that “delegate meetings must be set up where there are Party members” and the local Party “must provide leadership within these forums.”<sup>90</sup> She also wanted a move away from what she saw as abstract political discussion and towards a campaign “for cleanliness, the improvement of nutrition and so on...”<sup>91</sup> Nukrat wanted no further debates and cultural activities. Her view was that indigenous women were ignorant child-like creatures who had to be taught in a very simple fashion about how to live modern Soviet lives. She needed to be “taken by the hand” and “trained to understand dirt, illiteracy and infectious diseases.”<sup>92</sup> After training her to be a better wife and mother she could then be taught about other issues and

---

<sup>89</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>90</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>91</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>92</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

“every question in her village can be linked with general tasks of government.”<sup>93</sup> Although Nukrat was herself from the indigenous Turkic population, her attitude toward other Central Asian women was more derogatory than that of many Russian activists.

By the end of 1927 the women-only shops had closed and many clubs had collapsed. The project of women-only spaces was superseded by the setting up of delegate meetings as a method of electing women to the Soviets. Nukrat wrote in July 1928 that “the debate over the last year about the necessity of delegate meetings has now been supplanted with the reality of their successful implementation.”<sup>94</sup> Instead of women-only clubs and shops “delegate meetings are involved in a large number of general campaigns.”<sup>95</sup> Now delegate meetings had become the main form of organisation in Central Asia, and were designed to send women to work alongside men in factories and collective farms. Nukrat conceded that those women who were delegated to workplaces to work with men were treated badly and “given difficult and dirty work or, in many cases, they were not provided with any work at all.”<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless Nukrat agreed that the process of economic development could not be set at the pace of the ‘backward’ Central Asian peasant. As Sachudri argued “even in the most deeply peasant region, where there are only a few workers and factories, we must not postpone our ambitious plans to draw native women into industry.”<sup>97</sup> Now the work of the Zhenotdel had to shift to “train native women for industry” and “to make them into a female working class.”<sup>98</sup> The Bureau now had to act under the direct authority of the Five Year Plan and there would be no more autonomy.

### 3.5 Impact of the Zhenotdel Programme on indigenous women

The contradictory position of the Zhenotdel as a Bureau of the Central Committee and its commitment to Soviet legislation led to a number of problems for

---

<sup>93</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>94</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

<sup>95</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

<sup>96</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

<sup>97</sup> Sakhudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

<sup>98</sup> Sakhudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

indigenous women who became involved in its initiatives. One of these was the lack of support from the local Party membership. Liubimova reported in 1923 that the “Zhenotdel sections shoulder enormous responsibility for work at the present time.”<sup>99</sup> This burden did not alleviate, despite numerous calls for assistance from the Party leadership. There were also protests about lack of funding, isolation and apathy as well as opposition and sabotage of its work by local Party and soviet activists<sup>100</sup>. In these circumstances, indigenous women who responded to the Soviet project often found themselves isolated. In February 1923 activists discussed the “urgent need to help women who are now beginning to leave the family home looking for work”. They agreed that action had to be taken “to improve the living conditions of working women.”<sup>101</sup> Indigenous women were facing poverty and social alienation.<sup>102</sup>

*Kommunistka* writers also acknowledged the negative impact on indigenous society of peasant women leaving the home. Divorce appears to have had far more impact among the Kirghiz and Turkmen populations than in Uzbekistan. A report in February 1925 claimed with alarm that “divorce is reaching epidemic proportions” in Kirghiz as “everywhere second and third wives are escaping alongside young girls running away from arranged marriages.”<sup>103</sup> Seifi saw it as the “beginning of the end for the Kirghizi clan family.”<sup>104</sup> Men were “being left without the benefit of a woman’s labour within the home” and this was causing social and economic difficulties for a family dependent on her work.<sup>105</sup> Seifi was confused as to the best way to resolve the problem without undermining women’s rights. She hoped that where the desertion was as a result of women’s frustration at living impoverished lives then it should be “solved with financial measures and mutual

---

<sup>99</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>100</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>101</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>102</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>103</sup> Seifi, ‘Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>104</sup> Seifi, ‘Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>105</sup> Seifi, ‘Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43



support.”<sup>106</sup> She further speculated that women could be persuaded to stay -“if the economic situation of the Kirghiz family improved then perhaps women would not leave.”<sup>107</sup>

These reports illustrate the contradictory and unintended consequences of attempting to transcend the traditional family structures in the absence of viable social and economic structures. Thus, when policies to extricate women from their position within the family began to have some purchase on reality, they brought with them all manner of social and economic problems. Awareness of these issues was of little use in a situation where there was very little room to manoeuvre. There was a sense that the project had to go forward against the odds. The Zhenotdel was unable to provide support for the mass of the female population. Confusion and frustration led it to seek solutions within Soviet law and to demand legal action against indigenous men who refused to comply with the ban on kalym and polygyny. This meant an immediate confrontation with local Party members and a struggle which lasted for its entire existence. I deal with these issues in detail in chapters five and six.

### 3.6 The experience of the Hujum

The Hujum, known as ‘Nastuplenie’ in Russian, has already been discussed in chapter two. Nikolaeva described its launch as the declaration of “a resolute battle against anti-party behaviour exhibited in the continued practice of local customs such as kalym, wearing of the veil and so on which prevent liberation from those elements antagonistic to the party and to its building, alongside the building of the soviets and the economy.”<sup>108</sup> The cutting edge of the campaign was of course the mass unveiling of indigenous women of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan on International Women’s Day on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1927.

---

<sup>106</sup> Seifi, ‘Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>107</sup> Seifi, ‘Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923),pg.43

<sup>108</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927),pp.52-54

Although Northrop and Massell both argue that the Hujum was enthusiastically supported by the Zhenotdel, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of the campaign in *Kommunistka* until August 1927.<sup>109</sup> And then, in an extremely revealing article, Klavdiia Nikolaeva launched a scathing attack on the Eastern Zhenotdel. As I noted in chapter one, Nikolaeva had been a national Director of the Zhenotdel in 1925 for a short period before her removal for factional activities. She had been a one-time supporter of Kollontai and a strong women's rights activist. By 1927 Nikolaeva had left her oppositional past behind, and become a loyal voice of the Sredazburo and advocate for the Hujum. In her article Nikolaeva was sharply critical of the Uzbek Zhenotdel for what she claimed was a deeply disappointing performance in the unveiling campaign. The alleged failure of activists to engage with unveiled women was, for Nikolaeva, a substantial cause for the fact that 90% of those who had taken part in the events of March and May had consequently re-veiled.<sup>110</sup> The Zhenotdel's "failure to recruit unveiled women into its organisation had left and argued that activists had failed to engage with unveiled women had left them powerless in the face of the counter-attack by the clergy."<sup>111</sup>

As already highlighted in my discussion of the findings of Marianne Kamp in chapter two, Liubimova had in fact expressed resistance to the Hujum in 1926.<sup>112</sup> The decision to launch the unveiling campaign was contrary to her wishes and those of other activists. As will be seen in chapter four, the launch of the Hujum had a seriously detrimental effect on the work of the Zhenotdel. In particular the backlash and repression against indigenous women from the local male population, resulted in the closure and abandonment of clubs and shops. As I have already mentioned in chapter two, notwithstanding the fact that Zhenotdel members had always been critical of the veil, they had never actively advocated its removal, and certainly never called for public mass defiance of local culture. On the contrary, *Kommunistka* had published reports of the participation of veiled women in March 8 demonstrations, along with pictures of both veiled and unveiled women at these events. Niurina had reported in 1925 how that year "tens of thousands of

---

<sup>109</sup> See arguments in chapter two

<sup>110</sup> K. Nikolaeva, 'Pervye itogi', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>111</sup> K. Nikolaeva, 'Pervye itogi', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>112</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan: Islam Modernity and Unveiling Under Communism*, (University of Washington Press 2006), pg. 164

veiled and unveiled women had broken with tradition and attended meetings.”<sup>113</sup> They had taken to the streets and “marched beneath red banners awakened to calls for a new life.”<sup>114</sup> Liubimova was anxious to maintain the safety of veiled women travelling to and from women-only shops and clubs, which were a major preoccupation for her in late 1926 and 1927. Inside these buildings, safe from the prying eyes of men, indigenous women could unveil. The aim was for them to feel as safe as they did within the secluded walls of their own homes.<sup>115</sup> Also the women-only shops meant that “women could overcome their fear of men and go freely into a safe public environment.”<sup>116</sup> This was considered to be a very important psychological issue for veiled women. Despite a retreat from the early ideas of ‘self-liberation’ towards more interventionist forms of work, the majority of Zhenotdel activists in the East still wanted to encourage self-activity among indigenous women and wanted them to feel, and be, safe.

The Hujum was ostensibly aimed at indigenous women but in reality it was male Party members who were ordered in the first instance to unveil their female relatives. The campaign, thus, should be read first and foremost as a conflict engaging *men* and competing patriarchal systems, competing for control over women as the bearers of local culture and tradition. Nikolaeva described the successful organisation of “social evenings involving workers and their wives where up to 100 women were unveiled.”<sup>117</sup> In another article in August 1927, Anisimova complained that “in many enterprises non-Party members stated that they unveiled their wives before party members and thus introduced their wives to Soviet society.”<sup>118</sup> It is noteworthy that women were the object, not the subject of change. Male members of the Communist Party were being pressurised to abandon deeply ingrained cultural and religious practices and use their patriarchal authority to unveil their female relatives. In January 1929 that year Artiukhina reported that the Central Committee in Moscow had issued “a call to all Party

---

<sup>113</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>114</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>115</sup> M. Tunik, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 56-58

<sup>116</sup> M. Tunik, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 56-58

<sup>117</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>118</sup> S. Anisimova, ‘K itogam raskrepushcheniia zhenshchin Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp. 56-60

members to unveil their wives immediately” with strict action to be taken against those “who hinder unveiling.”<sup>119</sup>

The conflict over the Hujum was reflected in a year-long discussion of Eastern work which followed in the pages of the journal. As editor, Krupskaya promoted discussion from June 1928 up until the All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in December 1928. She urged “local activists to take part in discussions about important questions” which included a proposal for a legal ban on the veil.<sup>120</sup> Liubimova was at the forefront of arguing for a decree, believing that failure to issue one “would hand the Mullahs a weapons to use against unveiling” as they would wield the authority of Islamic law which prohibited it.<sup>121</sup> A decree would mean that “the Eastern woman would not stand alone in the struggle with the remnants of past slavery”. She would have “the full support of Soviet power” against the Mullahs and their influence. Liubimova believed in Soviet law both as an instrument of change and also a protective force within society. Krupskaya countered her views in her speech to the meeting where she argued that “we cannot approach liberation as though it is simply a legal issue.”<sup>122</sup> The wearing of the veil, in line with other traditional customs, was “deeply rooted in economic relations.”<sup>123</sup> A consensus developed at the meeting, no doubt under Krupskaya’s influence, for a campaign of persuasion among the population for the decree. In the meantime nothing should be done to provoke the kind of crisis which the Hujum had elicited.<sup>124</sup>

Krupskaya also took on other aspects of the state-led transformation projects which had emerged since 1926. She strongly argued against the anti-religious crusade that was launched by Stalin in December 1927 as part of the launch of the Five Year Plan. In his speech to the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, Stalin had demanded

---

<sup>119</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Vypolhim resheniia’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

<sup>120</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Ot redaktsii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pg. 83

<sup>121</sup> S. Liubimova., ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>122</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>123</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>124</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Vypolhim resheniia’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

the “overcoming of terrible cultural backwardness” and the strengthening of the battle against religion.<sup>125</sup> A year later Krupskaya responded that:

...we cannot be simply anti-religious”. Direct “confrontation with religion will produce nothing good. If we see this struggle as a war then we need to conduct a step by step battle rather than an all-out war.<sup>126</sup>

She further argued that there should be “no bans on christenings and religious weddings”, as such “bans will only encourage fanaticism.”<sup>127</sup> Krupskaya’s speech is noteworthy because of her courage both in confronting the Hujum and the war on religion being rolled out across the Soviet Union. It is also important in reflecting her continued adherence to views first argued by Lenin in 1921.<sup>128</sup>

In the aftermath of the December 1928 All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East, the coverage of the Zhenotdel’s activities in Central Asia changed markedly. There was no more debate within the journal, which went from monthly to fortnightly publication. The director of the national Zhenotdel, Alexandra Artiukhina, demanded that there was to be no more prevarication over Party policy. In relation to the calls for a legal ban on the veil, she denounced those who demanded state protection and asserted that “we need brave revolutionaries to fight against the wearing of the veil.”<sup>129</sup> With the implementation of mass collectivisation, the wearing of a veil was now described as a serious barrier to the successful implementation of the Five Year Plan, as it prevented the recruitment of indigenous women in Uzbekistan to the collective farms. There was to be no more talk of incremental change - instead now “we need to take a leap forward from these current conditions of backwardness.”<sup>130</sup>

Nukrat wrote in glowing terms of the “earnest fresh-faced unveiled Turkmen women” who could readily join the workforce.<sup>131</sup> The drive to recruit to the Plan took precedence over the views and wishes of women, and indeed their safety.

---

<sup>125</sup> J. Stalin, *Collected Works* Volume 10 August-December 1927 (Foreign Languages Publishing Press 1954).

<sup>126</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>127</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>128</sup> See chapter one and the criticisms made by Lenin of over-zealous attempts to transform cultural norms.

<sup>129</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Vypolnim resheniia’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

<sup>130</sup> F. Niurina, ‘“Usilit’ podgotovu kulturnykh’, *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1929), pp. 2-25

<sup>131</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Kul’tpokhod v Turkmenistan’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp. 32-35

She argued it had been “an interesting and forceful form of work”, which had “resulted in great success in its first days with an unprecedented number of demonstrations with many thousands of women taking part who - seized with energy - removed their paranjis and threw them on bonfires”. However, because of the Zhenotdel’s negligence, insufficient education of the masses and lack of solid action, the “enemies of soviet power were able to raise their heads.”<sup>132</sup> The tactic of mass unveiling itself was beyond question. Now the job was to get on with a systematic “cultural revolution” which meant “putting the question of the personal example of communists at the forefront.”<sup>133</sup> Krupskaya’s warnings were disregarded and an “attack against all old forms of life” was declared to drive forward the construction and mobilisation of a Central Asian proletariat<sup>134</sup>.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to illustrate the contradictory nature of the Zhenotdel project to transform the Eastern family. Central to this was the absence of a theory on the nature of this institution and the role it played within peasant society. Efforts to change it were bound to cause conflicts and dangers without a clear understanding of what the aims were and with the lack of any social or economic safety net outside the family. The Zhenotdel was not capable of providing long-term alternatives for indigenous women, in particular as it faced major opposition and lacked funding. It was attempting to create a socialist alternative in a society which had never experienced capitalism and therefore lacked a working class. The initiative which had the most success, the woman-only shops, were never accepted as a legitimate part of the co-operative movement, and the leadership of this movement, with the apparent backing of the Sredazburo, took the opportunity to close down the women-only shops in 1927.

The question of agency was also a contradictory concept from the beginning as a view of indigenous women as enslaved by their own cultural norms meant that the issue of their empowerment would always be problematic. Kollontai and

---

<sup>132</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Osnovnye voprosy soveshchaniia’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.77-80

<sup>133</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Osnovnye voprosy soveshchaniia’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.77-80

<sup>134</sup> Sh. Karimova, ‘Na bor’bu s bytovymi pereshitkami’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1929), pp.43-45

Samoilova called for the empowerment of indigenous women while, simultaneously, in particular in Samoilova's case, actively persuading them to adopt idealised Soviet forms of the family and to take legal action against their families for breaches of laws on kalym and polygyny. In the absence of a mass movement of Central Asian women, it was inevitable that they would become the object, rather than the subject of transformation. Interestingly the surge in support for the Zhenotdel from indigenous women from 1925 did start to reflect real autonomy, with women-only shops being the most important example. In chapter four I will show how the Zhenotdel was forced to abandon this work in the midst of the unveiling campaign. Without the Hujum, significant progress may well have been made in urban areas of Central Asia.

A problem which would nonetheless have needed to be addressed was the legalism of the Zhenotdel. In her speech to the December 1928 meeting, Krupskaya proposed a different approach to the law. She encouraged activists to understand that "polygyny and kalym are disguises for economic exploitation" and needed to be addressed in a way that undermined that system. One example was through land reforms - by "granting more land to families where the women are allowed to unveil."<sup>135</sup> She also argued for an intensive education programme aimed at male Communist Party members. Soviet law should serve as a model for society, rather than a tool to prosecute those who failed to comply with it. Winning the population over, rather than estranging women from their families, would also provide more security for those who wanted change.

However, while being deeply critical of the Zhenotdel's approach to the Eastern family, I would argue that there were many positive aspects in their attempt to provide independence for women and to educate them both in practical ideas and theoretical debates. A number of activists, under Liubimova's leadership, did not want to engage in any strategy which would harm these women and were always very mindful of the fate of the woman returning to the family after school or work. This was in stark contrast to the attitude of the Party leadership, which, up to 1927, had failed to acknowledge or support its efforts. Liubimova had illusions regarding the progressive role of Soviet law and institutions, and it can be argued

---

<sup>135</sup> N. Krupskaya, 'Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-122

that her insistence on waging a legal battle against polygyny and kalym led to a bureaucratic intrusive attitude to the Eastern family. However, in spite of these bureaucratic tendencies, it should not be concluded that there was a direct link between the ambitions of those activists who followed Liubimova and those of the Central Committee. She was committed to the amelioration of the position of Eastern women and to introducing them to the benefits of work and modernity.

The experience of organisation in Central Asia shows that the Zhenotdel did have a commitment to autonomy and self-organisation. Unlike Russia, where it appears that the Zhenotdel was fighting liquidation from 1921, the Bureau in Central Asia was largely isolated from the Party until 1926. This gave it a longer period in which to develop its project. In the following chapters I will consider this state of affairs in the context of the economic and social initiatives, the legal policy and the relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Party.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Economic and Cultural Policies in Central Asia**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I set out the various strategies utilised by the Zhenotdel activists to support, as they saw it, the entry of indigenous women into the more formal spheres of economic and social life. In particular, I examine the aims and experiences of women's clubs and local cooperatives and the manner in which they attempted to intersect with the practical needs of indigenous women and provide a conducive environment for Soviet education and propaganda. I look separately at the role of women-only shops, introduced from late 1925 and their reported success in achieving the aims previously envisaged for clubs. I consider the commitment of both Russian and indigenous activists to women-only shops, despite the antagonism of the local and Central Party leadership. I look briefly at the calls to set up delegate meetings from 1926 by activists, who in contrast to supporters of clubs and shops, demanded direct Party supervision over the Zhenotdel's work and a more confrontational approach to indigenous society. I then proceed to consider the practical implications of the unveiling campaign for work among women before looking at the Five Year Plan and the abandonment of the Zhenotdel's original strategy.

#### **4.2 The Central Asian Women-Only Clubs**

As discussed in chapter three, the major challenge confronting Zhenotdel activists in 1920 was the difficulty of gaining access to indigenous women. Following reports from Konkordiia Samoilova and others who had visited the region in 1920, it was acknowledged that the main form of organisation in Russia - the delegate meeting - was an unsuitable method for beginning work among secluded and nomadic

women.<sup>1</sup> In April 1921, the All-Russian Meeting of Organisers among Women of the East announced a decision to re-orientate its work and agreed that the “best way to bring together isolated women is through the creation of women’s clubs.”<sup>2</sup> Women’s clubs would afford a protected space for indigenous women to engage in social and economic activity and provide them with positive experiences of “how Soviet power can emancipate them in all aspects of their lives once they engage with it.”<sup>3</sup> Clubs were to be “schools where women are drawn to the Soviet project through their own self-activity and begin to cultivate the spirit of communism within themselves.”<sup>4</sup> They were set up mainly in urban areas of Uzbekistan and orientated towards the secluded female population. As noted in chapter three, the nomadic Turkman and Kirgiz tribes, a travelling tent, known as a Red Yurt, was to perform a similar role. In general, the initiative was aimed at encouraging self-activity among indigenous women, which was considered by Zhenotdel leaders to be a crucial aspect of building socialism. The vision of a woman developing herself on her own terms, of being “the conscious creator of her own life” was extremely popular among activists.<sup>5</sup>

In Central Asia that vision meant more autonomy from Party and Soviet structures than existed in Russia. Women’s clubs would not delegate women to work within Soviet organisations, because of the cultural barriers that prevented men and women working together, in particular the seclusion of veiled women. Instead Central Asian women would engage in collectivised forms of economic activity, education and cultural activities within the shelter of the club, with childcare facilities and other supports attached to these clubs. The April 1921 Zhenotdel All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East decided that the department itself would provide the connection with local and central Party organisations and in so doing would “raise the issues and demands which flowed from the task of

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>2</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>3</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>4</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>5</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge University Press 1997), pp. 220-212 for a discussion of the popularity of arguments in the aftermath of the Civil War

liberating Eastern women.”<sup>6</sup> It would lead a campaign within the Party “to strengthen the struggle against prejudice toward women which has deep roots among men in the population.” The meeting pledged to “assist the Party in cultivating the spirit of communism and an understanding of the shared interests of men and women among the male proletariat and peasantry.”<sup>7</sup>

The strategy was thus to initiate a network of semi-autonomous women’s clubs in Central Asia and other parts of the Soviet East. Zhenotdel members would have a dual role - as the representative of the Party within clubs and the voice of indigenous women within the Party. The fact that this policy was adopted at a time when Kollontai was Director of the Bureau and that she had taken a leading role in developing work in the Soviet East meant that it strongly reflected her vision of the Zhenotdel “as an advocate for women within the Party and government.”<sup>8</sup> The policy of self-organisation conflicted with the perspective of the Central Committee, which, by deciding to bring work among women under its authority, was almost certainly anxious to inhibit excessive autonomy. The Zhenotdel was perceived by the Central leadership as an instrument to ensure the authority of the Party over the mass of women.<sup>9</sup> It most definitely was not understood as a lobby for women within the Party. The manner in which these conflicts expressed itself in Central Asia will be dealt with in detail in chapter six of this study.<sup>10</sup>

It was agreed from the start that one of the central characteristics of the women-only clubs was that they would be of practical assistance to indigenous women. They needed “to include within it services, including a crèche, a public laundry, and a school” which would “encourage interest among indigenous women in attending the clubs and thus assist the Soviet project.”<sup>11</sup> Clubs would be a site for the education of indigenous women both practically and politically. The model

---

<sup>6</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>7</sup> A. Kollontai A., ‘Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>8</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist – The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Indiana University Press 1979), pg. 171

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Ellwood, *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist* (Cambridge University Press 1992), pg. 441 for Ellwood’s description of the Central Committee’s motivation for forming the Zhenotdel.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 6 on the relationship of the Central Asian Zhenotdel to the Party and Soviet regime.

<sup>11</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunisticheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’ *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

put forward for the Central Asian Zhenotdel to adopt was based on the Ali Bairamova Club in Baku. According to a report from June 1922, this establishment provided a wide range of facilities for indigenous women, including medical consultations with a female doctor, a canteen, a crèche and kindergarten. Women were employed as trainees in book binding, weaving, sewing, shoe making and wool spinning workshops on site. A school within the club offered classes in literacy and elementary education, as well as political propaganda. Finally there were social activities, including a drama group, a choir and dance classes. Apart from two male workshop managers who had yet to be replaced by suitably qualified women, all personnel and attendees were female. The writer insisted that this women-only establishment was “not in any sense sowing feminist tendencies among Muslim women” but was a practical and “essential way for the slow and patient drawing in of indigenous women to society and public life.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite the enthusiasm among activists regarding the possibilities that lay ahead, the Zhenotdel’s organisational strategy made little headway in Central Asia between 1921 and 1923. There was initial confusion and demoralisation within the Bureau, following the deaths of Armand and Samoilova, and the removal of Kollontai from her position as director and expulsion abroad, which I referred to in chapter one.<sup>13</sup> The individual who had personified the Zhenotdel’s campaign for radical change more powerfully than any other had been dispatched to Norway in disgrace.<sup>14</sup> For those activists who wanted to continue the programme of work announced in 1921, a central obstacle to doing so was the negative impact of the New Economic Policy (NEP). In 1923, Liubimova described how the cuts in staffing were “especially painful in the East, where almost all responsibility for work lies with the Zhenotdel and where it is very difficult to make use of the wider Party apparatus.” This was seen as a specific problem because the “organisation is scattered over a huge expanse and requires a large number of Zhenotdel organisers.”<sup>15</sup> According to Liubimova, the drop in funding had “knocked the

---

<sup>12</sup> E. Ralli, ‘Zhenskie musul’ manskie kluby’, *Kommunistka*, 6-7 (1922), pp. 30-32

<sup>13</sup> C. Eubanks Hayden, ‘The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party’ in *Russian History* III, 2 (1976), pg. 163

<sup>14</sup> The involvement of Kollontai in the Workers Opposition is discussed by a number of writers, most recently by B. C. Allen, *Alexandra Shlyapnikov 1885-1937 Life of an Old Bolshevik* (Haymarket Books 2016)

<sup>15</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30; M. Kamp; *The New Woman in Uzbekistan, Islam Modernity & Unveiling under Communism* (University of Washington Press 2006), pg. 92 confirms her position in the leadership

Zhenotdel off course.”<sup>16</sup> The advent of NEP is described by Barbara Evans Clements as a defining moment for the Zhenotdel in that it revealed the incongruity between its programme and that of the Central Committee. She argues that during the Civil War:

The party leadership was occupied with military matters and the atmosphere of war communism encouraged utopians to believe that they were riding a revolutionary tide that was sweeping away old Russia. The Zhenotdel was free to champion all the elements in female emancipation- that had been laid clown by the founders of Marxism: Zhenotdel publications openly endorsed the radical restructuring of the family and sexual liberation, and prophesied the imminent creation of a new woman.<sup>17</sup>

NEP dealt a very serious blow to this self-confidence. Cuts to state funding for the Bureau resulted in the loss of 19 of its 42 fulltime staff, and many of its regional organisers. It is surprising that the Zhenotdel actually survived in this period, particularly in Central Asia where it had a very fragile presence.<sup>18</sup> Its members fought to retain some influence in the region by holding large scale meetings and congresses, where they gave speeches “on the protection of motherhood, the achievements of the Russian Zhenotdel and the way forward for Eastern women.”<sup>19</sup>

In 1923 in relaunching the Zhenotdel in Central Asia, Liubimova congratulated activists on their tenacity throughout that difficult. She pledged to “preserve those links made with women who attended congresses and meetings during.”<sup>20</sup> Liubimova announced that action would be taken to “consolidate and advance the achievements of these earlier agitation campaigns by drawing these women into clubs, schools and soviets.”<sup>21</sup> At the second Meeting of Workers among Women in

---

<sup>16</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30

<sup>17</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’ in *Slavic Review* Vol 51, Volume 51 no 3 (Autumn 1992), pp 485-496

<sup>18</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997), pp.76-119 for a discussions of the stresses on the Zhenotdel.

<sup>19</sup> Dryzhinina, ‘Probuzhdenie zhenshchiny vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 18 (1) (1922), pp.19-20

<sup>20</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>21</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

the East in March 1923 Liubimova had made clear that she would use her position to "continue to press forward with the liberation of Eastern women by setting up clubs within which Artels<sup>22</sup>, trade schools, elementary schools, libraries, crèches and other facilities would operate."<sup>23</sup> In the aftermath of the meeting she demanded support from the Central Committee, reporting that Zhenotdel members "urgently needed equipment and funds to establish women's clubs in the region."<sup>24</sup> She took charge of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, with a determination to realise the decisions made three years earlier, in the belief that the only things which were necessary were an improvement in organisational methods and proper support from the Central Committee and local Party.

It is clear that Liubimova was a very determined individual.<sup>25</sup> A Russian member of the Communist Party, in 1921 she had attended lectures given by Kollontai at the Sverdlov University in Petrograd.<sup>26</sup> She displayed a strong affinity with Kollontai's views, describing how deeply she had been inspired by her as a political leader in 1921.<sup>27</sup> In 1923, in a period when Kollontai's successor, secretary Sofia Smidovich, was at pains to disassociate the Zhenotdel from any connection with Kollontai, Liubimova made it clear that she retained a commitment to the methods of organisation proposed by a woman she still called "comrade Kollontai."<sup>28</sup> Liubimova retained her position as head of the Central Asian Bureau until 1926 when she was removed and apparently replaced by Anna Nukrat. It is no coincidence that Liubimova's removal was in the midst of arrangements for the launch of the unveiling campaign, about which she herself had expressed serious disquiet.<sup>29</sup>

Liubimova's efforts to create women-only clubs began to pay off in 1924, with the opening early that year of a club in Tashkent by Nadia Krupskaya editor of the journal *Kommunistka*. The club, named after Krupskaya, was reported to have an

---

<sup>22</sup> The Artel was a small local workshop or co-operative.

<sup>23</sup> S. Liubimova, 'K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>24</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Turkestane', *Kommunistka*, 7(1924), pp.19-20

<sup>25</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 267

<sup>26</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography* (Merlin Press 2015), pp. 342-344

<sup>27</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pg. 342

<sup>28</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Vostok', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30

<sup>29</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 267

initial membership of 500.<sup>30</sup> It was situated in the indigenous old quarter of the city and the Zhenotdel claimed that it was popular with indigenous women - "every day hundreds of Muslim women stream into the club, to attend the medical consultations, the schools, the reading library and the children's nursery."<sup>31</sup> There was "a drama club with Muslim women rehearsing a play to perform at the next regional Zhenotdel meeting."<sup>32</sup> Otmar Stein congratulated activists for their commitment "to open clubs based on the model of the Krupskaya club in all parts of the region."<sup>33</sup> She asserted that "the creation of Muslim women's clubs needs to be a central part of the work in liberating women of the East."<sup>34</sup> By April 1925, the reported number of women-only clubs in Central Asia had increased to 13 and by September to 15, with the vast majority of these in urban parts of Uzbekistan.<sup>35</sup>

These clubs were described by one writer as "a seedbed on which to develop Soviet culture."<sup>36</sup> The provision of practical support was proving to be very valuable in attracting women, who "go to the club for assistance in their lives, and when there, they can become educated."<sup>37</sup> Measures that were used to enlighten indigenous women included reading groups and professional skills training. Illiteracy proved to be a major challenge, and Liubimova reported in 1923 that in Bukhara, one of the main cities in the region, the level of literacy among indigenous women was only 3%. This figure was also reflected among male Party members, with "the level of illiteracy among all Party members standing at between 90-95%."<sup>38</sup> It was agreed that schools would also be set up within clubs to educate women in literacy and other skills. Where there were insufficient resources to set up a designated club, women-only 'red corners' and 'Lenin corners' were created.<sup>39</sup> By 1926 it was reported that the number of women-only clubs in Central Asia had risen to 34 and the number of red corners in Uzbekistan

---

<sup>30</sup> K. Kasparova, 'Itogi i Perspektivy raboty na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp.45-48

<sup>31</sup> L. Otmar Shtein, 'Kraevoi pokazatel'nyi klub imeni Krupskoi dlya musul'manskikh zhenshchin v starom' Tashkente', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp 49-50

<sup>32</sup> L. Otmar Shtein, 'Kraevoi pokazatel'nyi klub imeni Krupskoi dlya musul'manskikh zhenshchin v starom' Tashkente', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp 49-50

<sup>33</sup> L. Otmar Shtein, 'Kraevoi pokazatel'nyi klub imeni Krupskoi dlya musul'manskikh zhenshchin v starom' Tashkente', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp 49-50

<sup>34</sup> L. Otmar Shtein, 'Kraevoi pokazatel'nyi klub imeni Krupskoi dlya musul'manskikh zhenshchin v starom' Tashkente', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp 49-50

<sup>35</sup> V. Kasparova, 'Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin norodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1925), pp. 84-87

<sup>36</sup> F. Niurina, 'V Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>37</sup> F. Niurina, 'V Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>38</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Kirgizii', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pp. 43-45

<sup>39</sup> V. Kasparova, 'Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin norodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1925), pp. 84-87

to 90 - with far fewer in the nomadic region of Turkmenistan.<sup>40</sup> Club work continued to be described as “our most important and principle method of work.”<sup>41</sup> The ability of the clubs to provide services to women was said by Liubimova to have improved significantly. In a report on the Meeting of Women-only Clubs held in November 1926, she stated that in “Uzbekistan alone over the last six months 71,000 women attended medical consultations in clubs.”<sup>42</sup>

A decision taken in 1924 to recruit indigenous women to positions of paid organisers in Uzbekistan was reportedly an important step forward.<sup>43</sup> The “number of Zhenotdel organisers in Central Asia rose from 50 to 103” and “the number of indigenous women involved in work increased from 6% to 30%, drawn from Uzbek, Kirghiz and Turkmen women”. The capacity to reach out to indigenous women was improved significantly because “45% of organisers can now speak a native language”.<sup>44</sup> Liubimova commended the activity of 50 indigenous women members of the Chinese club in Uzbekistan who, once stimulated into action, “put themselves at the forefront of every campaign in the village”, including during the land reforms of 1925 when they “went with their red banner to villagers and to surrounding villages informing Uzbek women of their equal rights to water and land under the Soviet administration.”<sup>45</sup>

The active involvement of indigenous women was a major boost to the Central Asian Zhenotdel. In chapter two I referred to Marianne Kamp’s analysis of their participation in the Zhenotdel as a symbol of their shared agenda on women’s rights. Their participation also reflected the policies of Korenizatsiia within the National Delimitation process, which promoted the involvement of the indigenous intelligentsia in the CPSU and Soviet establishment.<sup>46</sup> The importance of clubs for secluded women was often stressed in articles up to 1927. In 1924, Liubimova

---

<sup>40</sup> Z. Prishchepchik, ‘Opyt raboty klubov v Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 76-78

<sup>41</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

<sup>42</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Bor’ba na ideologicheskome fronte’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 74-76

<sup>43</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>44</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Turkestane’, *Kommunistka*, 7(1924), pp.19-20

<sup>45</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Turkestane’, *Kommunistka*, 7(1924), pp.19-20

<sup>46</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press 2001), pp. 154-170 for a discussion of the categorisation of various national groups for the purposes of state building



claimed that “the work to establish clubs in the East has proved itself in practice. Through them the Zhenotdel can reach out to Muslim women and involve them in education.”<sup>47</sup> Their importance was evident in the fact that they:

...can facilitate women firstly moving from an enclosed way of life into social and economic life within the club, and then, through their experience in the club, to make connections with other establishments, including co-operatives, trade unions and soviets.<sup>48</sup>

Thus clubs were specially designed to “answer the aspiration of Eastern women who are now awakening to the fact that the Russian revolution has taken place. It allows them to become educated, to take up economic activity outside the home, and become involved in social activities while at the same time not putting her on a collision course with the local customs and way of life.”<sup>49</sup> This latter point was crucial for the Zhenotdel. Indigenous women would not be willing or able to attend clubs unless they could do so in safety.

The work of clubs had suffered from the outset from lack of funding. Terry Martin describes a fierce battle between 1924 and 1926 for investment from the “cultural fund” for areas such as Central Asia.<sup>50</sup> It appears from the numerous complaints of Zhenotdel members that they received very little, if anything, from this fund. The financial situation of the Central Zhenotdel was also extremely precarious and it appears that it was unable to provide the Central Asian Zhenotdel with anything more than limited human resources.<sup>51</sup> Yet, despite the many obstacles, Liubimova was adamant in a report of the All-Union Meeting of Women’s Clubs in November 1926, that “it is beyond question that women’s clubs are an essential and unique form of Party work among women.”<sup>52</sup> They “are vital above all in that they organise Eastern women through providing practical assistance to them and by closing entry to men. They provide the possibility for a secluded woman to go

---

<sup>47</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Kursy volostnykh organizatorov’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pg. 49

<sup>48</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Formy i metody massovoi raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnikh narodov’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp.67-75

<sup>49</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Formy i metody raboty v zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1925), pp. 84-87.

<sup>50</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 129-132

<sup>51</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade*, chapter 6

<sup>52</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pervoe vsesoiuzhoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

freely to the club, to uncover her face and to feel as comfortable as she would in the women's quarter."<sup>53</sup>

### 4.3 Nomadic Women

In addition to their ambition to draw secluded women into social and economic activity in Uzbek and Tajik sedentary areas, the Zhenotdel resolved to organise among women in the nomadic regions. In chapter three I have described how the 1921 All-Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East had resolved to create travelling clubs, known as Red Yurts, as the main form of work in these regions and how these Red Yurts were to include "literacy classes, medical consultations, obstetrics units, trading stations and legal advice."<sup>54</sup> Activists reported that they often had to approach husbands and fathers before they could access women, who were described as very frightened by these European strangers. One report stated that "At first we even began to educate men in literacy within the yurt. Then 40 women - their wives - registered with the school." After that "public health advice corners, economic assistance corners and Lenin corners opened."<sup>55</sup> Also "an adobe hut was built for a children's nursery" which was visited by medical practitioners.<sup>56</sup> One question which dominated articles on work in nomadic regions was what was described as the battle "with dirt which is extremely bad and threatens the survival of the population." Putilovskaya argued in 1921 for bathhouses to be set up among the Kirghiz population along with "model kitchens" to teach women the importance of cleanliness and good diet. There had "to be a serious struggle with TB and venereal disease and to educate nomadic women in ways of predicting, preventing and treating these diseases."<sup>57</sup> This view of nomadic women as profoundly regressive and surrounded by filth and disease persisted throughout the decade.

---

<sup>53</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Pervoe vsesiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

<sup>54</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Kirgizii', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923): pp. 43-45

<sup>55</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Pervoe vsesiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

<sup>56</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Pervoe vsesiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

<sup>57</sup> Putilovskaya, 'Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka' *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

It also dictated the priorities of work among village women in these regions. Liubimova reported in 1927 on an initiative, known as a “Dekhan women’s house”, in Turkmenistan which catered for 20 peasant women from nearby villages. She proudly announced that the peasant woman “could stay in the house for two weeks, where she would be provided with her own bed linen and European clothes if she chose to wear them”. She would “become familiar with the idea of using soap, attend the bathhouse and see the doctor at the Dekhan house.”<sup>58</sup>

Although there was some work done to bring Turkmen and Kirghiz women into cooperatives, the Zhenotdel found it even more difficult to relate to nomadic and semi-nomadic women and took an extremely negative view of their culture and life-style. Paradoxically it wanted to make them into good housewives rather than seeking to liberate them from domestic drudgery.

#### 4.4 Co-operatives and economic work

Konkordiia Samoilova expressed a central premise of the Zhenotdel in 1920 when she argued that economic independence outside the home was crucial in transforming the lives of Eastern women.<sup>59</sup> This commitment was articulated in a resolution to the Women’s Secretariat of Comintern in 1921 on work among Eastern women which asserted that through participation in artels “working women will be become aware their own experiences of the oppressive nature of work in the household economy. They will be able to contrast it to work in the public sphere which will emancipate them.”<sup>60</sup> It was considered that experience of work outside the home would be positive and rewarding, both financially and socially. The April 1921 All-Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East adopted a strategy to facilitate this empowerment. It was agreed to:

---

<sup>58</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pervoe vsesiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

<sup>59</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp 31-32

<sup>60</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii i vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

[b]egin work by approaching women already making handicraft goods and create artels among them, while at the same time encouraging the development of their class consciousness. Among peasant and nomadic women, Zhenotdel branches must begin to work with the poorest elements of the population. In those parts where there are no farm workers and no handicraft women workers the Zhenotdel must concentrate on organising housewives using methods of agitation within the home.<sup>61</sup>

The Zhenotdel planned to create collectives among women who were already producing handicraft goods within the home. It would build this tiny workforce by drawing previously isolated housewives into clubs where they could be educated and given the possibility of becoming economically independent of their families. The aim was for the construction of a Central Asian female proletariat liberated from the repression of patriarchal family life, educated, skilled and class conscious.

There were reports that initial efforts to set up cooperatives had met with success. Liubimova reported in 1923 that the “Central Asian Zhenotdel had organised 4,000 handicraft women workers by 1921” and had set up technical courses “for 35 Uzbek and Kirghiz female students in Tashkent”. However the introduction of NEP had led to “a loss of working capital and raw materials and the subsequent collapse of many existing artels.”<sup>62</sup> She complained that NEP had not just been disastrous for the Zhenotdel, but for working women themselves: “Even as compared to the reduction in the number of women involved in production in Russia, the participation of proletarian women in the workplace within the Soviet East, already very small, is now virtually non-existent.”<sup>63</sup> Other writers criticised the lack of financial support, including from Soviet cooperative organisations. A comrade Kislova pointed to the obstacles which the Bureau encountered in nomadic Turkmen regions where:

[d]espite the desire of Turkmen women to organise artels the resources do not exist to set them up. We need funds to purchase raw materials for artels

---

<sup>61</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>62</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>63</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

in carpet making and spinning. The Joint Producers' Cooperatives in the region which should help are refusing to do so. Materials can only be bought upfront for cash and there are no preferential terms or credit. This is no good as neither we nor indigenous Turkmen women themselves have any money.<sup>64</sup>

Kislova argued that the refusal to assist the development of a carpet making industry had closed off a promising avenue for economic development. She complained that despite evident opportunities, there was a stubborn refusal among local Party members and co-operatives to accept that women could be of benefit to the economy. Liubimova returned to the subject in January 1924, complaining about the downward trend in production among indigenous women. She noted that "in the period of war communism we had a reasonably good network of artels in Eastern areas. But with NEP these were damaged to the point where now we do not even have a single economically productive artel."<sup>65</sup> The withdrawal of state funding meant that there was little training available for women. Liubimova observed that "the government's point of view women's artels do not justify themselves as they need financing. This means that the organisation of handicraft women workers is not considered supportable."<sup>66</sup> She argued that this narrow short-termism had to be overcome through recognising the long-term benefits of involving and training women in the economy.<sup>67</sup> For indigenous women to make a positive contribution to the Central Asian economy there needed to be substantial financial and organisational backing from the Central Committee and Soviet organisations.

Notwithstanding these problems, the Central Asian Zhenotdel pushed on to implement the decisions of the second All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in March 1923. These included a commitment to "redouble our efforts to bring Eastern women into productive work, through artels and technical courses. At the end of the debate we passed a resolution committing delegates to bring Eastern women into all forms of cooperative building."<sup>68</sup> At a Central Asian

---

<sup>64</sup> Kislova, 'Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>65</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Pis'ma iz Turkestana', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

<sup>66</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Pis'ma iz Turkestana', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

<sup>67</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Pis'ma iz Turkestana', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

<sup>68</sup> S. Liubimova, 'K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

meeting the following year delegates pledged “to set up an artel in every uyzed (district) over the summer period.”<sup>69</sup> Plans were made to focus on carpet making in Turkmenistan, cattle herding in Kazakhstan, silk production and market gardening in Uzbekistan. There were also efforts to set up farming cooperatives in 1925.<sup>70</sup> Because artels were almost completely women-only environments, often within or connected to women’s clubs, women were isolated from general cooperatives and they did “not have the right to go to the market to sell their goods.”<sup>71</sup> The Zhenotdel tried to establish links “with the General Cooperative Bank, the Department of Trade and trade unions” to overcome these obstacles. *Kommunistka* writers pleaded with the general co-operative movement to recognise that women’s participation was an essential ingredient in a strong economy. Hence “drawing women into work and providing them with wages is of social and political importance because they will then consider themselves equal members of society and put their efforts into developing the economy.”<sup>72</sup> Without raw materials and the ability to sell their products this could not be achieved. Despite continuous requests for assistance, in September 1925 Seifi complained bitterly that, “still practically nothing has been done to organise women handicraft workers. We have to put this work on a systematic footing or it will fail.”<sup>73</sup>

Articles written in advance of annual International Women’s Day commemorations on March 8 called for the collectivisation of women handicraft workers to be a priority for all communists. In 1927, Liubimova requested that “questions of ‘results and tasks’ of work among women must be placed before all Party cells and meetings, the Komsomol, trade unions and peasant meetings.”<sup>74</sup> This would facilitate the “cooperation of women in silk weaving, dairy farming and market gardening with which women are already familiar”. However, by May of that year, Bolshakov complained that “there has been no real attempt by the general cooperatives to do work with women. The situation is very bad despite there being

---

<sup>69</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Turkestane’, *Kommunistka*, 7(1924), pp.19-20

<sup>70</sup> Z. Prishchik, ‘Opyt raboty klubov v Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 76-79

<sup>71</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>72</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>73</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pomoshch’ v proizvodstve zhenshchin v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 75-80

<sup>74</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

a clear foundation on which to develop this work.”<sup>75</sup> She pointed to a number of problems including “a lack of professional organisers to set up and run women’s handicraft artels, an absence of available credit and virtually non-existent links between handicraft artels and general markets. She also highlighted the conservatism of the male population which does not recognise the importance of bringing women together in cooperatives.”<sup>76</sup> All responsibility for work amongst women was left to the Zhenotdel which was bogged down with underfunding, disorganisation, a lack of skilled workers and isolation. The inability of the Artels to become financially viable meant that women were unlikely to become involved. The vision of emancipation through work could never become a reality in such a hostile environment. In fact the perception of handicraft work as an inferior form of production plagued the Zhenotdel. Kasparova complained that “there is a view that handicraft work is not equal to men’s work, as it is seen as merely the normal duties of a woman within the home.”<sup>77</sup> The lack of respect for this type of production was compounded by the fact that “women are not allowed to go to the market and sell their goods.”<sup>78</sup> This situation was, of course, a key obstacle to the project. Without an income from sales, both the women themselves and the artels remained penniless.

There were attempts to create farming cooperatives among women who had been granted land during the land reforms of 1925. A woman was required to be the head of the household to receive land and, therefore, widows and single women were the only ones to qualify. Because of the isolation of such women from family support systems and the general antipathy of the male population toward them, it was vital for them to pool their resources, share equipment and assist each other with planting and harvesting. The Zhenotdel had been making efforts from 1925 to encourage women to demand land from their local Soviets and to organise together.<sup>79</sup> Writing in May 1927, Liubimova reported some success with this

---

<sup>75</sup> V. Bolshakov, ‘Koooperirovanii zhenshchin v Vostochnykh natsional’nykh raionakh’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp.53-55

<sup>76</sup> V. Bolshakov, ‘Koooperirovanii zhenshchin v Vostochnykh natsional’nykh raionakh’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp.53-55

<sup>77</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>78</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>79</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

project, in that “more than 1,500 single women in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan [had] received land.”<sup>80</sup> The Zhenotdel had also began “to encourage women in cattle breeding regions of Kirgizia and Kazakhstan to form co-operatives.”<sup>81</sup> Liubimova argued that success in creating farming cooperatives would “improve the prestige of collectivisation among women” because of the low prestige of handicraft work.<sup>82</sup> This attitude contrasted with the high status accorded to large-scale agricultural work within Soviet policy which Liubimova clearly wanted to reconcile. Barbara Evans Clements identifies this as a central difference between the small-scale co-operative model of the Zhenotdel and the monopolistic industrial approach of the Party leadership. She argues that for the Zhenotdel “the essence of communism was not technology and social organization, but a transformed individual.”<sup>83</sup> By 1927 the Zhenotdel was under a great deal of pressure to defend its strategy of handicraft cooperatives, which would shortly fall victim to the Five Year Plan.

#### 4.5 Women Only Shops

In the context of the difficult struggle to make progress with economic work among indigenous women, the launch of the first women-only shop in Uzbekistan in late 1925 was an important breakthrough. Opened in Tashkent, it reportedly drew in 400 Uzbek women in its first weeks of operation, with a further eight shops being opened in the Tashkent district in the following weeks.<sup>84</sup> Liubimova contended that the crucial reason behind the success of the initiative lay in the exclusion of men from the shops:

The absence of men means that a woman can remove her veil and talk with the staff, while at the same time selecting the goods she needs.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘O kooperirovanii zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 51-52

<sup>81</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘O kooperirovanii zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 51-52

<sup>82</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘O kooperirovanii zhenshchin vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 51-52

<sup>83</sup> B. Evans Clements ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’, *Slavic Review*, Vol 51 (No. 3 Autumn 1992), pp. 485-496

<sup>84</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1926), pp. 56-59

<sup>85</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.70-72



Formally part of the general consumer cooperative, the Zhenotdel was able to announce in June 1926 that there were then 1,500 Uzbek women organised in cooperatives.<sup>86</sup> Liubimova pointed to a notable increase in the numbers joining cooperatives since the creation of women-only shops, with the number of Uzbek women in cooperatives rising from 225 in October 1925 to 1,500 in October 1926.<sup>87</sup>

The majority of shops were set up between 1925 and 1926, and by May 1927 there were a reported 27 shops in operation. The venture was described as having proven to be a “very successful commercial initiative.”<sup>88</sup> The women-only shops were formally located within the consumer co-operatives and could connect with handicraft and other artels, as women producing goods within their homes. The success of this project was clearly a boost to the Zhenotdel members. Indeed it was claimed by one activist, Butusova in September 1927, that the women’s shops were proving to be far more commercially viable than general shops:

Not a single one of the women’s shops within the consumer co-operative is running at a loss. On the contrary the average profit in the women’s shops is higher than in the general shops.<sup>89</sup>

In the Kokand district of Uzbekistan it was reported that “the women’s shop had recruited 328 women between 1<sup>st</sup> October 1926 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 1927, whereas in contrast the total number of men recruited to similar cooperatives in that district during the same period was only 128.”<sup>90</sup> The shops were claimed to provide a very valuable service in supplying scarce goods to women cooperative members. One example given was “the distribution among shareholders of the scarce ‘kok tea’ which is a green tea used by the local population.”<sup>91</sup> Shops also provided credit facilities to peasant women on favourable terms with long term instalment repayment schemes. They provided an income to those who sold goods within them and a profit to shareholders who invested. Butusova claimed that in Kokand “the bonuses which were due to shareholders in the sum of 14-17 roubles were

---

<sup>86</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotorye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

<sup>87</sup> M. Tunik, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 56-58

<sup>88</sup> M. Tunik, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 56-58

<sup>89</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>90</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>91</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

reinvested voluntarily by the shareholders in order to strengthen their shares”, and that “the average size of a share in a woman’s shop is higher than that in a man’s shop.”<sup>92</sup>

There also appears to have been some advance in creating broader organisation around the shops. A report in 1927 stated that a “special meeting of women’s shop managers has been held, with participation from managers, representatives of shop committees and cooperative workers.”<sup>93</sup> It was claimed that monthly meetings were “held within the shops to discuss cooperative methods, with literature available to provide guidance to participants on this issue.”<sup>94</sup> A 5% contribution was made by the cooperative members to allow the setting up of “mother and baby corners.”<sup>95</sup>

Reports in *Kommunistka* claimed that the project of women only shops was making enormous progress within indigenous society. In September 1927 Butusova argued that the shops were successful precisely because they accorded with the patterns of indigenous life and met the needs and aspirations of women for more freedom. Uzbek women could now shop alone, uninhibited by a veil or the overbearing presence of husbands or fathers. With their faces uncovered it was far easier for them to inspect the condition of the items for sale. In July 1926, Liubimova wrote of her visit to a Tashkent shop where “women freely removed their veils, sold their own produce and selected the goods they wanted to buy.”<sup>96</sup> Women’s shops presented no immediate threat to indigenous norms, as husbands had little difficulty with their wives going out to shop in a woman-only environment, especially as they were relieved of the burden of having to go to the market themselves.<sup>97</sup> Because of this “the Uzbek man looks on women-only shops approvingly. He can freely allow his wife to go there as it does not interfere with his traditions and he is not afraid that she will meet men.”<sup>98</sup> Thus in 1927 when

---

<sup>92</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>93</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>94</sup> V. Bolshakov, ‘Koooperirovanii zhenshchin v Vostochnykh natsional’nykh raionakh’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp.53-55

<sup>95</sup> V. Bolshakov, ‘Koooperirovanii zhenshchin v Vostochnykh natsional’nykh raionakh’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp.53-55

<sup>96</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.70-72

<sup>97</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>98</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

the Sredazburo was leading a campaign to destroy the fabric of indigenous society, a section of Zhenotdel activists were, in contrast, seeking ways to work within that same society. The fact that they continued to pursue this strategy in the face of demands to build the unveiling campaign reflected a firm resolve among some activists to resist the Communist Party leadership, both nationally and regionally.

Zhenotdel activists insisted that shops provided a unique environment to access and recruit indigenous women to the Soviet project. There were “readings and discussions of the journal *Yangi Yol*” - the Turkic language journal of the Zhenotdel. Shops were described as “providing a means through which the Party can enlighten women who are otherwise completely secluded.”<sup>99</sup> This was a reflection of the arguments used in support of setting up clubs in 1921 - that a form of organisation which was of practical use to indigenous women would also facilitate their recruitment to the Soviet project. Liubimova was so enthusiastic that she called for the initiative to be extended to Turkmenistan where “women only markets could be held where women can bring their produce to sell and buy the goods they want for themselves.”<sup>100</sup> In May 1927 Tunik claimed that “the social and political role of the shops is very great”, with crèches, cafes, and various forms of meetings taking place.<sup>101</sup> The social role was represented in that “we have mother and baby corners in ten shops, where Uzbek women can receive basic items for the care of children, with medical consultations and medication also provided.”<sup>102</sup> The active participation of indigenous Zhenotdel activists in running the shops meant that staff members spoke Uzbek. According to reports, activists were so dedicated to the project that they worked long hours for low pay.<sup>103</sup>

According to Zhenotdel reports, women’s shops were able to fulfil the functions that clubs were originally designed for. They could “involve Uzbek women in cooperatives, train them in skills, raise cultural levels among them, engage in education on everyday issues, and provide political education.”<sup>104</sup> Women’s shops provided a setting that indigenous women could feel at ease within, which met

---

<sup>99</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>100</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.70-72

<sup>101</sup> M. Tunik, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927),pp. 56-58

<sup>102</sup> M. Tunik, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927),pp. 56-58

<sup>103</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>104</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

their needs and facilitated the Zhenotdel's transformation project. One report stated that following a reading of *Yangi Yol* there were "group discussions among customers, usually initiated by the customers asking a manager about a particular question. When she answers there is then a discussion involving all those present."<sup>105</sup> Butusova described a "sense in which Uzbek women are finding their own answers to questions about their own lives which they could never obtain within their home environment."<sup>106</sup>

However, while the shops apparently provoked no antagonism from indigenous men, the same was not true of the attitude of male Party members. It is unclear whether the disapproval emanated from Russian or indigenous Party members, but one report stated that activists had been warned by their male comrades that "women's shops would lead to the creation of a separate women's cooperative and undermine the recruitment of working Uzbek women into the general cooperative movement. They would lead to a feminist organisation, resembling the women's cooperatives in western class society."<sup>107</sup> These claims were made despite Liubimova's insistence that the shops were a formal part of the general shop cooperative organisation; "The shops do not have their own governing body but operate under the leadership of the consumer cooperative's governing body. The full system of accounts, the supply of goods and the management of money reflects the connections with the general system of cooperatives."<sup>108</sup> Moreover "every shop manager is a member of the Communist Party with close links with local party committees. And shop staff work under the leadership of the party."<sup>109</sup> However it appears that these assurances did not suffice. Anna Artiukhina reported in January 1928 that the number of "shops had increased to 43 by October 1927 bringing together 5,946 indigenous women and were clearly a success."<sup>110</sup> Despite this "a directive was issued by the cooperative leadership and without the knowledge of the Zhenotdel, for women-only shops to be turned into general shops". The reason given by the cooperative leadership, according to Artiukhina was "that it was unnecessary to have separate shops for women when

<sup>105</sup> E. Butusova, 'Zhenskii lavki v Uzbekistane', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>106</sup> E. Butusova, 'Zhenskii lavki v Uzbekistane', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>107</sup> E. Butusova, 'Zhenskii lavki v Uzbekistane', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>108</sup> S. Liubimova, 'O kooperirovanii zhenshchin vostochnykh narodov', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 51-52.

<sup>109</sup> S. Liubimova, 'O kooperirovanii zhenshchin vostochnykh narodov', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 51-52.

<sup>110</sup> A. Artiukhina, 'Ot 'nastupleniia' k sistematocheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniiu raboty v Sredei Azii)', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

they had unveiled.”<sup>111</sup> Artiukhina expressed particular anger that this decision had been taken in circumstances where the majority of women had re-veiled.<sup>112</sup>

The liquidation of women-only shops was undoubtedly perceived as a major setback for the Zhenotdel’s work in Central Asia. Marianne Kamp describes how some activists considered the shops “to be a stroke of genius.”<sup>113</sup> She describes the publication of a story in *Yangi Yo’l* which portrayed the many benefits of the women-only shops and encouraged indigenous women to join what would be a life-changing experience, allowing them to be “released from oppression” and obtain work and education.<sup>114</sup> This strong support from *Yangi Yo’l* suggests that shops were a grassroots initiative which reflected the aspirations of indigenous activists. It also shows that a significant section of Zhenotdel activists, both Russian and Uzbek, were pursuing a very different policy toward indigenous society than the Party leadership. The Central Committee had hitherto done little but issue formal calls for support of the Zhenotdel. In its call for an assault on indigenous society in 1926 and its support for the Sredazburo’s unveiling campaign, the Central Committee had shown that it had little interest in culturally sensitive forms of transformation. The continued existence of women-only protected spaces was in fact an impediment to the Central Committee strategy. Instead of safeguarding their welfare, it demanded that indigenous women place themselves at the frontline of highly dangerous unveiling campaign.

#### 4.6 Delegate Meetings versus Clubs

The 1921 the Zhenotdel Meeting of Activists among Women of the East agreed that delegate meetings were not an appropriate method of organisation at that time in the region. Kollontai described her hope that women would be drawn “into clubs and then progress to delegate meetings and after that to membership of the

---

<sup>111</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>112</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>113</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 111

<sup>114</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 110

Communist Party.”<sup>115</sup> Clubs remained the main form of organisation until late 1925, after which they were supplemented by women-only shops. Delegate meetings would have required women being sent to work in male dominated environments, and Liubimova and her supporters believed that Central Asian women were still a long way from taking that step.<sup>116</sup>As the section on women’s clubs illustrated, Liubimova retained a strong commitment to building local women-only organisational forms.

However, from 1926, clear moves were initiated to implement a policy which was counter-posed to the prevailing strategy. These came initially from Zavaryan, who appeared to be a supporter of Anna Nukrat, herself a staunch Party loyalist, and soon to become the leading voice of the Central Committee and Sredazburo in Central Asia. Zavaryan complained in July 1926 that “there is a tendency for activists to concentrate all their work in clubs and red corners.”<sup>117</sup> She claimed that efforts to set up delegate meetings in Uzbekistan had failed only because of lack of support from the Zhenotdel. And while not demanding that delegate meetings completely replace clubs, she demanded that they at least partially supersede clubs as a key form of work among indigenous Uzbek women. She called for activists to “lose their negative attitudes toward delegate meetings in the coming year” and “begin to place some value on this method of work.”<sup>118</sup> She criticised those Zhenotdel activists who believed “delegate meetings to be an inappropriate form of work in Central Asia and hence put no effort into building them.”<sup>119</sup> In contrast, Zavaryan insisted that they were essential in order to “consolidate Party influence over indigenous women.”<sup>120</sup> For this to be achieved they needed to be set up only where there was local Party organisation, “as experience has shown that we cannot achieve any success in remote areas where there is a great deal of backwardness.”<sup>121</sup> She and others also believed that, without direct Party involvement, the Zhenotdel could be taken over by anti-

---

<sup>115</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii i vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

<sup>116</sup> S. Anisimova, ‘K itogam raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp. 56-60, where Anisimova as a supporter of the Hujum argues against the view that women needed clubs.

<sup>117</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

<sup>118</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

<sup>119</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

<sup>120</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

<sup>121</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

Soviet elements.<sup>122</sup> It is interesting that Zavaryan's demands emerged in a period when work among indigenous women appeared to be achieving some success. She reflected a strand of thinking which wanted the Party to dominate indigenous society, not to work alongside it in the manner attempted by the Zhenotdel up to that time.

In the same issue of *Kommunistka*, Liubimova countered that clubs continued to be invaluable precisely because they "assisted the spread of the influence of the Party."<sup>123</sup> However, perhaps surrendering to pressure to show more Party loyalty in September that year, she conceded that "delegate meetings could be set up among students to connect them to the Party and Komsomol."<sup>124</sup> Yet she continued to disregard them as a method of organising among working and peasant women. Zinaida Prishchepchik who was appointed head of the Uzbek Zhenotdel that year supported Liubimova and insisted that "women's clubs remain the central form of work in Central Asia" and were proving indispensable in organising teachers and conducting education.<sup>125</sup> She claimed that the number of clubs had risen to 34 at that stage, although only 16 clubs had their own premises.

Although there is no report in *Kommunistka* of Liubimova being removed from her position as head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, and she continued to write in the journal up to late 1928, it is clear that opposition to her leadership was developing from June 1926, as indicated in Zavaryan's criticism of the strategy of the Zhenotdel under her leadership. Interestingly Richard Stites reported that the Central Committee issued a circular letter in 1927 to local Party organisations "noting their failure to make sufficient use of the delegate meetings to mobilise women around pressing tasks of the Party."<sup>126</sup> Anna Nukrat, by then the key voice if not the formal leader of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, took up the leadership's call for delegate meetings in July 1927. She complained that "up to now our members have not valued delegate meetings as a method of organisation."<sup>127</sup> In

---

<sup>122</sup> N. Zavaryan, 'Delegatski sovershennnie v Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.35-40

<sup>123</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Zhenskie lavki v Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.70-72

<sup>124</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Bor'ba na ideologicheskome fronte', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 74-76

<sup>125</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Bor'ba na ideologicheskome fronte', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 74-76

<sup>126</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Movement in Russia, Feminism Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press 1990), pg. 342

<sup>127</sup> A. Nukrat, 'Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

common with Zavaryan, she argued that delegate meetings were to be established only where the Party had a base, and that “every delegate meeting must have clear practical tasks connected with the local needs of the region.” They should also take on work previously done by clubs to develop “the dairy, and market gardening collectives, handicraft artels, silk-worm nurseries as well as setting up crèches within these collectives.”<sup>128</sup> She believed that delegate meetings would “play a central role in the struggle with obstinate problem of kulaks, the Muslim clergy and the clan system of family.”<sup>129</sup> She saw them as a weapon in fighting against indigenous society.

As part of this strategy delegate meetings were now to aim at drawing indigenous women into elections to the Soviets. By June 1929, Artiukhina boasted that, in relation to the recruitment of women to delegate meetings organised for elections “we have made a huge step forward” and “can now report that 25% of the membership of Eastern soviets are women.”<sup>130</sup> There were demands for the ambit of delegate meetings to be extended to organise events like March 8<sup>th</sup> in order to “win the battle with vestiges of prejudice” and ensure the “continued activity of working women.”<sup>131</sup> In 1929 Prishepchik, head of the Uzbek Zhenotdel, Nukrat and others boasted of the superior nature of delegate meetings in electing women to the Soviets and in providing support for mass collectivisation. By this point in time, the Zhenotdel leadership had shifted away completely from self-organisation to bringing groups of indigenous women together to hear speeches and vote in elections.<sup>132</sup> Delegate meetings clearly appear to have operated as an instrument of the Central Committee and Sredazburo.

There is no evidence in *Kommunistka* of any direct action or decision was taken by the Zhenotdel to close down existing clubs. Instead voices like Nukrat and Zavaryan led a campaign to undermine them by shifting the focus of work away from them. Delegate meetings were superior in their view because they worked directly with and were under the control of the Party. In their view, delegate meetings could provide more effective Party leadership and avoid the isolation

---

<sup>128</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>129</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>130</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Zakrepit’ vnov’ vydvynutyie kadry’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1929), pp.3-10

<sup>131</sup> Sh. Karimova, ‘Na bor’bu s bytovymi pereshitkami’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1929), pp.43-45

<sup>132</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Podniat novye plasty Vostochnits’, *Kommunistka*, 17-18 (1929), pp.17-20



experienced by Zhenotdel activists within clubs. In 1927 delegate meetings remained generally women-only environments, but there was a shift in 1929 towards involving men also.<sup>133</sup> Liubimova continued her battle against the liquidation of clubs against these pressures to close them down, stating in January 1927 that “it is vital for local Party organisations to support clubs.”<sup>134</sup> However, by December of that year, because of the disruptive impact of the Hujum, many clubs had become extremely neglected and some were completely abandoned.<sup>135</sup> The strategy of women-only organisation had aimed at creating culturally sensitive avenues to social and economic independence from the family. The Hujum demanded the opposite. It confronted indigenous society with the aim to destroy it. Although club work continued to be mentioned sporadically in *Kommunistka* after 1927, it is clear that the nature of the project had changed. Now delegate meetings had become the main method of organising indigenous women for the purposes of the Five Year Plan.<sup>136</sup>

#### 4.7 The impact of the Hujum

As discussed above, the core principle of women-only organisation in Uzbekistan had been a belief that a culturally appropriate environment was a prerequisite to engage with indigenous women. Secluded women could go to clubs and shops wearing the paranji and chachvon and remove them in safety in a male free environment.<sup>137</sup> In the absence of a mass revolution against seclusion, the only way to tackle it was by encouraging indigenous women to take gradual steps forward. This approach represented a complete contradiction with the Hujum and, as described in chapter 2 and 3, the issue of women’s safety became an immediate concern for many Zhenotdel activists once the unveiling campaign was announced.

---

<sup>133</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Podniat novye plasty Vostochnits’, *Kommunistka*, 17-18 (1929), pp.17-20.

<sup>134</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pervoe vsesiuzhoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33.

<sup>135</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>136</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Podniat novye plasty Vostochnits’, *Kommunistka*, 17-18 (1929), pp.17-20

<sup>137</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.70-72

In August 1927, Anisimova, a supporter of the Hujum, took to task “those who had argued that it was necessary to educate first and then unveil.”<sup>138</sup> Instead, she claimed, the Hujum had coincided with “a massive influx of women into schools clubs and Soviet organisations.”<sup>139</sup> Unveiled women had “an enormous hunger for knowledge, education and work within society.”<sup>140</sup> She also denied that there had been any negative response to the unveiling campaign and argued that in fact there had been “a very supportive response from male workers. Frequently non-Party workers announce that they have unveiled their wives, in many circumstances before Party members.”<sup>141</sup> But Anisimova’s enthusiastic report was deeply misleading. In the same issue of the journal, Konkordiia Nikolaeva admitted that after “the great success on March 8<sup>th</sup> the pace of the unveiling campaign slackened and women started to veil again.”<sup>142</sup> She then proceeded to describe various attacks on unveiled women, including “the rape of an Uzbek woman in Tashkent” and “the killing of two women in the Yangi-Yulsk district” in the aftermath of March 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>143</sup> It does not appear that there had been arrests were made but she believed that these killings were the work of indigenous men. She was very critical of male members of the Uzbek Communist Party and Komsomol for refusing to unveil their wives or support the Hujum. Nikolaeva blamed the clergy for inciting the hostile mood toward unveiling. She also held the Zhenotdel responsible for the failure to provide support and security for those women who answered the call to unveil. According to Nikolaeva, the Zhenotdel had “failed in not acting to immediately consolidate work with unveiled women and to draw them into its orbit.”<sup>144</sup>

Nikolaeva’s claim that the Zhenotdel had not absorbed unveiled women into its structures is highly convincing, in particular given the lack of coverage of the Hujum in *Kommunistka*. It seems that Zhenotdel activists had done little more than take part in the demonstrations on March 8<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>. And even these were not reported in *Kommunistka* at the time of the demonstrations. From

---

<sup>138</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>139</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>140</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>141</sup> S. Anisimova, ‘K itogam raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin Uzbekistana’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp. 56-60

<sup>142</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>143</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>144</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

Marianne Kamp's reports, it appears that, unlike *Kommunistka*, *Yangi Yo'l* did campaign for the Hujum from February 1927. It is also clear that indigenous women activists around the Zhenotdel responded positively to *Yangi Yo'l*. Tojixon Shodieva, editor of *Yangi Yo'l*, had been promoted to the Central Committee of the Uzbek Party and was the deputy leader of the Hujum Commission.<sup>145</sup> However, the Russian leader of the Uzbek Zhenotdel at the time, Prishchepchik, did not write anything in *Kommunistka* on the campaign. The key article on March 8<sup>th</sup>, entitled *March 8<sup>th</sup> in the East*, was penned by Liubimova, who was now Head of the All-Union Eastern Zhenotdel, who wrote at length about Uzbekistan but completely ignored the unveiling campaign.<sup>146</sup>

In January 1928, Aleksandra Artiukhina admitted that the Hujum had been a failure. She stated:

...although more than 90,000 women removed their veils from March to May 1927, now between 80-90% of those women have re-veiled". The problem as she saw it was that the campaign "treated the fight with the vestiges of patriarchy as a short term project, within which it was only necessary to direct the energies of the Party to March 8<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>."<sup>147</sup>

While "clubs and red corners were expected to turn their energies to consolidate the recruitment of unveiled women", in reality "not only did they fail to respond to do this, but existing club work was discarded". Artiukhina complained that "now every club is empty and neglected, and no women attend meetings."<sup>148</sup> She reported that a recent inspection revealed that "the women's shops which had been wholly successful both politically and economically" were "without the knowledge of the Zhenotdel leadership turned into general shops on the orders of the co-operative organs". She reported that these closures had been justified with the claim that there was no longer any need for separate shops in circumstances where women no longer wore a veil. Paradoxically, as Artiukhina points out, "the

---

<sup>145</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan*, pp. 162-178

<sup>146</sup> A. Artiukhina, 'Ot 'nastuplenie' k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62; M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan*, pg. 207

<sup>147</sup> A. Artiukhina, 'Ot 'nastuplenie' k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>148</sup> A. Artiukhina, 'Ot 'nastuplenie' k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

liquidation of women-only shops took place during the period of re-veiling after May 1927.”<sup>149</sup> The collapse of the clubs and the closure of the shops were clearly major losses for the Bureau and for the indigenous women who had participated in them. Artiukhina pointed out that many indigenous women no longer felt able to go out in the streets for fear of attack and many now harboured a deep distrust of Soviet authorities.<sup>150</sup>

The debate in *Kommunistka* in the run-up to the December 1928 All-Union Meeting of Workers among Women of the East reveals an organisation in crisis. While there was no direct challenge to the rationale behind the Hujum, there were plenty of criticisms of the way in which the campaign had been run. In particular, it was argued that unveiling had to be seen as a longer-term aim and that women needed to be protected from attacks.<sup>151</sup> Along with reports of the demise of shops and clubs, attempts to enrol girls in education also suffered. In August 1928, Smirnova wrote with alarm at the collapse in the number of girls attending school because of “attempts to forcibly introduce co-education, including the introduction of boys to girl’s schools in Uzbekistan, all of which ended in failure and a significant drop in the attendance of young girls.”<sup>152</sup> The view that separate education for women and girls was essential was shared by other activists. Khairova argued that gender segregated schools “have been proven to work in practice and have been very important.”<sup>153</sup> The sense that women and girls were being seriously let down by local Party organisations abandoning this work was palpable. Both Russian and indigenous Zhenotdel activists watched as all of their efforts at developing women-centred education and economic independence were destroyed.

As activists grasped at ways to rescue the situation two main themes emerged in the 1928 debate. The first was the proposal for the Uzbek government to issue a legal ban on the veil. The second was a call to disconnect the Zhenotdel’s work among women from Party authority. In chapter five I will consider the discussion around a proposal to issue a legal ban on the veil, which was supported by

---

<sup>149</sup>A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniiu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>150</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniiu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>151</sup> The debate took place from June to November 1928

<sup>152</sup> A. Smirnova, ‘Zhenskoe obrazovanie v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp. 82-83.

<sup>153</sup> Khairova, ‘K voprosu o zhenskom obrazovanii na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.86-87

Liubimova and a significant number of indigenous Zhenotdel activists. In chapter six I will consider the crisis provoked by the Hujum and the arguments for work among women to become independent from the Party.

#### 4.8 The First Five year Plan

In December 1927, at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Stalin announced a major change in economic policy. Terry Martin describes the First Five Year Plan as an offensive aimed “at rapid industrialisation, the abolition of private trade, collectivisation of agriculture, dekulakisation, and a greatly intensified and centralised dictatorship.”<sup>154</sup> ‘Dekulakisation’ was a policy aimed at cleansing the Soviet project of so-called alien better-off elements within the peasantry.<sup>155</sup> In January 1928, Anna Nukrat told Zhenotdel activists that they needed to completely shift the focus of their work away from cities, and go to the countryside to enforce the Five Year Plan. Activists had “to ensure that all cooperatives, clubs and artels fulfilled the targets set by the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress.”<sup>156</sup> Nukrat was at pains to reassure these activists that the Central Committee was finally fully supportive of developing economic work among indigenous women. At last there would be financial provision for cooperatives. Even more importantly, “in line with the decisions of Congress, the cooperative organs are now compelled to support the Zhenotdel in every way.” From now on there was to be “systematic support from cooperatives and collective farms, from those who previously saw Zhenotdel work as simply women’s nonsense and a waste of time.”<sup>157</sup> This news may have been welcomed by Zhenotdel activists frustrated at the closure of the women’s shops and the collapse of clubs and cooperatives during 1927. Yet there was a major difference between the previous strategy of small cooperatives in the form of artels and the new tasks of mass production. Stalin had demanded that all industry be nationalised “at an accelerated rate” and that “the small and scattered peasant farms transform into large united farms based on cultivation of the land

---

<sup>154</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 238

<sup>155</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 238

<sup>156</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘XV s’ezd i zadachi raboty sredi vostochnits krest’ianok’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 53-56

<sup>157</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘XV s’ezd i zadachi raboty sredi vostochnits krest’ianok’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 53-56

in common, and transfer to collective cultivation on the basis of a new and higher technique.”<sup>158</sup>

It is difficult to judge if this contradiction was immediately apparent to all Zhenotdel leaders. In February 1928, Liubimova argued that compliance with the Five Year Plan meant “setting up productive cooperatives in villages throughout the region.”<sup>159</sup> Sachudri, a new contributor to discussions on the East, made clear that there had to be an acceleration of efforts to create a mass female proletariat for the factories and plants soon to be built in Central Asia. This author complained in very derogatory terms about the “low cultural level” and “ignorance” among local women.<sup>160</sup> According to Sachudri, indigenous women had “no discipline and often did not turn up for work.”<sup>161</sup> The Zhenotdel was now directed to teach these women “industrial discipline and proper habits of work.”<sup>162</sup> Central Asian women had to conform to the requirements of an intensive plan of production. There would be no vacillation on these questions. Further directions to the Zhenotdel on “building the village economy” and “drawing peasant women onto large-scale agricultural courses” were published throughout the year and Zhenotdel activists were informed that “special funds had been allocated to set up Kolkhozy (collective farms).”<sup>163</sup> Women were to be sent on special courses to be taught farming methods in dairy, poultry and cultivation and to ensure that they “fully understand the importance of large-scale agriculture.”<sup>164</sup>

In an article in January 1929, Nukrat made clear that veiling remained “the main obstacle to women becoming part of the workforce.”<sup>165</sup> It meant that they were “unable to work in factories or workshops, be part of collectives or undertake technical courses”. She proposed special measures be taken to physically protect unveiled women. Komsomol members, Party members, workers, Pioneers and

---

<sup>158</sup> J. Stalin, *Collected Works* Vol. 10 August-December 1927, (Foreign Languages Publishing Press Moscow 1954)

<sup>159</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

<sup>160</sup> Sachudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

<sup>161</sup> Sachudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

<sup>162</sup> Sachudri, ‘Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

<sup>163</sup> M. Maksimoro, ‘Krest’ianka-vostochnitsa v pereustroistve sel’skogo khoziastva’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.93-95.

<sup>164</sup> M. Maksimoro, ‘Krest’ianka-vostochnitsa v pereustroistve sel’skogo khoziastva’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.93-95

<sup>165</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

Soviet members “all need to be drawn into the task of defending ‘courageous’ unveiled women.”<sup>166</sup> Also, “special groups of men should be selected from the youth”, who could police districts, factories and other establishments to prevent any attacks on women on their way to and from work.<sup>167</sup> Conservative attitudes among indigenous men within cooperatives and trade unions and the “hostility and victimisation towards women entering factories” had to be overcome through compulsion; “the Central Committee must put pressure on general cooperatives and trade unions and call them to order for their attitudes.”<sup>168</sup>

By July 1929 there were claims that success had been achieved through the mobilisation of women in the creation of collective farms. Amosov, who it would seem was a Central Committee member, claimed that “the Party has demonstrated better leadership recently in the battle for unveiling.”<sup>169</sup> Stalin had announced a war on religious practice as part of the Five Year Plan, issuing a command to Party members to desist from all participation in religious practices and festivals. The Zhenotdel was tasked with assisting women who had refused to comply with the demands of the clergy.<sup>170</sup> Traditional society was to be transformed by attacking its cultural roots.<sup>171</sup> Intensive training of indigenous women became a central arena of activity for the Zhenotdel. Nukrat reported on the results of this work in an article in October 1929 where she argued for an even greater intensification of efforts - “special training courses must become a mass phenomenon. Courses must draw in hundreds of thousands of poor women, women agricultural workers and middle peasants.”<sup>172</sup> Instead of clubs or artels, indigenous women were now being prepared for collective farms, factories and plants which were being established all over Central Asia. Society was transformed intensely and abruptly, and all manner of tradition and culture which was not conducive to that strategy had to be confronted and destroyed. In March 1930 the final issue of *Kommunistka* featured an article on Women’s Day in the Soviet East, in which a comrade Sokolova wrote in strong terms of the major socio-economic

---

<sup>166</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

<sup>167</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

<sup>168</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

<sup>169</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 311 describes Amosov

as one of a number of “apparently authoritative figures in the central apparatus”

<sup>170</sup> A. Smirnova, ‘Pochin po bor’be s religiei na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1929), pg.27.

<sup>171</sup> F. Olushek, ‘Ukrepit’ antireligioznyi front’, *Kommunistka*, 15 (1929), pp. 9-13.

<sup>172</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Podniat novye plasty Vostochnits’, *Kommunistka*, 17-18 (1929), pp.17-20

transformation of Central Asia. She described how the “People’s economy is uprooting the remnants of capitalism and feudalism.”<sup>173</sup> For the East this meant “increasing the tempo of our battle with the remnants of clan society”, and with the practices of veiling, kalym, and seclusion of women. She announced that “workers’ brigades [were] being sent out to villages to assist with the liberation of women.” All of this was necessary in order to prepare for the “rolling out of a manufacturing economy in the Soviet East.” The 8<sup>th</sup> March celebrations had to be focused on the mass mobilisation of peasant and nomadic women in the various initiatives of the Five Year Plan. Women’s ‘brigades of model workers’ were to be sent out to inspect trade unions, factories and collective farms, in order to ensure that women were participating in all levels of collectivisation. The “broad masses of working men must take a direct part in the work of liberating women.”<sup>174</sup> The Zhenotdel was now liquidated, with Zhensektory - groups under the direct control of the Party - to continue the unveiling and mobilisation of Eastern women under the Five Year Plan.

#### 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the trajectory of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, from semi-autonomous forms of work to mass mobilisation under a centralised and authoritarian plan. The initial policy sought to bring indigenous women into the wider society in a manner which did not put them into direct conflict with their families and communities. It was hoped that some degree of financial independence and the experience of working outside the home would be a transformative experience. However, the success of this strategy demanded on financial, moral and political investment. In a climate dominated by NEP and a steady retreat from progressive and democratic principles, the Zhenotdel’s projects struggled to survive.

Besides the lack of support from Party organisations, the Zhenotdel initially faced serious obstacles of access to indigenous women. The first activists in the region

---

<sup>173</sup> A. Sokolova, ‘8 Marta na Sovetskom Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp.40-43

<sup>174</sup> A. Sokolova, ‘8 Marta na Sovetskom Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp.40-43



were Russian and did not speak the local languages. The decision in 1925 to promote indigenous women within the Zhenotdel contributed greatly to overcoming its isolation from the general population. *Kommunistka* reports a doubling in the number of activists almost overnight. The setting up of an Uzbek women's journal *Yangi Yo'l* and the involvement of a group of indigenous intellectuals around that project was important as was the opening of women-only shops which grew substantially in popularity and number over the course of two years. For a short period, it appeared that life for the female inhabitants of Uzbek cities was transforming in an incremental way which was in keeping with their own cultural experiences.

Ironically, 1926 and early 1927 appear to have been the highpoint of what we may term the policy of gradual, bottom-up change, as indigenous women began to make the project their own. It appears that there was an awareness within the Party - perhaps due to reports from the Zhenotdel to the Central Committee - of a growing mood of self-confidence among indigenous women in urban areas that prompted in turn the launch of the Hujum. Marianne Kamp has shown through her research on women who took part in the unveiling demonstrations that many of them had aspired to some form of emancipation.<sup>175</sup> One major problem for those who participated in the unveiling campaign was the lack of any real economic and social opportunities for them as unveiled women to be educated, work and live independently within wider society. The Zhenotdel's women-only economic and social initiatives were undermined by the Hujum and closed off that pathway to independence. There seems to have been was no option for them but to return to their old way of life.

In the central Asian context, the launch of the Hujum was undoubtedly, consciously or subconsciously, a pre-cursor to the Five Year Plan. It used moral and social compulsion to bring indigenous society under control. For the reasons that have been discussed by other writers, the Central Committee was determined that Central Asia would become an example of Soviet modernism. Until 1926 the oppression of Central Asian women was of no interest to the male leadership of the Party, nationally or locally. The Hujum allowed the Central Committee to

---

<sup>175</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 77-112

begin policing its members and to create a Party which appeared to be highly disciplined and militant. It also allowed it to launch a campaign against religion and peasant family life. When the First Five Year Plan was announced the process of softening up the population in that region had begun. The Zhenotdel leadership which developed around Anna Nukrat in 1927 believed firmly in the Party. They wanted indigenous women to break free of seclusion and to be employed in the general workforce. Any concept of autonomy was dismissed as either vacillation or bourgeois deviance. Despite the attempts of many activists to continue with their policy of incremental change, or to protest at the autocratic measures being taken, the Bureau had no power to prevent the changes which were to come. Central Asian simply had to fit in with the new order.

## Chapter 5

### The Legal Strategy of the Zhenotdel in Central Asia

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the Zhenotdel's legal programme in Central Asia. Efforts to ensure that Soviet family codes were properly implemented within the distinct social and cultural context of Central Asia became a major preoccupation for the Zhenotdel from 1923. In examining the various aspects its legal strategy, I locate this strategy within the Zhenotdel's overall programme of transformation and illustrate how it diverged from that of the Central Committee and Sredazburo.

Firstly, I consider the background to the Zhenotdel's utilisation of Soviet law to transform the Central Asian family, and the influence of Alexandra Kollontai on Serafima Liubimova, the principal proponent of this strategy. *Kommunistka* writers considered that Sharia and Adat laws codified the oppression of indigenous women. They were committed to the supersession of these laws as part of a programme "to untie the bonds which delay the economic and cultural development of the people."<sup>176</sup> This necessitated identifying effective ways to eradicate family practices such as polygyny, kalym, forced marriage, and child marriage, all of which were valid under Sharia and Adat law.<sup>177</sup> It also required that women be encouraged to seek to enforce their rights under Soviet law, including their right to divorce.

In contrast to its policy on economic and social transformation, the Zhenotdel's legal strategy presented a direct challenge to the indigenous family, at times betraying an insensitivity to the ramifications for women of bringing their husbands or fathers before the Soviet People's Courts. Success in persuading women over to exercise their legal rights could have terrible consequences, with few economic and social opportunities for women outside their traditional lives. I

---

<sup>176</sup> V. Kasparova, 'Novye rezervy na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925): pp. 21-27

<sup>177</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2004), pg.243

examine the debates among activists about the consequences of the legal strategy and the problems with obtaining the support of the local Party organisation.

In contrast to the Zhenotdel, the Central Committee and Sredazburo were very reluctant to enforce Soviet family law in Central Asia. The main source of concern for the CPSU appears to be the negative consequences for its own project of stirring up resentment among male supporters. Even after the aftermath of the Hujum, when a call for a decree against the veil emerged from the Zhenotdel, the Central Committee was very reluctant to take a legal route. It appears that it preferred to enforce compliance with required Soviet standards of behaviour through the Party apparatus at this stage, rather than utilising the formal structures of the state.

## 5.2 The Zhenotdel and Legal Change

Between 1917 and 1920 a number of decrees were issued by the Soviet government which fundamentally changed the legal status of women in the Soviet Union. These included the ending of religious sanction of marriage, the introduction of civil marriage, and divorce on request for both women and men. Women were declared equal under law and guaranteed equal pay for equal work as well as other protections in the workplace. New Family Codes set the minimum marriage age at 18 for males and 16 for females, and demanded the consent of both parties to marriage.<sup>178</sup> The concept of illegitimacy was abolished and abortion was legalised.

I have already illustrated Kollontai's continuing influence on the strategy of the Central Asian Zhenotdel both before and after her removal from Directorship of the Zhenotdel in 1922. As well as initiating distinct forms of social and economic organisation, Kollontai had a crucial role in extending Soviet family law to Central Asia. Furthermore, Liubimova, who played a central part in developing the legal

---

<sup>178</sup> R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia – Feminism Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press 1990) and L. A. Edgar 'Bolshevism Patriarchy and the Nation: The Soviet 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective' in *Slavic Review* Vol 65 No 2 (Summer 2006), pp.252-272

strategy, as Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, had been a student of Kollontai's. She had attended lectures given by Kollontai in 1921 at Sverdlov University, and been impressed by the latter's advocacy of the necessity to profoundly restructure the family to bring it into line with socialism. Sverdlov University was seen at the time as "a hotbed of radicalism" and Kollontai's lectures as the "most complete attempts to go beyond the traditional socialist analysis of women's oppression as simply coterminous with capitalism".<sup>179</sup> Liubimova subsequently wrote of how "Alexandra Mikhailovna was a lofty example of how a revolutionary should be and we all wanted to be like her."<sup>180</sup>

The main elements of Kollontai's lectures were subsequently set out in a pamphlet, *The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the Economy*, where she argued for the state to take over the functions of the family.<sup>181</sup> Linked with this was her call for the state to take a lead in refashioning the family, which I have already discussed in chapter one. One of her biographers, Cathy Porter, argues that "there is a confusion" in Kollontai's thinking "between the state and the collective; between actual conditions in Russia and her vision of better times."<sup>182</sup> In other words, Kollontai believed that the Soviet state represented the workers' collective, and wanted it to impose a socialist moral code. In an article in *Kommunistka* in September 1920, she argued that:

...the workers' collective has to establish its attitude not simply to economic relationships but to the form of relationships between the sexes. What kind of relations between the sexes are in the best interests of the workers' collective? What form of relations would strengthen not weaken the collective in the transitional stage between capitalism and communism and would thus assist the construction of the new society?<sup>183</sup>

Kollontai thus believed that the Soviet state should play an active role in determining relationships between people, and that the private life of an

---

<sup>179</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography* (Merlin Press, 2015), pg 343

<sup>180</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pg. 342

<sup>181</sup> A. Kollontai, *The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the Economy* from *Alexandra Kollontai, Selected Writings* translator Alix Holt (Allison & Busby, 1977), pp. 142-149

<sup>182</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pg.343

<sup>183</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Sem'ia i kommunizm', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

individual came second to the needs of society - “Communist morality demands all for the needs the collective.”<sup>184</sup>

Advocacy of state intervention in family life was problematic, particularly when that state was becoming increasingly autocratic. By 1920, the Soviet Union was a one-party state under the leadership of the Communist Party.<sup>185</sup> Kollontai was in fact one of the sharpest critics of the Communist Party leadership at that time for what she saw as its unforgivable retreat from key democratic principles, in particular the removal of workers’ control over the economy.<sup>186</sup> A profound contradiction is evident in her argument that a Party leadership, which she saw as excessively centralist, should simultaneously play an interventionist role in the private lives of Soviet citizens. Moreover, there was a disparity between her views on this question and those of Friedrich Engels, who, as I demonstrated in chapter one, was a central inspiration for her theories on the family. Engels had written of a future socialist society as one where the “government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished’ it withers away.”<sup>187</sup> In writing on the woman question and the family, Engels argued that the future state should have no involvement in the private lives of its citizens. His vision clearly presupposed the retreat of the state from family life, not an intensification of its role.<sup>188</sup> But Kollontai saw herself as a trailblazer.<sup>189</sup> She rejected what she considered to be Engels’ passive belief that “male chauvinism would automatically disappear once people were freed from property relations.”<sup>190</sup> Thus the state needed to play a central role in setting down rules for the new society.

As discussed in chapter one, Kollontai and Lenin conflicted sharply on these questions, and he criticised her for what he saw as a tendency toward dangerous

---

<sup>184</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Sem’ia i kommunizm’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

<sup>185</sup> S. Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press 1994) chapter 3 on the coming to power and the events of the Civil War leading to a very centralised regime.

<sup>186</sup> B. Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist, the Life of Alexandra Kollontai* (Indiana University Press 1979), pp. 181-194 for a discussion of Kollontai’s criticisms of the CPSU leadership in this period.

<sup>187</sup> F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science* (Progress Publishers, 1947)

<sup>188</sup> F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Foreign Languages Press, 1978), pp.94-97

<sup>189</sup> J. Lokaneeta, ‘Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism’ in *Economic & Political Weekly* Vol. 36 No. 17 (April 28-May 4 2001), pp. 1405-1412 pg. 1405

<sup>190</sup> C. Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai*, pp. 71-72

utopianism. He contended that demands for radical change of the family were premature and would provoke a backlash from more conservative sections of society. In a speech to the 1918 All Russian Congress of Working Women he argued that, by giving “too sharp an edge to the struggle we may only arouse popular resentment; such methods of struggle tend to perpetuate the division of the people along religious lines, whereas our strength lies in unity.”<sup>191</sup> In an interview with Klara Zetkin in 1920 he objected to what he saw as the “obsession” of Kollontai and her supporters with redefining relations between men and women. The “relations of the sexes to each other are not simply an expression of the play of forces between the economics of society and a physical need, isolated in thought, by study, from the physiological aspect.”<sup>192</sup> Such revolutionaries, he thought, were harming the interests of the revolution by interfering in complex human relationships and creating discord through a reckless imposition of their beliefs. However, Kollontai defied Lenin’s call for restraint and persisted in demanding the immediate re-articulation of relationships between men and women.

Kollontai had solid grounds for being critical of the Party’s passivity and conservatism on the question of women’s rights. Lenin had admitted that the male membership were very prejudiced towards women.<sup>193</sup> Within a Party with a male chauvinist culture, it was inevitable that there would be major obstacles to real change within broader society. In such a situation, activists paradoxically became more reliant on attaining legislative change as a measure of success, and looked more and more to the Soviet state as an instrument of change.

### 5.3 Kollontai’s view of legal tactics in the East

Kollontai considered that Central Asian women needed guidance from the Zhenotdel, so as to enable them to insist on their rights to equality under the Soviet Constitution. According to Kollontai, before the Russian Revolution, these

---

<sup>191</sup> V. I. Lenin, ‘Speech to the All Russian Congress of Working Women’ in *Selected Works, Volume 28* (Progress Publishers 1974), pages 180-182

<sup>192</sup> K. Zetkin, *Lenin on the Woman Question* (International Publishers 1934)

<sup>193</sup> K. Zetkin, *Lenin on the Woman Question* (International Publishers 1934)

women had lived lives of darkness and despair, with “no guiding star, no ray of light and no hope for a free and equal existence.”<sup>194</sup> Their oppression had been systemised under customary law, with “equality prohibited under Sharia law, the authority of customs and religious norms.”<sup>195</sup> Now finally their situation was transformed, and Kollontai believed in 1920 that indigenous women would take action once they became aware of their rights to do so. In the absence of Soviet People’s Courts, she argued that they should begin to “assert their rights as full citizens under the law” and in particular demand their right to divorce under Soviet law within the customary Sharia and Adat court system.<sup>196</sup> In this way, they could begin to transform their position within the family by challenging the system which underpinned their oppression. However, the Central Committee was not inclined to take such a radical stance. Indeed, according to Gregory Massell, little action was taken by the Soviet leadership to extend Soviet family law to Central Asia before 1924. Soviet People’s Courts appear not to have been established in the region until 1921. From this point in time until 1926, the Soviet People’s Courts operated alongside the Sharia and Adat court system.<sup>197</sup> There was a fear of provoking a hostile reaction from the peasant armies of the Basmachi and a concern that the Soviet regime should not appear to be imperialist.<sup>198</sup> Adrienne Lynn Edgar describes the manifestation of this hesitancy in Turkmenistan where “Soviet officials were inclined to tread cautiously in attempts to undermine the patriarchal social system, for fear of alienating what they saw as the regime’s true basis of support - poor and landless male peasants.”<sup>199</sup> Turkmenistan had no Hujum and the “shift from legislation to direct action never took place.”<sup>200</sup>

As with other aspects of Zhenotdel policy, Kollontai was not prepared to wait for the Central Committee to act. In a resolution to the first All Union Meeting of

---

<sup>194</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s’ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>195</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s’ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>196</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s’ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>197</sup> G. J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 196-212.

<sup>198</sup> G. J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 201.

<sup>199</sup> A. L. Edgar, ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29’ in *The Russian Review* 62 (January 2003), pp. 132-49

<sup>200</sup> A. L. Edgar, ‘Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29’, pp. 132-49



Activists among Eastern Women in April 1921, she called on Zhenotdel activists to educate indigenous women how to use their new legal rights. In “order to liberate women from the torments of family and marriage, the Zhenotdel must introduce them to the Soviet People’s Courts.”<sup>201</sup> It was crucial that a Soviet court system be established to encourage women to seek their legal rights and to create an identification with the state. In the words of her comrade and supporter, Konkordiia Samoilova, the “laws which liberate an Eastern woman politically and economically remain a dead letter until she learns how to use these revolutionary gains. The liberation of the women of the East must be the work of their own hands.”<sup>202</sup> Another writer, Putilovskaya, agreed that it was up to indigenous women themselves who “as a group who have previously suffered the worst repression would become a force in their own right for liberation.”<sup>203</sup> Thus Soviet law was a weapon to be put into the hands of indigenous women to enable them to obtain freedom from the constraints of kalym and other customary forms. The Zhenotdel would facilitate their journey from repressed slaves to liberated human beings.

#### 5.4 The Central Asian legal programme

As, with other aspects of the Zhenotdel’s activity in Central Asia, little progress was made with the legal strategy before 1923. Although kalym (bride-price) had been declared illegal in 1921, there had been few attempts to enforce the ban. The second of Activists among Eastern Women in 1923 discussed for the first time action to ensure “the abolition of polygamy, kalym, punishment for abduction of women for arranged and under-age marriage along with a number of property rights.”<sup>204</sup> Liubimova adopted a fervent approach to developing the legal programme, reflecting her continued adherence to Kollontai’s views. Douglas Northrop has argued that the commitment of the Zhenotdel to a forceful legal

---

<sup>201</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Rezoliutsii I vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51.

<sup>202</sup> K. Samoilova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp. 31-32

<sup>203</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>204</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

strategy stemmed from a negative colonialist attitude towards indigenous culture.<sup>205</sup> However, while undoubtedly prejudices toward Central Asian society were rife among Russian activists, many indigenous women also supported the legal strategy, particularly when it addressed the wearing of the veil.<sup>206</sup> I consider that a better explanation is to be found in the Zhenotdel's commitment to state led transformation of family life, first advocated by Kollontai. This connects with what Barbara Clements Evans has described as the "utopianism of the Zhenotdel", where she argues that the vision which motivated its activists "was the creation of a 'new woman' whose defining features were independence and activism."<sup>207</sup> Thus, the birth of a 'new Central Asian woman' was to be accelerated through a decisive legal programme.

This legalistic utopianism led to impatience with the persistence of traditional cultural practices and religious influences. This zeal was reflected in Liubimova's first article as Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel, where she declared her complete animosity toward the role of Islam in family life.<sup>208</sup> She contended that Islam was more insidious than any other religion because of its legalistic and normative role in society - it was an all-encompassing phenomenon. Thus it was "the Koran which has been instrumental in shaping all aspects of family life."<sup>209</sup> It was "religious practices and beliefs which perpetuate kalym, polygamy, the wearing of the veil, child-marriage, the transfer of a widow to the nearest relative, and a whole range of customs which result in the absolute subjugation of a woman."<sup>210</sup> She proclaimed her commitment to utilising Soviet law in a battle against the hold of Islam. By "introducing Soviet legislation into this region we are instigating a battle against religious fanaticism and to destroy the hold of the Mullahs and the Koran."<sup>211</sup> She was also very antagonistic to the Adat and Sharia courts "where a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man". The

---

<sup>205</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press 2004), chapter 7 discussion on the role of Zhenotdel members on the use of the law.

<sup>206</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp.205-212 for a discussion on the support for a legal ban on the veil among indigenous women.

<sup>207</sup> B. Clements Evans, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 51 no 3 (Autumn 1992), pp. 485-496 pg. 486

<sup>208</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>209</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>210</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>211</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

necessity to overcome institutional inequality was thus for Liubimova, “a key issue in all our work in Turkestan [Central Asia].”<sup>212</sup>

Liubimova’s lack of cultural sensitivity to the role of religious laws and customs contrasts sharply with her highly nuanced approach to social and economic change. She displayed an ethnocentric refusal to acknowledge the importance of historically rooted cultural practices. Islam had a history in Central Asia stretching back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and was deeply immersed in all aspects of life.<sup>213</sup> Because it was so much part of daily life, a legal offensive against it was both dangerously premature and intrusive. In common with Kollontai, Liubimova had an intolerant attitude to what she considered to be repressive institutions. And, like Kollontai, she also had a belief that the new institutions of the Soviet state could take the lead in superseding the old.

She had support from other Central Asian activists. Writing also in 1923, Kasparova reported that activists were at that time developing proposals to bring before the Party “to eradicate existing tribal family attitudes and religious fanaticism which exist within Sharia and Adat law, all of which deprive women of the most elementary human rights.”<sup>214</sup> She underscored the importance of achieving legal change, as without such change indigenous women could not make any progress toward economic independence. In particular, she argued that without a ban on kalym and polygamy, women could not own their own property.<sup>215</sup> At the second Meeting of Activists among Eastern Women in February 1923, activists adopted a resolution which committed them to “representing women in the courts and providing them with legal advice”. They also acknowledged that “these measures are vital to win influence and popularity among indigenous women.”<sup>216</sup> Zhenotdel activists put forward their proposals for legislation within legal commissions that

---

<sup>212</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>213</sup> A. Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and the Revolution in the Early USSR* (Cornell University Press 2016) for a discussion of the struggle for control over and ultimately extermination of Islam in Central Asia

<sup>214</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Pervye dostizheniia v rabote sredi Vostochnykh truzhenits’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1923), pp.40-43.

<sup>215</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pis’ma iz Turkestana’ *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41.

<sup>216</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36.

had been set up as part of the National Delimitation process.<sup>217</sup> The commissions sent proposals to the executive bodies of the new republics calling on them “to establish legal codes to regulate practices within the family and property rights for Eastern women.”<sup>218</sup> By 1924, Liubimova reported that the ban on kalym had been passed into law in the new republics but that there was continuing opposition to enforcing bans on underage marriage and polygamy.<sup>219</sup> Tineva complained that “the strong hold of tradition along with the selfishness of the male population has meant that even when decisions are taken by the republics on kalym, polygamy and child-marriage they only remain on paper.”<sup>220</sup> Another activist wrote that despite “a growing awareness among indigenous women that Soviet laws have liberated them, with some attending meetings and learning about their legal rights, their day to day existences and their low status within the family continue to prevent their full involvement in social and economic life.”<sup>221</sup> From the perspective of these activists, Soviet law was a vital weapon in the battle for the emancipation of indigenous women as it challenged their existing repression under Sharia and Adat law.

Yet making Soviet law a reality in Central Asia was easier said than done. At the end of 1924 Liubimova expressed frustration that, despite the formal situation, “women remain slaves within their families”, with “Uzbek women in an even worse position than other indigenous women because they remain repressed by the terrible laws of seclusion and are forced to wear the heavy veil.”<sup>222</sup> She argued that efforts to develop laws to ‘liberate’ indigenous women were completely meaningless without economic and social prospects for women. Zhenotdel activists understood this but were often unable to assist divorced and homeless women and there were continuing complaints about the dearth of economic and social opportunities. Liubimova acknowledged that “achieving results necessitates economic growth.”<sup>223</sup> Women who responded positively to the Soviet legal model and took action to gain some independence often found themselves isolated and

---

<sup>217</sup> S. Liubimova S., ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>218</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Trudiiashchiny zhenshchiny stran Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1923), pp. 25-26

<sup>219</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Turkestanе’, *Kommunistka*, 7(1924), pp.19-20

<sup>220</sup> Tineva, ‘Vostok i 8 Marta’, *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924); pp. 48-49.

<sup>221</sup> Untitled, ‘Postanovlenie plenuma Ts.K RKP (b)’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pg. 20.

<sup>222</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na puti k raskreposhcheniiu’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1924), pp.36-39.

<sup>223</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp.13-14

impoverished.<sup>224</sup> The lack of support from the Central Committee in the development of cooperatives for indigenous women meant that the Zhenotdel was undermined in its efforts to address this problem.

## 5.5 The Court System

Reports indicate that attempts to represent women in the traditional Sharia and Adat courts foundered almost immediately.<sup>225</sup> As well as the difficulties of representing women in those forums, the Zhenotdel also encountered opposition from their local male comrades. Kislova reported that the Turkestan (Central Asian) Party Central Committee had issued a circular in 1922 calling on the Zhenotdel “to desist from involvement in family legal disputes and instead to restrict itself to education.”<sup>226</sup> This demand provoked angry responses from activists and Kislova wrote that the Turkmen Zhenotdel had refused to comply with the direction, as “we considered to do so would deprive us of our entire purpose as an organisation.”<sup>227</sup> She reported that activists had complained to the Turkestan Central Committee about this instruction but, “having received no response, we decided to carry on our legal work as before.”<sup>228</sup> Yet she then states that “soon afterwards, we decided to abandon our role as defenders of native women in the traditional courts”. Instead Zhenotdel activists in Turkmenistan would “provide advice to women prior to their attendance at Court.”<sup>229</sup> At the subsequent All Union Meeting of Activists among Eastern Women in February 1923, the decision of the Turkmen Zhenotdel was endorsed and adopted by activists across the Soviet East. It was stated that that no progress was possible within the traditional court system because it “operated according to the tenets of the Koran” and consequently, “a woman cannot get a fair hearing either as a citizen or a human being.”<sup>230</sup> In future, therefore the meeting agreed that, “no Zhenotdel

---

<sup>224</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, pp.119-129

<sup>225</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>226</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>227</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>228</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>229</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>230</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

activists will under any circumstances be sent to represent women in these courts.”<sup>231</sup>

This decision signalled a shift of the majority of legal activity to the Soviet People’s Courts. A resolution passed by the Communist International in 1921 had called on the Zhenotdel “to drive forward the implementation of Soviet legislation to put women on an equal basis to men” and to “promote the recruitment of women who are capable of becoming judges and serving on juries within the People’s Courts.”<sup>232</sup> This call was taken up with enthusiasm by activists who agreed at the 1923 All Union Meeting to use their “best efforts to draw indigenous women into the Soviet People’s Courts at all levels.”<sup>233</sup> At this state the Ali Bairamova club in Baku, the model for Central Asian women’s clubs, had already set up three-month training courses. The meeting agreed to begin to train their court activists in “how to relate Soviet law to issues of concern for Muslim women.”<sup>234</sup> Liubimova was no doubt relieved that Adat and Sharia courts were to be abandoned in favour of the Soviet model of family justice. However, it did not take long for problems to emerge within this strategy. Instead of becoming models of socialist decision making, the prejudice that Zhenotdel activists objected to in the traditional court system re-emerged quickly within the People’s Courts.<sup>235</sup> In a report from Kislova in June 1923 she protested that “customary law continues to dominate attitudes” and “to have a negative influence on the operation of the People’s Courts.”<sup>236</sup>

In 1926, the Sharia and Adat courts were completely abolished by the Uzbek government.<sup>237</sup> In the same year Zavaryan complained that despite the efforts of

---

<sup>231</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>232</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’ *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>233</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Pervye dostizheniia v rabote sredi Vostochnykh truzhenits’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1923), pp.40-43

<sup>234</sup> E. Ralli, ‘Zhenskie musul’manskie kluby’, *Kommunistka*, 6-7 (1922), pp. 30-32

<sup>235</sup> Reference to the discussion of the courts themselves which will be examined under the heading the Court System

<sup>236</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>237</sup> S. Keller, *To Moscow not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia* (Praeger Press 2001), pp.81-85

the Zhenotdel, “work to legally protect women is still seen as irrelevant.”<sup>238</sup> The low status attached to this work meant that “those who work in the People’s Courts are poorly trained and under the influence of old ideas and prejudices, particularly in areas where the clan system is strong.”<sup>239</sup> There was little respect for women and very few female advocates who might have been more sympathetic to the situation for women bringing cases. In February 1927 Liubimova lamented the fact that “problems persist within the People’s courts and “cases brought by women are not dealt with for months and even years.” The “ZAGs (Family Registration Offices), militia and criminal investigation unit often do not understand that their function is to protect women. Instead of dealing with complaints themselves there is a tendency to send all matters to the Zhenotdel.”<sup>240</sup>

In a continuing effort to improve the People’s Courts, Liubimova demanded in February 1928 that an effort be made to recruit indigenous women to positions of judges and advocates within them. She argued for “an inspection to be carried out into the People’s Courts on cases brought by women and on attitudes to women.”<sup>241</sup> This inspection would assist in “ensuring that day to day procedures within the People’s Courts are correct.”<sup>242</sup> It would also look at the work of Party members who were employed within the courts. She was supported by Aleksandra Artiukhina, national director of the Zhenotdel, who announced that the first inspection of the courts would take place in line with Liubimova’s proposals.<sup>243</sup> Douglas Northrop and Gregory Massell have criticised the Zhenotdel for becoming involved in inspections of the personal behaviour of male Party members, and linked these inspections with methods used by Stalin in disciplining the population during the forced collectivisation which followed. Massell has described the evolution from “revolutionary legalism” to “administrative assault” to “social

---

<sup>238</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

<sup>239</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

<sup>240</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

<sup>241</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

<sup>242</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

<sup>243</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

engineering” which characterised Soviet policy in 1920s Central Asia.<sup>244</sup> Yet, the Zhenotdel did not have the same programme of the Central Committee. It wanted the Party membership to be pulled into line, as opposed to aiming to discipline an entire population through demands for conformity. I will examine this question further when considering the relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Party in chapter six.

## 5.6 Response and effect of legislation on the lives of indigenous women

In relaunching the legal strategy in 1923, Liubimova re-asserted Kollontai’s view of the importance of educating indigenous women on the legal rights available to them. She reported that Zhenotdel activists were united in their belief this was “a key means to win over the masses to conscious support of the emancipation of women.”<sup>245</sup> This legal education policy was beset with difficulties and contradictions and accounts in *Kommunistka* highlight divergent reactions from indigenous women. Secluded Uzbek women were the least likely to be drawn into discussion around the law. Zhenotdel writers believed that the difficulty in engaging with them on this, and other questions, stemmed from their isolation and consequent lack of awareness. The veil presented both a psychological and physical barrier, inhibiting an understanding “of what we are saying about genuine equality and liberation for the women of the East.”<sup>246</sup> Zhenotdel members struggled to teach secluded women that “from the moment of her birth she is likely to be sold off” to “become the wife of a man she does not know and does not love.”<sup>247</sup> Club work was vitally important, and could provide an environment which was more conducive to interacting with women. In late 1924, the Organisational Bureau (Orgbureau) of the Party directed the Zhenotdel to “set up a network of legal assistance offices in clubs which will provide consultations and advice to women on how they can reject the traditional laws of Central Asian

---

<sup>244</sup> G.J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pg. xxiii

<sup>245</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp.13-14.

<sup>246</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pis’ma iz Turkestana’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41.

<sup>247</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36.



society.”<sup>248</sup> This decision was likely to have been a consequence of the adoption of the Criminal Legal Code that year which made kalym, polygyny and arranged marriage explicitly unlawful.<sup>249</sup> This was one occasion when it seems that the Zhenotdel and the Party leadership were working together. As I will show in chapter six, Liubimova and other leaders were at pains to convince the Central Committee that joint working arrangements were vital.<sup>250</sup> Liubimova hoped that the decision to promote legal awareness and advice would encourage “women to make use of the rights that have been granted to them under Soviet legislation and bring their claims to the People’s Courts.”<sup>251</sup> Perhaps she also hoped that the mandate from the Orgbureau symbolised a new willingness to support the Zhenotdel. Unfortunately, as I illustrated in chapter four, little or no material support was forthcoming.<sup>252</sup>

It was reported in *Kommunistka* that, in contrast to their Uzbek sisters, unveiled women in the mainly nomadic Kirghiz region were quite assertive in demanding their legal rights. In a report from October 1923 on a series of meetings with Kirghiz women, Liubimova was enthusiastic about how forthright Kirghiz women had been in “demanding the eradication of polygamy and the strict monitoring of kalym.”<sup>253</sup> They also “complained at the lack of legal penalties for polygyny.”<sup>254</sup> Seifi wrote in 1923 that “Kirghiz women are already taking advantage of their new right to divorce and large numbers are leaving their husbands.”<sup>255</sup> She claimed that women frequently “deserted their husbands for other poor men”, which showed how important it was to have choice and not be forced into an arranged marriage. She claimed that the Kirghiz family was facing its own demise”, but that there was no viable form to take its place. Despite the efforts of the Zhenotdel “to facilitate the transition to a new form of Kirghiz family” and to “take legal action against those who interfered with women’s rights”, it was extremely

---

<sup>248</sup> Orgbureau, ‘Ocherednye Zadachi partii v rabote sredi rabotnits i krest’ianok’, *Kommunistka* 12 (1924), pp.6-11.

<sup>249</sup> G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pg. 204.

<sup>250</sup> Chapter six discusses this question in detail

<sup>251</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30

<sup>252</sup> Discussed in chapter four

<sup>253</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Kirgizii’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pp. 43-45

<sup>254</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Kirgizii’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pp. 43-45

<sup>255</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

difficult to provide a livelihood for women who wanted independence.<sup>256</sup> There was a dearth of economic and social alternatives for women who left their marriages. The Zhenotdel struggled to keep a few small scale co-operatives functioning within the Kirghiz female population and it was in no position to provide economic solutions. This meant that many women who fled their families to the cities were left in desperate circumstances. Their decision to respond to the Zhenotdel's call to "make use of their rights" often did not lead to their emancipation, but to a different form of oppression.<sup>257</sup> In March 1926, Zavaryan reported that "divorce has taken on the character of an epidemic", with "a spontaneous flight of second and third wives from their husbands, along with girls running away from arranged marriages."<sup>258</sup> She argued that this "is leading to very serious problems, including a tendency towards prostitution" among these women.<sup>259</sup> This was a problem about which the Zhenotdel was painfully aware but could not resolve. There can be little doubt that the lack of an economic and social infrastructure was a major obstacle for the Zhenotdel. This was not just a problem in Central Asia. Women throughout the Soviet Union had found themselves thrown out of factories with the introduction of NEP.<sup>260</sup> Unemployment and prostitution among women had become endemic.<sup>261</sup> Lenin's decision to introduce market forces had shut women out of Soviet society and economy, and had strengthened prejudice toward them. In Central Asia, where women's economic activity outside the home was virtually non-existent before 1920, they were in an even more vulnerable position if they decided to depart traditional life.<sup>262</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> M. Seifi, 'Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem'i', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>257</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Kirgizii', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pp. 43-45

<sup>258</sup> E. Zavaryan, 'Brachnoe i semeinoe na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1926), pp. 42-45

<sup>259</sup> E. Zavaryan, 'Brachnoe i semeinoe na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1926), pp. 42-45

<sup>260</sup> E. A. Wood, *The Baba & the Comrade; Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press 1997), pp. 160-169

<sup>261</sup> B. Evans Clements, 'Working-Class and Peasant Women in the Russian Revolution, 1917-1923', in *Signs*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Winter, 1982), pp. 215-235 for a discussion of the economic problems facing peasant women after the introduction of NEP

<sup>262</sup> See further T. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire* pp.129-132 for a discussion on the 'cultural fund'

In an effort to utilise all options for economic progress, the Zhenotdel pushed hard for the allocation of land to Central Asian women under the 1925 Land Reforms.<sup>263</sup> The legal entitlement to own property was argued to be the “most essential right for women in Central Asia” because it would allow them to be genuinely independent.<sup>264</sup> Up until then women had not been permitted to farm land independently. Widows were reported to be the worst affected by lack of property rights as they “were transferred along with livestock and land to the deceased’s family.”<sup>265</sup> This group of women were seen by Zhenotdel activists as potential beneficiaries of Soviet land reforms. Liubimova argued that “their successful farming of land will provide us with the best way to convince indigenous women of the benefits of socialism.”<sup>266</sup> Yet, over a year into the land reform programme, Zavaryan complained that it had made almost no impact in Central Asia, with “land still almost exclusively being granted to men.”<sup>267</sup> This lack of real support from the Soviet State left the Zhenotdel appearing weak and ineffectual.

Another feature of the legislation programme was its reported misuse. Nukrat wrote in horror in 1929 of reports “of many incidents of divorce being used for the speculation and re-selling of women.”<sup>268</sup> She argued that the availability of divorce needed to be restricted to prevent this manipulation. Liubimova had also been upset in 1924 to be approached with requests to lower the price of kalym in order to assist poorer men. She did not understand how these young men did not understand “that they are being exploited by having to save for decades for kalym, and not being able to buy a wife until they are 40 or 50 years of age.”<sup>269</sup> Soviet legislation would release them from these burdens while also “striking a blow against the rich landlords, who buy wives to use them as a source of labour.”<sup>270</sup> However, Liubimova bemoaned the “fact that we have received calls to campaign for the lowering of the price of kalym because poor men cannot afford wives and

---

<sup>263</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925): pp. 85-93. Where Kasparova argued that it was urgent to take measures to bring women into all aspects of production and to allocate land to them.

<sup>264</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Novye rezervy na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pp. 21-27

<sup>265</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Novye rezervy na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pp. 21-27

<sup>266</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1926), pp. 56-59

<sup>267</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

<sup>268</sup> A. Nukhrat, Kul’tpokhod v Turkmenistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp. 32-35

<sup>269</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pis’ma iz Turkestana’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

<sup>270</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pis’ma iz Turkestana’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

without being married have no rights to obtain properly irrigated land.”<sup>271</sup> She could not understand how the Zhenotdel’s project could be misunderstood in such a fundamental way. Instead of Soviet law changing traditional society, traditional society was subverting it. The limits of Zhenotdel legalism were evident in the contradictions which emerged from the attempt to graft European norms of family life onto Central Asian society.

Progress was therefore slow and contradictory. Niurina complained in April 1925 that “despite the official decrees issued by the Soviet republics prohibiting polygyny and kalym, the overwhelming mass of women remain extremely repressed.”<sup>272</sup> Those women who did attempt to go beyond their traditional roles faced hazardous obstacles. There were discussions about the need to be sensitive to indigenous culture as attendance at Zhenotdel meetings or educational courses could inflame tensions within families and lead to women being disowned. Kislova wrote in 1923 “we need to be aware of the dangers for women who are coming to the Zhenotdel for education, as it is causing big problems within their families and they are not safe.”<sup>273</sup> Zavaryan reported that “the People’s Courts are besieged with women seeking help. The Zhenotdel is inundated daily by women who have been thrown onto the streets by their husbands.”<sup>274</sup> Activists were extremely stressed about their inability to provide any practical economic and social support. Worse still were the reports of physical attacks on women who transgressed traditional culture. Divorce was a particularly dangerous option for indigenous women. In 1925 Niurina reported that “25 women have been murdered by their husbands within a period of 4 months this year because they obtained a divorce in the Soviet courts without their consent.”<sup>275</sup>

Gregory Massell has argued that the Soviet Party, including the Zhenotdel, had a highly coordinated strategy to provoke women into rebellion against indigenous society, while simultaneously using their revolt as an opportunity to impose Soviet control over the region.<sup>276</sup> However, it is problematic to suggest that the Central

---

<sup>271</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pis’ma iz Turkestana’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

<sup>272</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>273</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>274</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Brachnoe i semeinoe pravo na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1926), pp. 42-45

<sup>275</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>276</sup> G. Massell *The Surrogate Proletariat*, pp. 3-37 for a discussion on the rationale behind the Soviet leadership’s decision to launch the Hujum

Asian Zhenotdel was an unequivocal supporter of that policy. While Liubimova saw Soviet law as a crucial weapon against “the remnants of patriarchal society”, she also believed it needed to go hand in hand with social and economic development.<sup>277</sup> In announcing the launch of a Zhenotdel campaign for legal change in 1923, Liubimova also pointed to the “fact that we are endeavouring to draw Eastern women into productive activity and to teach them skills for the workplace”.<sup>278</sup> Moreover, all change had to be incremental. Indeed Zhenotdel activists were apprehensive of the consequences of provoking a revolt because of the terrible consequences for women. Yet, faced with an inability to contain, or to impact on the unintended and complex local responses to legal change, the recourse for the Zhenotdel seemed to be towards supporting ever-deeper state interference into private lives. Thus continuous calls to extend the law and provide more punitive measures for breaches resulted in an increasing identification with an ever more bureaucratic state machine.

## 5.7 Discussions on Soviet Law and Indigenous Society

Although Liubimova’s positive advocacy of Soviet law dominated coverage of legal issues in *Kommunistka*, other activists expressed concerns about its impact. One worry was the manner in which transgressors should be handled. Writing in 1923 on the backlash against female initiated divorce in the Kirghiz region, Seifi counselled against taking too punitive an approach to indigenous men who resisted the law. Zhenotdel activists needed to understand that “men are very afraid of losing a woman’s labour in the home.”<sup>279</sup> This situation, she argued, needed instead to be tackled “through providing economic assistance to the Kirghiz family.”<sup>280</sup> Thus, “an improvement in conditions will help women who would otherwise seek divorce to escape poverty.”<sup>281</sup> “But if their mass departure is a

---

<sup>277</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>278</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>279</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pravovoe poloshenie zhenshchiny Vostoka, Vopros ob ukreplenii Kirgizskoi sem’l’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>280</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pravovoe poloshenie zhenshchiny Vostoka, Vopros ob ukreplenii Kirgizskoi sem’l’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>281</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pravovoe poloshenie zhenshchiny Vostoka, Vopros ob ukreplenii Kirgizskoi sem’l’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

revolt by women against their enslavement we must handle it very carefully.”<sup>282</sup> In September 1924, Seifi expressed concern about alienating the Central Asian indigenous population through advancing Soviet legal measures too vigorously. Comrades needed to be patient and be aware that “although our new society is winning the battle with the old way of life, we must be very careful when approaching questions of family life.”<sup>283</sup> In July 1925, Kasparova wrote that “in a situation where the soviets are weak, there is a tendency among Zhenotdel activists toward officialdom and bureaucracy.”<sup>284</sup> This tendency was exemplified “by the actions of Zhenotdel members in Central Asia who issued an order to the local militia to arrest a man for breach of family law.”<sup>285</sup> Kasparova deplored this and demanded that “the Zhenotdel leadership take steps to eliminate this kind of highhanded behaviour.”<sup>286</sup> She also warned of the need to take care to “avoid a situation where women become free of the old laws but then are thrown into prostitution.”<sup>287</sup> She counselled patience and argued that “crimes of everyday life will not be resolved in a single generation. The youth must therefore be trained well as their views will build a society based on communist ideas.”<sup>288</sup> Kasparova can be seen as a voice of opposition against the pro-active legal strategy advocated by Liubimova. In Kasparova’s view the law was a model for society, not a set of rules to be rigidly enforced.<sup>289</sup>

Not only was Liubimova preoccupied with the immediate implementation of Soviet law, but she saw it as a vital weapon in defeating all elements of Central Asian Islam. There could be no progress for indigenous women within the Muslim religion. She saw reformist elements as a particular threat, declaring in 1923, that we need “to enforce Soviet legislation so as to undermine their ability to use

---

<sup>282</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pravovoe poloshenie zhenshchiny Vostoka, Vopros ob ukreplenii Kirgizskoi sem’i’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

<sup>283</sup> M. Seifi, ‘O rabote sredi devushek na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp. 47-49.

<sup>284</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp.85-93

<sup>285</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp.85-93

<sup>286</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>287</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>288</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

<sup>289</sup> Kasparova’s views seem to be more like Krupskaya’s, as will be seen in section 5.8 of this chapter

reformism” to win women over.<sup>290</sup> In September 1926, she demanded that “the clergy not be allowed to masquerade as progressives” and warned of the dangers from the so-called ‘Red Mullahs’.<sup>291</sup> In 1927, then head of the Eastern Zhenotdel, she despaired of the situation in the Tatar region where the “mullahs have succeeded in finding a way of recruiting women.”<sup>292</sup> They “go to these women with verses from the Koran which talk of allowing education for women, of permitting them to take part in broader society and even of allowing them to join the clergy.” Instead of seeing this as an indication of the opportunities for Tatar women to create a movement within the terms of their own cultural heritage, Liubimova saw it as an example of them being duped. She far preferred a situation where the clergy were conservative as “it is easier for the Party to conduct anti-religious propaganda when the mullahs defend seclusion, arranged marriage and other barbaric customs.”<sup>293</sup> Liubimova’s intolerant attitude toward religion reflected the growth of militant atheism in the Soviet Union, together with the creation of the League of the Militant Godless in 1925.<sup>294</sup>

Liubimova had always advocated the view that Central Asian women ultimately needed to break with the indigenous family. In that sense she was simply reflecting the views of the Zhenotdel on the need to supersede the traditional family. She understood and worked hard to create safe and culturally appropriate spaces for them to begin that transition, while writing in glowing terms of those “brave women who reject the system of kalym and leave their villages for the city.”<sup>295</sup> These women were “pioneers who were subjected to persecution within their own clan.”<sup>296</sup> By 1925, Seifi had also begun to idealise women who rejected their families to become Zhenotdel organisers. Such a woman had chosen to “take the path of Lenin and break with her own family. She had been prepared to become a social outcast, left with no money and considered as a ‘fallen woman’.”

---

<sup>290</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>291</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Bor’ba na ideologicheskom fronte’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 74-76

<sup>292</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Tataria’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp. 72-76

<sup>293</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Tataria’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp. 72-76

<sup>294</sup> D. Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Cornwell University Press 1998), pg. 2

<sup>295</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Kursy volostnykh organizatorov’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pg. 49

<sup>296</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Kursy volostnykh organizatorov’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pg. 49

She called on the Central Committee to ensure that the Party gave full support to these women.<sup>297</sup> Unfortunately, Seifi's words fell on deaf ears.

## 5.8 The Unveiling Campaign and the Law

In contrast to this gradualist legal project, the Hujum was aimed at mobilising women *en masse* by dint of direct political pressure. Liubimova appeared to ignore the calls for mass unveiling demonstrations, and continued her legal campaign in the months leading up to March 8<sup>th</sup>. She demanded that “the People’s Courts be pulled into line” and “action taken to correctly implement Soviet law.”<sup>298</sup> In the aftermath of the unveiling campaign the following year, Liubimova once again raised the demand to “popularise Soviet legislation in respect for women” among the population.<sup>299</sup> However, by then the key debate had shifted to discuss the demands emerging from among Zhenotdel activists for a state ban on the veil.

Unsurprisingly, Liubimova emerged as a central proponent of a decree to ban the veil. Yet she was not the first to raise it, as the initial demand for a decree had come from “a debate among activists in the Azerbaijan Zhenotdel.”<sup>300</sup> Azerbaijan had also been part of the Hujum, with unveiling demonstrations organised in 1927.<sup>301</sup> In August 1928 *Kommunistka* published a report of a meeting of Azeri Zhenotdel activists, where they discussed a resolution to be proposed to the All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in December of that year.<sup>302</sup> The report of the discussion included an assertion from one activist that:

---

<sup>297</sup> M. Seifi, ‘O rabote na Vostoke i nasnem kadre’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 73-77

<sup>298</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

<sup>299</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

<sup>300</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>301</sup> See further M. Kamp, ‘Women initiated Unveiling: State led Campaigns in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan’ in *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Modern World*, editor Stephanie Cronin (Routledge Press 2014), pp. 205-228



...women are being forced to wear the veil against their will because their husbands insist on it. These women are asking us for a decree as they believe it would help them to win their argument to unveil with male family members.<sup>303</sup>

Liubimova relied on this claim that a decree would override cultural opposition to support her arguments for a ban, which, she reasoned, would be an act of enormous significance for women who wanted to unveil. It “would allow those women and men who have sympathy with unveiling to act according to their views.”<sup>304</sup> Conscious of the devastating violence against women which had been provoked by the Hujum, Liubimova also considered that a state ban would produce a sense of safety and solidarity among those who wished to unveil. On the other hand, not issuing a decree would “give the mullahs the weapon of Koranic law to invoke against unveiling.”<sup>305</sup> Liubimova was thus repeating an argument first made by her in 1923 of the necessity to use Soviet legislation as a weapon in a war against Sharia law. A “decree will show the enemies of the working class that we are serious.”<sup>306</sup>

A decree would provide an indigenous man a “valid reason” to break Sharia law. There was an “urgent necessity” to legislate “so that “the Eastern woman is not isolated in her struggle against the remnants of the slavery of the past. It will give her the full support and opportunities introduced by Soviet power.”<sup>307</sup> Liubimova provided an example of an Uzbek woman who came to the Zhenotdel asking for a ban on the veil to undermine the authority of her husband. She quoted the woman as arguing that:

I want to remove my paranji but my husband won't allow it. Tomorrow at a certain time I will be at a certain shop in the bazaar. Come up to me and

---

<sup>303</sup> Untitled, ‘Nushno li izdat’ decret, zapreshchaiushchii noshenie chadra, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.

<sup>304</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>305</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>306</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>307</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

force me to remove it. Then I will be happy and my husband won't say anything.<sup>308</sup>

Marianne Kamp asserts that this argument revealed “an astute observation of Uzbek women’s etiquette” on Liubimova’s part. Kamp has found that “in many activist’s memoirs there are accounts of women unveiling in response to a direct request from a person in authority.”<sup>309</sup> Liubimova and other supporters of a decree believed that women needed the state to step in and provide support to them in their battle within their own community. A “ban on covering the face would create an atmosphere of support and solidarity with uncovered women.”<sup>310</sup> It will allow us to “go directly to the broader layers of the population in the struggle for women’s liberation and above all to organise women workers and peasants.”<sup>311</sup> This illustrates the strength of her belief in the role of state legislation as an instrument of liberation. It also begs the question of how indigenous women could genuinely be engaged in an act of self-liberation when they needed the state to take the lead.

Krupskaya’s response to the call for a decree is noteworthy because of her opposition to Liubimova’s legal strategy. In her speech to the December meeting, Krupskaya took a stance which mirrored that of Lenin’s opposition to Kollontai in 1920. She argued that “there is no problem with a ban on the paranji and chadra as it shows that the law supports unveiling.”<sup>312</sup> But she believed that supporters of a decree were taking an overly legalistic approach and argued that:

I of course want the paranji to go to hell like everybody else. But we don’t always get what we decree and cannot approach the question of liberation as though it is simply a legal issue.<sup>313</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>309</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp 207-208

<sup>310</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>311</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

<sup>312</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>313</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

Instead of laws that demanded immediate unveiling, Krupskaya argued that economic incentives should be offered persuade indigenous men to allow their wives to unveil. Indigenous men needed to be educated and won over, not alienated. This included “only giving land to a woman if she is unveiled”, thus giving her economic independence and prestige.<sup>314</sup> It would also mean that husbands would have an interest in allowing their wives to unveil so as to obtain a larger landholding. Krupskaya argued that reliance on the law was also a problem in other arenas of women’s rights. There needed to be a recognition that “polygyny is a disguise for economic exploitation”, for “the use of women as free labour.”<sup>315</sup> This “exploitation is not just among kulaks but also exists among peasants working in handicraft production as well as the middle layer of peasants.”<sup>316</sup>

Yet Zhenotdel activists would not have disagreed with the necessity to address women’s economic vulnerability. Liubimova argued in February 1927 that an enormous gap existed between the “world’s most impressive family legislation” and the reality on the ground.<sup>317</sup> She and others had consistently argued for assistance to provide independence to women who wanted to leave their husbands. However, like Kollontai before her, Liubimova was not willing for that development to take place before attempting to enforce that legislation. She believed that the struggle for legal and economic change went hand in hand. It was vital to educate indigenous women in how to enforce legal action against “the crimes of kalym, polygyny and abduction of women.”<sup>318</sup> The debate about a ban on the veil had only come about because Liubimova and her supporters were striving to protect women from the terrible backlash precipitated by the unveiling campaign of 1927.

## 5.9 The political shifts of 1929 and the Legal Strategy

Following the year-long debate, the final decision of the Zhenotdel All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in December 1928 was to launch a

---

<sup>314</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>315</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>316</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>317</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

<sup>318</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

campaign to introduce a decree on a gradual basis by republics across the region. Perhaps Krupskaya's call for moderation had made a difference. In January 1929, Aleksandra Artiukhina announced that the majority of the meeting had decided to conduct a more persuasive strategy to win over the population in favour of a decree before issuing a law. The Uzbek republic was expected to introduce a decree in 1929 after a campaign among the population to win support. This campaign was to link a legal ban with one against "the remnants of the old society in the form of kalym, polygamy, the paranji (veil), arranged marriage, child marriage, blood feuds and so on."<sup>319</sup>

Nukrat set out in her report of the meeting how "a great deal of work needs to be done to resolve the text of the decree" as "questions need to be answered as to how punishments for disobedience of a decree would be applied...would it only punish those who refused to allow the removal of the veil or also women who continue to wear it?"<sup>320</sup> In the meantime however, the "Central Committee has issued a directive to all activists not to wait for a decree and instead to begin immediately to take resolute measures to bring about the liberation of women."<sup>321</sup> It is interesting to note in that respect that no decree was ever passed. As discussed in chapter two, despite the campaigning of the Uzbek language Zhenotdel journal *Yangi Yo'l* and the demonstrations organised by activists to demand a decree the Uzbek republic never passed it. She reports further that this was despite the expectation of the Uzbek president that a decree would be implemented.<sup>322</sup> Ultimately the Central Committee decided that it was not in its interests to introduce one. The push to impose the Plan meant that legal questions were marginalised, as was any debate or criticism. Now the Zhenotdel to put all its efforts into mass agricultural and industrial collectivisation. In this context calls for individual legal safeguards were denounced as vacillating, spineless or bourgeois.

---

<sup>319</sup> A. Artiukhina, 'Vypolnim resheniia', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

<sup>320</sup> A. Nukhrat, 'Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

<sup>321</sup> A. Nukhrat, 'Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

<sup>322</sup> M. Kamp *The New Woman of Uzbekistan*, pp.209-212

## 5.10 Conclusion

A close reading of *Kommunistka* from 1920 to 1930 reveals the Zhenotdel's legal strategy to have been perceived as a crucial facet of its overall transformation project. Yet, there were deep conflicts within this strategy. On the one hand, Zhenotdel activists recognised the need, from an economic and social perspective, to work broadly within the parameters of indigenous society. But, on the other hand, these same activists were urging women to take legal action that would put them in conflict with that society, without any alternative support structure in place.

Marianne Kamp argues that many of the legal measures that were proposed by the Zhenotdel also reflected the views of indigenous Jadid women, particularly when it came to a ban on the veil.<sup>323</sup> Yet this does not mean that those measures were any less insensitive toward the circumstances of women within the broader population. When tackled on the intrusive nature of a ban on the veil, Liubimova replied that "this same argument could have been made against the ban on kalym as this also encroaches on the most intimate aspects of life for a peasant family."<sup>324</sup> Thus she believed that state intervention within the family was invasive but necessary. Similarly to Kollontai, she wanted a confrontational battle against the old institutions of power and their laws and believed the Soviet state's legislative powers to be the most effective way of winning that struggle.

In contrast to Liubimova's impatience for legal change, the Central Committee was extremely cautious. While this may seem to conflict with its authoritarian tendencies, as exhibited in the unveiling campaign, in fact it simply suggests that the Central Committee preferred the Party to lead these campaigns. It perhaps wanted present the Soviet government as a more neutral force, even at this point

On the other hand, the Zhenotdel wanted the Soviet government to be very proactive. This reflects both a belief in a separate progressive role for that body and an attempt to reach out beyond the confines of the Party. The argument of Liubimova, for example, that a decree would allow the Zhenotdel to go directly

---

<sup>323</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman of Uzbekistan*, pp. 205-212

<sup>324</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Decret o chadra i obshchestvo 'doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo'', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

to the masses illustrates the frustration of activists who felt imprisoned by the Party and wanted more autonomy. I deal with this question in detail in chapter six.

The very divergent approaches of the Zhenotdel and Central Committee to the enforcement of Soviet family law provide further evidence to refute the argument made by Massell and Northrop that the Zhenotdel was an unequivocal supporter of the Hujum. As my research shows, the Zhenotdel's enthusiasm for legal action contrasts very sharply with the attitude of the Central Committee, which was distinctly apathetic about this project. Moreover, the Zhenotdel saw utilisation of Soviet law as a way to bring about change within the safety of the Soviet structures. In contrast, the Central Committee and Sredazburo showed no similar concern for safety and instead sought to put indigenous women in direct and dangerous confrontation with their families and communities.

## Chapter 6

### The Zhenotdel and the CPSU in Central Asia

#### 6.1 Introduction

As I have previously indicated, the view in the literature on 1920s Central Asia has perceived of the Zhenotdel as a loyal supporter of the Party leadership.<sup>1</sup> Yet, my detailed consideration of the views and experiences of the activists who wrote in *Kommunistka*, in particular from 1920 to 1928, reflects a far more complex relationship than hitherto acknowledged. My research shows that Zhenotdel activists in Central Asia did not have a more harmonious relationship with their male comrades than their counterparts in Russia. I have illustrated that profound conflicts were engendered by the presence of the Zhenotdel in the region, as well as its attempt to implement a programme that, in practice, diverged very significantly in reality from the policies of both the Central Committee and local Party organisations.

In previous chapters I have discussed the tensions which flowed from the Zhenotdel's attempt to introduce forms of organisation, such as clubs and women-only shops, as well as its efforts to make headway with its legal strategy. In chapter three, I looked at how the strategy of the Zhenotdel to create women-only spaces diverged from the practice of the Party. I showed how *Kommunistka* reflected the disappointment and frustration of activists at the lack of support from the Central Committee and Sredazburo. In chapter four I detailed initiatives designed to build culturally responsive women-only organisation, and the clash between this strategy and the Hujum. In chapter five I considered how the

---

<sup>1</sup> For the principal proponent of this view, see G. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1974)

Zhenotdel's legal policy conflicted with the Central Committee's political priorities.

As discussed in chapter one, existing secondary literature provides clear evidence of a deeply conflicted relationship between the Zhenotdel and the Party majority in the urban centres of Russia.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I show how this discord found reflection in the conditions of Central Asia. A common complaint among activists was that, despite the formal commitment of the Party to women's emancipation, the Zhenotdel was burdened with the sole responsibility for carrying out that policy. Even Central Committee loyalists such as Anna Nukrat complained of this problem, pointing in 1927 to the fact that "local Party members consider [work among women] to be the sole preserve of the Zhenotdel and dump all responsibility for them onto it."<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I examine the consequences of retaining sole responsibility for work among indigenous women, and the attempts of some activists to overcome what they saw as an untenable situation. I also discuss the debate on autonomy which emerged in the aftermath of the Hujum and the suppression of dissent in the opening stages of the Five Year Plan.

## 6.2 Relationship of the Central Asian Zhenotdel to the Party

In October 1920, Kollontai appealed to the Central Party leadership to support the Zhenotdel's decision to begin work in the Soviet East. She argued that this project would be mutually beneficial as the "more the Party develops its work with women in the East, the easier it will be to achieve the aim of building communism."<sup>4</sup> The Zhenotdel believed that the full backing of the Central Committee was required to bring about a change in the attitudes of male Party members, both Russian and indigenous. Another writer, Kyraev, attributed the conservatism of male comrades to their lack of subjective experience; "[E]ven the most solid revolutionary leader,

---

<sup>2</sup> W. Z. Goldman, 'Industrial Politics, Peasant Revolution and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR' in *Slavic Review* Vol 55, No 1 (Spring 1996), pp.46-77 for an example of that discussion

<sup>3</sup> A. Nukhrat, 'Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>4</sup> A. Kollontai, 'Posledniaia rabynia (k s'ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)' *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26



the most profound theoretical brain does not really comprehend” the reality of women’s oppression. His “inner soul does not protest with indignation and does not seek to throw off the burden of slavery.”<sup>5</sup> Thus Communist men needed to be educated in order to teach them to appreciate the problem of women’s oppression. In a resolution to the All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in April 1921, Kollontai called for specific efforts to “improve the Party’s struggle with existing prejudice.”<sup>6</sup> Delegates agreed and resolved that “the Zhenotdel will encourage Party members to implant a spirit of communism among workers and peasants as well as an appreciation of their reciprocal interest in the emancipation of women.”<sup>7</sup>

Wendy Goldman has described the constant battle for the Zhenotdel to make progress within the Party in Russia, with Zhenotdel activists embattled in a constant struggle to survive constant attacks to close down initiatives.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Central Asian activists appear to have been left alone for the first six years of their work in the region. Their isolation had a contradictory effect. While it made the involvement of women in Party structures very difficult, and allowed male Party members to ignore the existence of the Zhenotdel, it also appears to have provided Zhenotdel activists with far more independence to pursue their initiatives than their counterparts in Russia.

Yet, activists did not see always their isolation as an advantage. The commitment of Communist men to women’s emancipation was crucial to its programme for socialism. From the outset, Zhenotdel leaders believed that it was imperative for working class and peasant men to be won over to support women’s liberation. Zhenotdel activists in Central Asia wanted their male comrades to support women-only clubs, cooperatives, and shops, and also to take action themselves to “win indigenous men over to support women’s rights.”<sup>9</sup> One of the first Zhenotdel activists in Central Asia, Putilovskaya made it clear that “Communist men must appreciate the importance of work among women and commit to carrying out this

---

<sup>5</sup> ‘L’, ‘Krest’ianka i mezhdunarodnii zhenskii den’, *Kommunistka*, 8-9, (1921), pp. 4-6

<sup>6</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>7</sup> A. Kollontai, ‘Posledniaia rabynia (k s”ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

<sup>8</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics’

<sup>9</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

work in their Party committees and regions.”<sup>10</sup> But this was a very ambitious demand, particularly, as she admitted that “Communist men especially from the Turkic population have not yet accepted women as comrades in the common struggle”. Worse still, they “are very unwilling to submit to Party discipline” in even allowing their own female relatives to join the Zhenotdel.<sup>11</sup> Zhenotdel activists struggled “to convince them that the victory of communism is impossible without the involvement of Eastern women in a common revolutionary struggle.”<sup>12</sup> However, in the absence of the Central Committee adopting a policy to educate male comrades and make it clear what that they were required to support the Zhenotdel, it was almost impossible to achieve any real progress.

The policy changes at the heart of the CPSU also hindered the ability of Zhenotdel members to convince their male comrades. Liubimova protested that “the introduction of NEP in Central Asia has made our situation even worse and entrenched the chauvinistic views of Communist men even more deeply.” There were constant pleas to the Central Committee and Sredazburo to take a firm line with local comrades. As with other requests for help, little more than formal support was ever forthcoming. Seifi complained in 1923 that “although in 1921 the Politbureau demanded that every Party member had to support our work on the woman question”, it “is very reluctant to take a firm line to enforce this demand among the membership.”<sup>13</sup> Liubimova argued that “our struggle to overcome hostility from male Party members is seriously undermined by a total lack of support for these efforts from the Party leadership.”<sup>14</sup> By 1925 reports continued to reflect frustration with the lack of progress in changing attitudes, as indicated by Niurina’s complaint in 1925, that more than four years after the launch of the Zhenotdel in Central Asia, “local Party members still refuse to recognise the importance of work among women.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>11</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>12</sup> Putilovskaya, ‘Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

<sup>13</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Kashgariia’, *Kommunistka* 8 (1923), pp. 34-37

<sup>14</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30

<sup>15</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

However activists retained a stubborn belief that the Central Committee would overcome its apathy once it saw how important the Zhenotdel was to the overall Soviet project. Liubimova argued that its organisational flexibility and, in particular, its ability to reach secluded women through women-only clubs and cooperatives had to be recognised by the Central Committee. The Zhenotdel was uniquely placed “to spread the influence of the Party to the most backward section of working women of the Eastern population.”<sup>16</sup> Liubimova demanded that there needed to be acknowledgement of the “successes we have achieved already, including the fact that we have organised thousands of backward Eastern women.”<sup>17</sup> The Zhenotdel deserved not only full political and economic support, but also “the allocation to it of the most experienced and best qualified Party members.”<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, despite these calls, the Zhenotdel continued to experience staff shortages and financial hardship. During a year when the entire Party was ostensibly mobilised to free veiled women from seclusion, in July 1927 Niurina expressed her disappointment at the lack of material support from the Central Committee. She protested that “the leadership still neglects the Zhenotdel and does not provide us with either funds or personnel.” It has “yet to understand that the liberation of indigenous women is the only way to resolve all issues in the Soviet East.”<sup>19</sup> This comment is extraordinary, in a period when the Sredazburo had formally committed the Party membership to mobilising women through the Hujum. It indicates that the Party leadership, both in Moscow and Tashkent, had little real interest in women’s emancipation beyond its use as a slogan to facilitate the achievement of Soviet mastery over indigenous society.

Zhenotdel activists were careful to express their criticism of the Central Committee in terms which did not directly question its political commitment to women’s emancipation. Instead, they lamented about its lack of a proper understanding of the importance of the Zhenotdel to achieving that goal. In contrast, local male Party members were derided for their political backwardness and continued adherence to traditional norms. It was argued that “the hostile

---

<sup>16</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>17</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>18</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei’, *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

<sup>19</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

attitude of the male population to our work, and the persistence of prejudice toward women among our own male comrades makes our work really dreadful.”<sup>20</sup> This disapproval of male comrades reflected the Zhenotdel’s frustration at trying to make progress in an environment where purported allies were in fact opponents. The majority of male Party members, whether Russian or indigenous, appear to have not supported women’s emancipation when it came to themselves as individuals. Indigenous Party men had been brought up in a society that was deeply divided on the lines of gender, where it had been hitherto unheard of for women to attend meetings or to participate in activities outside of the home.<sup>21</sup> Despite the depth of resentment shown by these men toward the imposition of radical changes to their personal lives, and mirroring Kollontai’s earlier refusal to exercise restraint, Liubimova called for the Central Committee to take action to ensure that indigenous Party members abide by Soviet standards in their personal lives.<sup>22</sup> Her demand coincided with a decision made at a Party conference in Baku in January 1923, to bring indigenous members into line. The conference resolved “that a stricter attitude to polygyny among native members of the Party will be adopted, along with an insistence that they conform to the Party rules just as European members do.”<sup>23</sup> The Baku conference also instructed “Communist men to show an example to the masses by sending their wives, sisters and daughters to school.”<sup>24</sup> In the same year a decree was passed by the Soviet government “abolishing kalym and punishing forced marriage” in Central Asia.<sup>25</sup> The Kazakh Komsomol also passed a number of rules, including one which stated that “members are forbidden from beating their wives or using kalym to buy a wife.”<sup>26</sup> The decisions of the Baku conference, the decrees specifically banning kalym and polygyny and their reflection in the Kazakh Komsomol appeared, on the surface, to reflect a new commitment to women’s rights. It seemed that the Party leadership was beginning to recognise the necessity to take action alongside the Zhenotdel. Liubimova used the opportunity to call on her indigenous male

---

<sup>20</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>21</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 19-32

<sup>22</sup> Chapter 5 for a discussion of this issue.

<sup>23</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>24</sup> Kislova, ‘Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

<sup>25</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp.28-30

<sup>26</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp.28-30

comrades “to provide an example to the rest of the population in their behaviour towards women.”<sup>27</sup>

Much to the disappointment of Zhenotdel activists, the decisions of the Baku conference, as with other Party pronouncements did not translate into meaningful action. Zavaryan reported in June 1926, that kalym and polygyny remained a serious problem among local Party members. She complained that “in Uzbekistan alone there have been 283 cases of polygyny and 1,170 cases of kalym among Party members.”<sup>28</sup> Polygyny was viewed as something characteristic of those men from relatively privileged backgrounds, as a poor peasant could not afford two wives. The apparent predominance of polygyny among a section of Party members suggests that these men were drawn from native intelligentsia.<sup>29</sup> Thus, paradoxically, the men who the Zhenotdel railed against for their backward practices were allies of the CPSU in government in Uzbekistan and elsewhere in Central Asia. Until the Hujum in 1927, the Central Committee appears to have been unwilling to impose any lifestyle changes that would cause friction with these political allies.

### 6.3 Mobilisations around March 8<sup>th</sup>

In an effort to promote work among women and to overcome its isolation, the Central Asian Zhenotdel placed a great deal of effort into building all-Party campaigns to coincide with annual International Women’s Day celebrations. International Women’s Day had its roots in the Socialist Second International. It was especially meaningful in the Soviet Union because action taken by women on International Women’s Day 1917, which had sparked the first phase of the revolution.<sup>30</sup> It was declared a national holiday in 1922. In Central Asia, the

<sup>27</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>28</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-70

<sup>29</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg.228-238 for a discussion of the operation of Korenizatsiia in the Soviet East

<sup>30</sup> R. Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia – Feminism Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press 1990) pp. 289-291 and T. Kaplan, ‘On the Socialist origins of International Women’s Day’ in *Feminist Studies* 11, No. 1 (1985), pp. 163-171.

discussions and events surrounding this symbolically charged day acquired particular significance in the Hujum of 1927.

Liubimova began a campaign to build all-Party organisation in early 1923 with a call for Zhenotdel activists to use March 8<sup>th</sup> to build awareness. In January of that year pointed to the problem of “continuing isolation of the Zhenotdel from the Party.”<sup>31</sup> She called for “the woman question to be put on the agenda of every cell and made a normal part of the work of the Party.”<sup>32</sup> In June of the same year she claimed success had been achieved already that year and that the Zhenotdel had organised a festival with “a distinctively proletarian atmosphere, involving both men and women in all events.”<sup>33</sup> Of particular note was the fact that secluded women had participated. Liubimova declared proudly that “thousands of women wearing veils took part in the celebrations, including in a public march through Tashkent.”<sup>34</sup> Photographs in *Kommunistka* show groups of veiled and unveiled women with banners. In 1924 Liubimova announced further success with the Sredazburo agreeing to “include the women question on the agendas of cells, training courses and Party schools.” The Sredazburo had also agreed to enforce behavioural conformity among the membership with “a campaign for the removal of the veil among Komsomol and Party members in city areas.”<sup>35</sup>

In the years that followed, official Party pronouncements became a standard aspect of March 8<sup>th</sup> campaigns. In February 1925 the Central Committee called on all Party organisations in the East to implement measures aimed at “the maximum recruitment of indigenous women, the creation of crèches, canteens and other supports and the education of women.” Also, “all Party cells [were] to assist and facilitate indigenous women in becoming active in social production outside the home.”<sup>36</sup> *Kommunistka* writers applauded these initiatives and claimed that support from the Party had encouraged indigenous women to participate in larger numbers in March 8<sup>th</sup> events that year. Such events were a positive example of

---

<sup>31</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>32</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>33</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Eshche shag na puti k raskreposhcheniiu’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 32-34

<sup>34</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Eshche shag na puti k raskreposhcheniiu’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 32-34

<sup>35</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp.13-14

<sup>36</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Novye rezervy na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pp. 21-27

how enthusiastically women would become involved in building the Soviet Union, when they saw the Party as their ally.

1926 witnessed a shift towards more authoritarian calls within the March 8<sup>th</sup> campaign. A tightening up of legislation against ‘crimes of everyday life’ was announced by the Party leadership that year, with kalym, polygyny and child marriage particularly targeted.<sup>37</sup> This move by the Soviet government was welcomed by Zavaryan as a major step forward in “the real liberation of women.”<sup>38</sup> While her endorsement of state-led transformation is in keeping with previous policy, her enthusiasm for the criminalisation of customary family practices is a sign of a new intolerance. While this did not indicate support for the kind of mass confrontation with indigenous society that would be evidenced in the Hujum the following year, it did show that Zhenotdel’s support for state intervention could lead it to support oppression of indigenous society.

March 8<sup>th</sup> campaigns were typically short-term and largely ceremonial. This problem had been criticised by *Kommunistka* from the outset, with Tineva complaining in 1924 that “the commitments given by the Party leadership are meaningless because of the persistence of traditional views and self-centredness among our male comrades”.<sup>39</sup> Glebeva protested that “our work is impeded because Party cells still consider that work among women is the responsibility of the Zhenotdel and pay absolutely no attention to it.”<sup>40</sup> This problem also found reflection in the context of the Hujum, with the majority of criticisms being that local Party members viewed it at best as a short-term stunt. The Zhenotdel was not in a position to cope with the social dislocation and backlash which had followed, even if it had wanted to. Indeed its members were also under attack, with the murder and intimidation of activists and the closure of many of its projects.<sup>41</sup> Artiukhina’s anger was evident in January 1928 when she complained

---

<sup>37</sup> For a summary of the legislation introduced in 1926 see S. Keller, ‘Trapped between state and society: women’s liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941’ in *Journal of Women’s History* Vol. 10.1 (Spring, 1998): pp. 20-36

<sup>38</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Brachnoe i semeinoe pravo na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1926), pp. 42-45

<sup>39</sup> Tineva, ‘Vostok i 8 Marta’, *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924), pp. 48-49

<sup>40</sup> Glebeva, ‘V Bashkirii’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1925), pp: 69-70

<sup>41</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchaniia)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

about “those members who have refused to implement the directives of the Party.”<sup>42</sup> They had “done nothing to assist unveiled women or involve them in Soviet activity after March 8<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as described in chapter four, many existing Zhenotdel initiatives had been closed down in that period, without its knowledge or consent.<sup>44</sup>

The Five Year Plan prompted a reversal in the manner that March 8<sup>th</sup> campaigns were presented in *Kommunistka*. Up until 1928, articles had attempted to win Central Committee and local Party organisations to support the Zhenotdel. Now, Zhenotdel activists were told they had to recruit to the Party’s perspectives, and in particular fulfil its economic targets. Liubimova loyally demanded that Zhenotdel activists put all their energies into winning indigenous women to the Five Year Plan. They were told to “go out to win the mass of working women to Party slogans, and bring them out of seclusion and onto the streets and into clubs.”<sup>45</sup> It was vital to ensure “a successful start to the Five Year Plan through increasing production, creating productive co-operatives in the villages and recruiting the best women activists to the Party.”<sup>46</sup> 1929 saw a continuance of this theme:

...the March 8th campaign must be used to promote women’s participation in elections to the Soviets”, the “implementation of land reforms, seizure of land from the wealthy and the clergy, all as part of sharpening the class struggle.”<sup>47</sup>

The March 8<sup>th</sup> campaign of 1930 was addressed in an article in the last issue of *Kommunistka*, in which Sokolova demanded that the:

March 8<sup>th</sup> campaign must spark an offensive to involve young women, agricultural workers, poor women and collective workers in the Party, trade

---

<sup>42</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>43</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>44</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>45</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

<sup>46</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

<sup>47</sup> Sh. Karimova, ‘Na bor’bu s bytovymi pereshitkami’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1929), pp.43-45



unions, Soviets and cooperatives. They must also be propelled into production, into factories, industrial plant, Soviet farms and collective farms.<sup>48</sup>

Women activists, soon to become members of the Zhensektory under the discipline of the local Party, were told that “March 8<sup>th</sup> will be really huge if the mass of workers are persuaded to take a direct part in the work of liberating women and drawing them into the building of socialism.”<sup>49</sup>

The demand for unveiling had not receded but was now being channelled toward the mass recruitment of women to the new factories and collective farms. The elimination of “the outmoded and harmful veil” was urgently needed to free women up for entry into mass production.<sup>50</sup> The aspirations of both Russian and Central Asian women activists were manipulated to fulfil the needs of the Five Year Plan. Their recruitment was simply one of the many quotas to be reached. The Zhenotdel struggled hard to maintain March 8<sup>th</sup> as a festival which was based on the elevation of the woman question within the ranks of the Party, as a way to take a step forward. Ultimately however it was unable to hold onto this message, and the dictates of the Five Year Plan swamped all calls for women’s emancipation.

#### 6.4 Recruitment, delegate meetings and the soviets

By 1923, the number of women Party members in Central Asia remained very small. Attendance of women at Zhenotdel events and the developing club network did not translate into Party membership. The Zhenotdel had been able to achieve some success in recruiting indigenous women in women-only organisations but had not many had joined the Party. This situation precipitated a debate over the role of the Zhenotdel, and in particular whether it was to be a transmission belt into

---

<sup>48</sup> A Sokolova, ‘8 Marta na Sovetskom Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp.40-43

<sup>49</sup> A Sokolova, ‘8 Marta na Sovetskom Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp.40-43

<sup>50</sup> Sh. Karimova, ‘Na bor’bu s bytovymi pereshitkami’, *Kommunistka*, 3 (1929), pp.43-45

the Party or an organisation to develop the autonomous self-activity of indigenous women.

Proponents of the former view began to put forward their criticisms of Liubimova's strategy in *Kommunistka* from 1924. Seifi, who appears to have worked mainly among nomadic and semi-nomadic women in Kirghizia, called for an acknowledgement of "the importance to our revolutionary movement of the mass recruitment of indigenous women to the Party."<sup>51</sup> As highlighted in chapter four, Seifi was among a number of activists who held the view that there was too much focus on women-only clubs, which were unable recruit to the Party because of their distant relationship to it.<sup>52</sup> Seifi endorsed the recruitment drive by then then Director of the Zhenotdel, Sofia Smidovich. At a meeting of Zhenotdel Managers and Organisers in the East that year, Smidovich had demanded progress in recruiting "a strong cadre of women who are capable of building the Party among indigenous women."<sup>53</sup> Unlike Kollontai, Smidovich wanted a direct relationship between work among women and the Party.

Seifi believed that delegate meetings were the best form of organisation to ensure recruitment to the Party. They would "establish a strong bond between the Party and the mass of women" and "spread our communist influence among the broad layers of Eastern women."<sup>54</sup> There is an echo of Lenin's attitude to the Zhenotdel in Seifi's arguments, where he has discussed the need for the Party to exert influence over the women through the Zhenotdel. It is certainly quite different to that of Liubimova, who regarded autonomy from the Party as vital for the development of the women's movement in Central Asia. As discussed in chapter four, National Delimitation had brought indigenous women into the Party and Zhenotdel. Writing again in 1925, Seifi emphasised that the "training of activists and recruitment to the soviets and the Party is central to the Zhenotdel's work."<sup>55</sup> She demanded funding from the Party leadership to expand activist courses, recently initiated in Tashkent.<sup>56</sup> The focus on training of

---

<sup>51</sup> M. Seifi, 'Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp.42-44

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>53</sup> S. Smidovich, 'Itogi vse. Sov. Zaveshenotdelami', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp. 15-17

<sup>54</sup> M. Seifi, 'Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp.42-44

<sup>55</sup> M. Seifi, 'Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp.42-44

<sup>56</sup> M. Seifi, 'Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp.42-44

indigenous women was reported as producing some success, evidenced in “a doubling of women organisers in the Central Asian Zhenotdel in 1925, with 67 Russian women and 36 indigenous women recruited to those positions.”<sup>57</sup> Female Party membership had also risen to 675, with 117 of them being indigenous women.”<sup>58</sup>

But to be an active Party member was an enormous challenge for indigenous women. Liubimova described how potential recruits had to be “prepared to break with their families, leave their villages and immerse themselves in the work of the Party and soviets.”<sup>59</sup> Niurina reported that male Party members were opposed to the recruitment of women, both to the Party and to delegate meetings. She stressed that “we in the Zhenotdel cannot, despite our best efforts, overcome the obstruction of the delegate meetings by the local Party membership.”<sup>60</sup> There were additional pressures also as “veiled women find it very difficult both to take part in meetings with covered faces and to be able to discuss political and social questions with men.”<sup>61</sup> This was a very alien environment for those who had been used to highly differentiated roles for men and women. And, while for such women to unveil may have appeared to resolve some problems, it caused other difficulties. Indigenous women who unveiled were often seen as prostitutes in Uzbek society. Niurina pointed to the difficult tensions within the Party on recruiting women and argued that a decisive and clear position needed to be taken by the local Party leadership. It needed to decide whether “it wants only to recruit those ‘so-called good women’ or the most vulnerable and dispossessed.”<sup>62</sup>

Seifi and other Zhenotdel activists also reported problems with female Party members who had forced into prostitution. Douglas Northrop has argued that the coolness shown by activists towards recruiting prostitutes evidenced their disdainful attitude towards such women. He quotes the Head of the Zhenotdel in the Fergana region of Uzbekistan, Olimpaida Ermakova, who in September 1927 reportedly warned her comrades that “as soon as you fuss over two or three

---

<sup>57</sup> K. Tineva, ‘Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp.21-26

<sup>58</sup> M. Seifi, ‘O rabote na Vostoke i hashem kadre’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 73-77

<sup>59</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Kursy volostnykh organizatorov’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pg. 49

<sup>60</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

<sup>61</sup> N. Zavaryan, ‘Nekotorye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp.66-70

<sup>62</sup> F. Niurina, ‘V Srednei Azii’, *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

prostitutes, hundreds of the people we need will run away from us.”<sup>63</sup> Northrop concluded that “rather than trying to change the way that Uzbek men and women saw prostitutes - as economically disadvantaged women in need of compassion and aid, not the targets of scorn - party and Zhenotdel leaders directed grassroots workers to take popular attitudes into account.”<sup>64</sup> In other words that the Zhenotdel was unwilling to challenge prevailing conservative views. Yet this interpretation is contradicted by Niurina’s arguments, which point to the difficulties both of those ‘good women’ and those who been “dispossessed.”<sup>65</sup> For Niurina, the problem was the attitude of indigenous male Party members, not women. What both accounts show however is that the strict moral codes of indigenous society made it enormously difficult to recruit women to the Party.

Opposition from indigenous male comrades was not restricted to recruiting women to Party membership. Antonina Nukhrat was forced to admit that “the backwardness of male Communists on the woman question hinders recruitment to delegate meetings.”<sup>66</sup> Despite her efforts to use delegate meetings to create direct links with the local Party, and involve her male comrades in work among women, Nukhrat complained that they dumped it onto the shoulders of the Zhenotdel.<sup>67</sup> Perversely, however, Nukhrat also blamed Zhenotdel activists for not trying hard enough and, in particular, for “putting all their efforts into clubs and corners, rather than trying to build delegate meetings.”<sup>68</sup>

For Nukhrat, the existence of clubs and women-only organisation created a barrier between men and women within the Party. She did not have any sympathy with the needs of indigenous women to a culturally sensitive environment. She was determined to press on to “set delegate meetings up wherever the Party or Komsomol [had] a presence so as to assist recruitment.”<sup>69</sup> Notwithstanding the refusal of her male comrades to engage with the process, she was committed to

---

<sup>63</sup> D. Northrop, *The Emancipation of the Unveiled*, pg. 134

<sup>64</sup> D. Northrop, *The Emancipation of the Unveiled*, pg. 134

<sup>65</sup> D. Northrop, *The Emancipation of the Unveiled*, pg. 134

<sup>66</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>67</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>68</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

<sup>69</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

the task of building the Party. Autonomous organisation was to be actively discouraged.

In addition to being a transmission belt to the Party, delegate meetings were to be used to build participation in elections. In March 1925 the Presidium of the Executive Committee of Soviets instructed “the governments of Soviet Republics to address the fact that indigenous women have still not been freed from their historic oppression.”<sup>70</sup> In particular they had to “ensure that a woman can vote and be elected to the Soviets” and “assist her to become an active member of her local soviet.”<sup>71</sup> As with other Party pronouncements concerning women during the period of National Delimitation, it seems nothing or nothing was done to enforce this instruction. Then, suddenly in July 1927 Prishchepchik claimed that “90,000 women have taken part in the elections to the soviets this year.”<sup>72</sup> Interestingly the number of women who reportedly participated in the election is exactly the same as that claimed to have unveiled.<sup>73</sup> Nikolaeva, was anxious to make the link and declared that the surge in participation “rested on the fact that the election was organised within the Hujum campaign.”<sup>74</sup> In December 1927 Nukrat wrote enthusiastically:

In spite of both open and clandestine opposition from Communist men to the involvement of women in elections”, the “number recruited to the soviets has risen from 7.7% in 1926 to 15.7% in 1927.”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, even for loyal Central Committee supporters like Nikolaeva and Nukrat, the Hujum was about far more than the destruction of indigenous society. For Nukrat it was an opportunity to recruit women into Party, which she believed to be the only manner to bring about positive change. She was absolutely opposed to

---

<sup>70</sup> Untitled, ‘Postanovlenie plenuma Ts.K RKP (b)’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pg. 20

<sup>71</sup> Untitled, ‘Postanovlenie plenuma Ts.K RKP (b)’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pg. 20

<sup>72</sup> Z. Prishchepchik, ‘Ob uchastii trudiashchikhsia v perevyborakh b rabote sovetov v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp. 77-79

<sup>73</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye Itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp. 52-54

<sup>74</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp. 52-54 and see B. Evans Clements *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge University Press 1997) pg, 235 for Nikolaeva’s time in opposition in 1925.

<sup>75</sup> A. Nukhrat ‘Perevybory b sovery I zhenshchiny Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1927), pp. 41-44

anything which detracted from this strategy right up to the closure of the Zhenotdel in March 1930.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast, Liubimova remained loyal to the semi-autonomous strategy of club and other women-only organisation until 1929. In January 1927 she defended her record of leadership in the work and contended that “the decision of the Zhenotdel to utilise the method of clubs to organise women has been absolutely vindicated.”<sup>77</sup> In October that year she persisted in insisting that clubs continued to “be at the centre of work in Uzbekistan.”<sup>78</sup> Liubimova’s stubborn assertion that the original strategy of work was still alive in Central Asia contrasted with Artiukhina’s rather more sober report of neglected clubs and other women only organisation in the same period. The tension between Nukrat and Liubimova regarding the relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Party spilled over into a debate on autonomy in 1928 which I deal with in section six of this chapter.

## 6.5 Relationship to co-operatives

The Zhenotdel’s isolation from the Party has already been discussed above in terms of the refusal of male Party members to support its work and the difficulties of recruiting indigenous women to the Party. Another manner in which this isolation expressed itself was the isolation of women-only cooperatives and shops from Soviet economic organisations. Here, the apathy of the Party to the Zhenotdel translated into refusal to assist economic development among indigenous women. In 1925 the Zhenotdel called for the Party “to assist the establishment of links between the Zhenotdel and Soviet economic organisations to support organised economic activity among these women.”<sup>79</sup> This included “the setting aside of a quota of places for women in the economy”, “the guarantee of

---

<sup>76</sup> In all Nukhrat’s articles from 1926 to 1930 she emphasises the recruitment and training of indigenous women and often ignores or dismisses debates on problems which arose within this strategy.

<sup>77</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Pervoe vsesiuznoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

<sup>78</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Vostok k desiatletiiu Oktiabria’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1927), pp.55-61

<sup>79</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-92

funds to women-only cooperatives” and “an insistence that the cooperative leadership support initiatives to recruit women.”<sup>80</sup>

As I illustrated in chapter four, neither the Central Committee nor the Sredazburo appear to have responded positively to these calls for support. In 1923, Liubimova complained that the Party leadership believes that “funding for women-only cooperatives is a waste as they are not currently financially profitable.”<sup>81</sup> There was no recognition of the need to train a skilled female workforce, “in spite of the clear need for a strong economic base in the years to come.”<sup>82</sup> Still in 1925, Seifi was expressing frustration that “absolutely nothing has been done to organise women handicraft workers.”<sup>83</sup> Kasparova protested that the “Zhenotdel just cannot do all of this work on its own.”<sup>84</sup> Yet again the Zhenotdel found itself ignored by the Central Committee. It was clear that economic organisation of women on the terms put forward by the Zhenotdel was deemed a low priority. Such indifference from the highest echelons of the Party seriously undermined efforts to establish links with cooperatives on the ground in Central Asia.

By 1927 little had changed. In February, Liubimova criticised the Central Committee for “not having learned the centrality to the economy of attracting women into co-operatives.”<sup>85</sup> In September of the same year Butusova complained of the attitudes of male comrades “who do not understand the importance of women’s shops and place far too much emphasis on boosting commercial success.”<sup>86</sup> However, even when these methods were disbanded, and the Five Year Plan imposed, women workers continued to be viewed negatively by male Party members. In 1928, Antonina Nukhrat was forced to admit that “Party members just do not see the importance of recruiting women to the workforce.”<sup>87</sup> They treated women workers in a highly derogatory way, “giving them dirty and difficult work, making them carry heavy loads, wash floors or ignoring them

---

<sup>80</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-92

<sup>81</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>82</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Rabota na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1923), pp. 27-29

<sup>83</sup> M. Seifi, ‘Pomoshch’ v proizvodstve zhenshchin v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 75-80

<sup>84</sup> V. Kasparova, ‘Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin narodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1925), pp. 84-87

<sup>85</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp.50-55

<sup>86</sup> E. Butusova, ‘Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67

<sup>87</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp. 55-61

completely.”<sup>88</sup> In November 1928, after the formal commencement of the Five Year Plan, Safodoi protested that “the majority of Party members hold very conservative views on the involvement of women. They constantly debase their participation in the building of socialism in the Soviet East.”<sup>89</sup>

As with other areas, the character of the discussion around the position of the Zhenotdel within economic initiatives shifted very significantly after 1928. From January 1929, Zhenotdel activists no longer pleaded for Party members to support women-only organisations. Instead they battled to achieve the ambitious recruitment targets of the Five Year Plan.

## 6.6 The debate on autonomy

One of the most interesting debates to emerge within *Kommunistka* concerned a proposal which emerged in 1928 from the Kazakh Zhenotdel, to set up an organisation separate from the Party, to campaign against polygyny, kalym and other practices seen by activists as oppressive. There had already been some discussion on this issue in 1925, connected with complaints from activists that remaining within the Party was a serious obstacle to making progress. In September 1925, Kasparova reported that “some Zhenotdel members have become so exasperated with the inability to make progress that they have proposed we set up a special women’s campaign outside of the Party.”<sup>90</sup> For Kasparova the problem was that “while it is undoubtedly true that such a campaign would benefit the women’s movement, it would be independent of the Party and Communist ideas.” This would lead it to “become infected by alien anti-Soviet elements” and thus “undermine our attempts to win the Party and soviets to take responsibility for work on the woman question.”<sup>91</sup> Kasparova argued that any separate organisation would be bound to be “feminist in ideology, with all of the problems which accompany such views, the most serious being the idea that

---

<sup>88</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Pora gotovit’sia’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

<sup>89</sup> A Safodoi, ‘Perevybory v sovety v Vostoke’ *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.30-35

<sup>90</sup> V. K., ‘Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 67-75

<sup>91</sup> V. K., ‘Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin norodov Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 67-75



the work of women's liberation is the responsibility of women alone."<sup>92</sup> She dismissed those who proposed a new organisation as "simply Russian women who lack a proper understanding of conditions in the East."<sup>93</sup> Yet this was 1925, a year when the Zhenotdel was finally able to announce that some progress was being made in recruiting indigenous women. Seifi reported proudly that the training programme of the Zhenotdel had produced "24 Uzbek women, 22 Kirghiz women and 9 Turkmen women organisers."<sup>94</sup> This suggests that those who wanted to organise independently of the Party saw it as a necessary step to overcome the objections to recruitment from male Party members, discussed above. Indeed Kasparova admitted that a separate organisation would be of benefit to work among women. Yet she could not countenance severing the organisational connection with the Party. Her remarks expose the dilemma faced by Zhenotdel activists who, time and again, found the CPSU itself to be a fundamental impediment to building an indigenous women's movement.

Similar proposals resurfaced in the debate in the run-up to the December 1928 All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East. This time, however, the proposal for autonomy had real substance, because the Kazakh Zhenotdel had already formed such an organisation, entitled Society for the Eradication of Kalym and Polygamy.<sup>95</sup> The Society appears to have been set up in 1927, soon after the Zhenotdel began work in that region of Central Asia. One of the leaders of the Kazakh Zhenotdel, Arikova, explained that the Society was formed precisely of the impossibility of making headway as a bureau of the Party, despite opportunities to do so. She reported that male comrades had refused to support work among women, despite "an increase in the participation of Kazakh women in the soviets from 6% to 10.3%" in 1927.<sup>96</sup> What is more, "Communist men in Kazakh villages continue to practice polygyny and kalym, and consider that Soviet legislation to protect women has no meaning for how they conduct their lives."<sup>97</sup> Also, the Soviet People's Courts and militia tolerated breaches of the law, "and

---

<sup>92</sup> V. K., 'Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin norodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 67-75

<sup>93</sup> V. K., 'Formi i metodi raboty v zhenshchin norodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 67-75 – Kasparova did not specifically name the proposers of a separate organisation in 1925

<sup>94</sup> M. Seifi, 'O rabote na Vostoke i hashem kadre', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 73-77

<sup>95</sup> A. Nukhrat 'Osnovnye voprosy soveshchaniia', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.77-80

<sup>96</sup> B. Arikova, 'Obshchestvo 'doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo'', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

<sup>97</sup> B. Arikova, 'Obshchestvo 'doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo'', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

no action taken against wrongdoers.”<sup>98</sup> Arikova explained that the Kazakh Zhenotdel concluded that it had no option other than to approach the indigenous population directly and “win it to support for Soviet law and the implementation of measures to emancipate women.”<sup>99</sup> Activists determined that “it was necessary to build a mass campaign which reached out to the population.”<sup>100</sup> By circumventing the Party membership, the Kazakh Society could “work more effectively with the soviets” and also “supervise the work of the Courts.”<sup>101</sup> It allowed progressive men “to be models to the backward population showing how to behave in humanitarian manner towards women.”<sup>102</sup> Attempts to persuade Communist Party men to behave in a civilised manner had continually failed. Supporters of the proposal did not want to waste their energies within a male dominated Party. Some argued Ishkova spoke of their shame at “seeing the wives of Communists still covered by the veil.”<sup>103</sup> The existence of the Kazakh Society provided activists throughout Central Asia with an alternative and effective model of organisation.

An important contribution to the debate came from a ‘ZP’ who almost certainly was Zinaida Prishchepchik, Head of the Uzbek Zhenotdel. Prishchepchik wrote approvingly about the “spontaneous rise of new forms of work” in Uzbekistan during the Hujum, which included

...family circles where unveiled women were brought together with their husbands to agitate for an end to seclusion within their community and to protect unveiled women against the mullahs and the rich who had organised together against the abolition of seclusion.<sup>104</sup>

She claimed that “the number of circles rose rapidly after March 1927, with several hundred by May” and it was proposed that a separate organisation be

---

<sup>98</sup> B. Arikova, ‘Obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

<sup>99</sup> B. Arikova, ‘Obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

<sup>100</sup> B. Arikova, ‘Obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

<sup>101</sup> B. Arikova, ‘Obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

<sup>102</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Decret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>103</sup> K. Ishkova, ‘Nushno li izdat’ decret, zapreshchailushchii noshenie chadra’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.59-62

<sup>104</sup> ZP, ‘Dobvol’noe obshchestvo ‘za novyi byt’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 84-85

formed.<sup>105</sup> The proposed organisation was to be called ‘Society for a New Way of Life’ and it was aimed to “both men and women together in a struggle against seclusion.”<sup>106</sup> With the collapse of the unveiling campaign in June 1927 Hujum, the circles had collapsed but apparently the idea of non-party organisation remained popular.<sup>107</sup> Prishchepchik supported the proposal because it “would be a big support for unveiled women and would help the battle against kalym, polygyny and underage marriage.”<sup>108</sup> Gregory Massell has written of family circles having been set up by the Sredazburo as a device to unveil the wives of Party members.<sup>109</sup> It is interesting to see that this organisational form, created in order to destroy cultural autonomy in Uzbekistan, actually increased calls for independence from the Party.

In her contribution to the debate, Liubimova launched a strong defence of the Kazakh Zhenotdel. She argued that “the Kazakh Society is not in any way feminist, shown by the fact that a number of its members are men.”<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, it was “not a cross-class coalition as all those who do not have voting rights under the Soviet constitution - kulaks, the wealthy, merchants - are prohibited from membership.”<sup>111</sup> It is of note that in 1928 the CPSU was in rapid retreat from the policy of Korenizatsiia, discussed previously in chapter five, which had hitherto involved the co-option of indigenous Muslims into the Party leadership and local government. With this reversal in policy, there had been a purge of “the nationalist intellectuals who had accepted the Bolshevik offer to work on behalf of korenizatsiia.”<sup>112</sup> Numerous “Muslim Communists were thoroughly vilified as ‘deviationists’, ‘traitors’, ‘agent provocateurs’, ‘deserters’, ‘bourgeois nationalists’, ‘enemies of the people’ and members of the ‘Bukharinist-Trotsky

---

<sup>105</sup> ZP, ‘Dobrovol’noe obshchestvo ‘za novyi byt’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 84-85

<sup>106</sup> ZP, ‘Dobrovol’noe obshchestvo ‘za novyi byt’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 84-85

<sup>107</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>108</sup> ZP, ‘Dobrovol’noe obshchestvo ‘za novyi byt’’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 84-85

<sup>109</sup> G.J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp.232-235

<sup>110</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>111</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>112</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 155

clique’.”<sup>113</sup> The claim, countered by Liubimova, that the Kazakh Zhenotdel was a cross-class clique, was a very damaging one in the prevailing political conditions. Taking a brave stance against these political pressures, Liubimova stated that “there cannot be anything wrong about a group of Kazakh workers playing a pioneering role in the area of everyday life.”<sup>114</sup> Nor could there be anything wrong with the fact that the Kazakh Society “prohibited its male members from beating their wives and practising kalym.”<sup>115</sup> Indeed the “influence of its members could be of great benefit to the work of the Party and the Soviets in the liberation of women.”<sup>116</sup>

Liubimova’s support for the Kazakh Society engendered an angry response from Party loyalists. Nukrat condemned the proposal to establish an autonomous organisation as “a pointless project detached from the soviets and Party, with little in the way of funds or support, unable to realistically offer assistance to indigenous women.”<sup>117</sup> In Nukrat’s view, fundamentally, such an organisation “would be a popular non-working class organisation within which the Party would find it difficult to provide leadership”.<sup>118</sup> In the context of an environment where the accusation of not being working class was equivalent to being an enemy of the Soviet Union, Nukrat’s words were ominous.

One contributor, Zhukova, was particularly upset that the existing work of the Zhenotdel would be damaged by the creation of an independent organisation. She argued that such an organisation would “disorientate projects which are only now beginning, and profoundly damage the fight for the liberation of women.”<sup>119</sup> It would “divide and undermine the activity of our members and destroy the Party leadership of the struggle.”<sup>120</sup> Yet, it should be noted that existing work was already in ruins after the Hujum. The unveiling campaign had clearly been a major

---

<sup>113</sup> B. Fowlkes & G. Bulent, ‘Unholy Alliance: Muslims & Communists – An Introduction’ in *Journal of Communist Studies & Transition Politics*, 25:1, 1-31 (2009)

<sup>114</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>115</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>116</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>117</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Rezul’taty obsushdenii’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.57-59

<sup>118</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Rezul’taty obsushdenii’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.57-59

<sup>119</sup> Zhukova, ‘Novye uvlechenne i staroi idei’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1928), pp. 79-81

<sup>120</sup> Zhukova, ‘Novye uvlechenne i staroi idei’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1928), pp. 79-81

cause of demoralisation among Zhenotdel activists. The strong response from Zhukova and Nukrat indicated that the proposal that the Zhenotdel should break away from the Party had touched a raw nerve. It highlighted the harsh reality for Zhenotdel members who perceived the Party as deeply hostile to their goals. In 1927, Nikolaeva had condemned leading Party members in Uzbekistan, like “a former member of the Uzbek Central Committee of the Party, who arrested a worker for unveiling his wife” and “the secretary of the Komsomol who refused to unveil his wife”.<sup>121</sup> It was clear that there was now enormous tension within the Party, as authoritarian demands emanated from the Central Committee and produced fear and resentment among both male and female Party members.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that Liubimova chose not go as far as to recommend that the Kazakh Society be adopted as a method of work by the Zhenotdel across the region. To do so would undoubtedly have resulted in her being denounced as a bourgeois feminist. Against this hostile backdrop, she cautiously recommended that activists who were unhappy with conditions within the Party, concentrate on the ‘way of life’ sections recently established within the soviets. These, she argued, had exactly the same aims as the Kazakh Society. She reasoned that to create a separate organisation which replicated the ‘way of life’ sections, especially when it would lack status and financial resources be “a waste of time.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, continued involvement in the soviets was a compromise solution for those deeply frustrated with the Party. The soviets were proffered as a non-Party compromise which did not deviate from the Party line.

As editor of *Kommunistka*, Krupskaya made a significant effort to bring disgruntled activists into the debate on the Kazakh proposal. Writing in June 1928, she stated that “[a]s editor I make the call for local activists to fully participate in discussions on this proposal.”<sup>123</sup> She expressed the concern that “not all Zhenotdel workers are taking part in this debate and many articles do not relate to the main discussion”.<sup>124</sup> This is likely to be a reference to Nukrat, who had made a substantial number of contributions to the discussion list, almost all of which

---

<sup>121</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927): pp.52-54

<sup>122</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘Dekret o chadra i obshchestvo ‘doloi kalym i mnogoshenstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-7

<sup>123</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Ot redaktsii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pg. 83

<sup>124</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Ot redaktsii’, *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pg. 83

focused on recruitment rather than the issues under debate.<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately Krupskaya did not succeed in stimulating many contributions from rank and file members to *Kommunistka*. Clearly, within the prevailing political climate, they would have been nervous about publically supporting a call for autonomy or criticism of the Hujum. The fact that Prishchepchik and Liubimova were prepared to speak must be acknowledged as remarkable.

At the All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East in December 1928, Krupskaya sympathised with the proposers of autonomous organisation but declared that “we should not set up a separate society.”<sup>126</sup> Her rationale for taking this stance was that she considered that it would undermine the class struggle. It was crucial “to link the struggle for women’s liberation with the class war and win over men and women on that basis.”<sup>127</sup> Doing so meant staying within the Party. Although Krupskaya did not denigrate the proposal as feminist or perfidious, the fact that she expressly opposed it was sufficient. The report of her speech in *Kommunistka* notes that her declaration of loyalty on this question was met with resounding applause. The proposal for an autonomous society was defeated. Krupskaya was prepared to criticise the Central Committee, but not to advocate deserting the Party.

It is remarkable that a discussion on autonomy took place in the conditions of 1928, not to mind a separate organisation actually being set up by the Kazakh Zhenotdel.

In that context it is notable that in the first edition of *Kommunistka* in 1929, Nukrat took the opportunity to present the reject of an autonomous society as a trouncing for the Kazakh Zhenotdel. She derided activists who “had insisted on setting up this Society before the All Union Meeting.”<sup>128</sup> She was glad that this decision had been disapproved of by “the majority of those who attended the meeting, who had viewed this decision negatively, and considered it wrong to

---

<sup>125</sup> *Kommunistka* 6 and 11 in 1928 feature extended articles by Nukhrat which presented technical questions of recruitment as the questions which should be discussed, rather than the debates on the decree or autonomy

<sup>126</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>127</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>128</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

have done so.”<sup>129</sup> The meeting instead had decided that all work among women should remain directly under the authority of the Central Committee and “focus on building the ‘way of life sections’ within the soviets.”<sup>130</sup>

An article on Kazakhstan in June 1929 makes no mention of any Society, which suggests it was closed down after the December meeting. It also shows Zhenotdel activists still struggling to obtain support from the Party, with the writer, Vekova, complaining about lack of funds and staff.<sup>131</sup> Her familiar pleas reflect the continued difficulty for the continued difficult position of the Zhenotdel in the Party.

Thus, despite the significance of these debates around a separate organisation, ultimately, for Zhenotdel members there was no alternative but to carry on within the Party structures. The Kazakh initiative had been crushed along with the proposals from Uzbekistan. Members were now required to return loyally to the fold.<sup>132</sup> Yet the difficult relationship between the Zhenotdel and the Party persisted. Even Nukrat, as the most prominent voice against autonomy, objected in April 1929 to the fact that “Party members continue to undermine the work of the Zhenotdel.”<sup>133</sup> During the 1928 debate, those who wanted an independent organisation were warned that it would be even worse outside the Party, as there would be no resources available.<sup>134</sup> Zhukova advised activists to remain patient and to understand that bringing about change “requires a lot of stubborn effort and time.”<sup>135</sup> Zhukova’s stance belittled the experiences of activists who had found it impossible to make progress in an environment where male Party members were often more conservative than their indigenous counterparts.

---

<sup>129</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

<sup>130</sup> N. Krupskaya, ‘Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

<sup>131</sup> N. Vekova, ‘Za Novyi Byt’, *Kommunistka*, 11 (1929), pp. 39-40

<sup>132</sup> A. Nukhrat A., ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929): pp. 24-28

<sup>133</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Kul’tpokhod v Turkmenistan’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929) pp. 32-35

<sup>134</sup> Zhukova, ‘Novye uvlechenne i staroi ideei’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1928), pp. 79-81

<sup>135</sup> Zhukova, ‘Novye uvlechenne i staroi ideei’, *Kommunistka*, 10 (1928), pp. 79-81

## 6.7 The role of the Zhenotdel as enforcer of the Party Purge and the Five Year Plan

*Kommunistka* of 1929 presents as a very different journal to that of previous years. In 1929 it reflected a pronounced loyalism toward the Central Committee and other leading Party bodies. Individual activists were not individually denounced for their oppositional views, but it was clear that the Central Committee would not tolerate any further criticism and the Party line had to be faithfully followed. Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, Central Committee member, close supporter of Stalin, and Head of the Anti-religious Commission had given a speech to the December meeting.<sup>136</sup> Given his position as a key figure in the war on religion, his intervention was clearly planned. Excerpts of his speech were printed in the January edition of *Kommunistka*. In this speech, Yaroslavsky stated that a tougher line would be taken to eradicate the influence of Islam among Party members. This included a crackdown on all those who opposed unveiling and “prosecutions taken against those who committed what now must be regarded as counter-revolutionary crimes.”<sup>137</sup>

Quoting from Nikolai Zelenskii, another Central Committee member and ally of Stalin, Yaroslavsky repeated Zelenskii’s demand that “[a]ll Communists demonstrate a correct attitude on the woman question.”<sup>138</sup> Yaroslavsky announced that “an inspection of our Party will be carried out very soon in order to cleanse it of all alien elements.”<sup>139</sup> He was adamant that Party members could not “ingratiate themselves with the clergy or assist their oppressive practices.”<sup>140</sup> We “need to consider the suitability of a Communist who keeps his wife locked up, who imprisons her under a paranji, who forbids her from attending meetings,

---

<sup>136</sup> D. Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless*, for a description of Yaroslavsky’s leading role in the persecution of religion.

<sup>137</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchanii’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

<sup>138</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchanii’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

<sup>139</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchanii’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

<sup>140</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchanii’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31



who sends his children to be educated in the madrassa, who supports the mullahs.”<sup>141</sup> He asked “Can we really consider this person to be a Bolshevik?”<sup>142</sup> Thus, Yaroslavsky sought to co-opt Zhenotdel members into a campaign which purported to answer longstanding demands, crystallised in that put forward by Liubimova in February 1928 for “the leadership to take action to change the attitudes and behaviour of male Party members when it comes to the question of women.”<sup>143</sup>

In reality it seems that the Central Committee was initiating purges at an early stage to pre-empt a backlash to the Five Year Plan. The Hujum of 1927 had revealed the hopelessness of issuing orders to those who refuse to obey them. The antagonism of Party members had been pointed to by Zhenotdel activists from the commencement of its work in Central Asia. However, before 1927 leading Party committees had not demanded compliance with their formal edicts on behaviour. Then attitudes shifted remarkably swiftly from tolerance to profound hostility toward those who did not act in accordance with the Party rules. Sredazburo representative Nikolaeva asserted in August 1927 that the Hujum “was a test of who was a genuine supporter of the Soviet regime.”<sup>144</sup> She referred to a report from the first formal inspection into the behaviour of Party members in July 1927 and railed at “the hypocrisy of those who call for unveiling in public but in reality continue to veil their wives and female relatives.”<sup>145</sup> She also commended “the recent arrest of the secretary of a Komsomol cell for refusing to allow his wife to unveil” as the kind of action which needed to be taken.<sup>146</sup>

While Nikolaeva’s attitude resonated with that of the Sredazburo, she was alone among *Kommunistka* writers at that time in demanding such tough action. Writing in January 1928, Artiukhina, did not advocate the targeting of individual lifestyle among the Party membership. Her concern about the findings of the inspection of July 1927 was that it showed that the Party had done nothing to protect women

---

<sup>141</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchani’), *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

<sup>142</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, ‘Reshitel’nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchani’), *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

<sup>143</sup> S. Liubimova, ‘8 Marta v Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

<sup>144</sup> K. Nikolaeva, ‘Pervye itogi’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

<sup>145</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>146</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

who had unveiled.<sup>147</sup> She believed that this failure revealed lack of understanding which needed to be addressed through education. However, she too had fallen into line behind a crackdown on individual lifestyle. She wrote then that “learning from the experience of 1927 means we need to cleanse our ranks of those who do not fulfil the requirement set by the Party to liberate women.”<sup>148</sup> She agreed with Yaroslavsky that those who did not obey the demand to unveil their female relatives, and forsake kalym and other illegal cultural practices, were to be considered enemies. Artiukhina reflected the sense that the Party had to get ready for another rebellion against it and wrote that:

Our attack on the paranji and chadra was without doubt a provocation to the counter-revolutionary kulaks, wealthy landowners and clergy. Now we need to prepare to resolutely crush any attempt by the enemy to wreck our work again.<sup>149</sup>

This theme was continued by another high-ranking Central Committee supporter, Amosov, later that year when he warned of the need to obstruct “the backlash and terror triggered by the Hujum in Uzbekistan.”<sup>150</sup> Zhenotdel activists were told by Artiukhina that they had to comply with the orders of the Party leadership and assist with the liquidation of disloyal elements within the Party. Zhenotdel activists were told that they must put themselves at the disposal of “an inspection into Party and Komsomol members to establish which of them will comply with the requirement to liberate women in reality.”<sup>151</sup> Nukrat confirmed that activists had to assist in “enforcing the decision of the Central Committee to rid the Party of members who do not implement the decisions of the Party on the woman question.”<sup>152</sup>

Another aspect of this new rigidity was a call for more action against the clergy and religious practices. This again was in direct conflict with Krupskaya’s call for patience and tolerance. In March 1929 a comrade Dimanstein complained “there

---

<sup>147</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Ot ‘nastuplenie’ k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

<sup>148</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Vypolnim resheniia’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

<sup>149</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Vypolnim resheniia’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

<sup>150</sup> M. Amosov, ‘Shire organizuite massy’, *Kommunistka*, 14 (1929), pp. 23-30

<sup>151</sup> A. Artiukhina, ‘Vypolnim resheniia’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

<sup>152</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

is a threat to the Party from the Mullahs, who direct their propaganda to the youth of the Party and Komsomol, particularly women.”<sup>153</sup> This menace was emphasised in articles over the following months, with demands increasing for a clampdown on the clergy under the slogan “against religion for culture” with all supporters of the Soviet government called upon “to take a stand in the fight against the Muslim religion because of its serious repression of women.”<sup>154</sup> Party members were exhorted to abolish religious practices in their families. And alongside the continued Hujum against unveiling, there were demands for the general rationalisation of clothing among women activists along with the development of “healthier clothes for women who are being drawn into the developing economy.”<sup>155</sup> The dress codes of peasant society had to be cast aside in the conditions of the industrialisation of agriculture.

Speaking at the meeting in December 1928, Zhukova expressed hope that the new tough tactics announced by Yaroslavsky would prompt “a male revolution and the emergence of a Communist who actively desires a ban of the veil.”<sup>156</sup> She was soon to be disappointed as reports show that local male Party members continued to exhibit a belligerent refusal to comply with the orders of the Central Committee. In an article on Turkmenistan in May 1929, Mukhitdinova reported that women continued to be “deprived of any rights within the family.”<sup>157</sup> Another article by Perimova in the same issue complained about the continual refusal of Party members to abide by the laws on polygyny and argued that “there are some members who still insist that their wife wears a yasmak.”<sup>158</sup> It seems from *Kommunistka* that, like the Hujum, the Zhenotdel were expected to lead a campaign for the compliance with Yaroslavsky’s orders but with no real support. And now the Zhenotdel had lost all autonomy.

Having prevented the creation of an autonomous organisation and harnessed the energies of the membership for the first Five Year Plan, an announcement was made in February 1930 of a major reorganisation of Party work among women.

---

<sup>153</sup> F. Dimanstein, ‘Protiv mull, ishanov’, *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1929), pp. 49-51

<sup>154</sup> A. Smirnova, ‘Pochin po bor’be s religiei na Vostoke’, *Kommunistka*, 8 (1929), pg.27.

<sup>155</sup> A. Nukhrat, ‘Na vazhneishem uchastke nashei raboty’, *Kommunistka*, 19 (1929), pp. 34-27

<sup>156</sup> Zhukova, ‘Mestnye rabotniki – ob Izdanii dekreta’, *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 34-35

<sup>157</sup> E. Mukhitdinova, ‘V zashchitu tryzhenitsy Vostoka’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp. 39-41

<sup>158</sup> Perimova, ‘Protiv primirenchestva v bytu’, *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp.37-39

The article which was reprinted from the Party newspaper, *Pravda*, was by Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin's chief political associates, who informed Zhenotdel activists that the organisation was to be closed down.<sup>159</sup> The reasoning he gave was the necessity "to overcome conservatism on the woman question" and "make it a task for the organisation as a whole."<sup>160</sup> Meanwhile "[s]pecial methods of work [would] continue to be used among women, especially in the East", known as the *Zhensektory*, but would be "under the direct supervision of the Party apparatus."<sup>161</sup> Indigenous women had to be transformed into a mass proletariat to fulfil the ambitious aims of the Plan. Nukrat had earlier declared war on the veil, the *yasmak* and any other form of indigenous dress that tied peasant women to their old lives."<sup>162</sup> The liberation of women became synonymous with the imperatives of the Soviet state.

## 6.8 Conclusion

This chapter traced the Zhenotdel's relationship with the Party as reflected in the pages of *Kommunistka* during a decade of involvement in Central Asia. Clearly this period proved to be a very difficult experience for the Zhenotdel, with activists fighting a frustrating battle for recognition of their project. The core problem from the outset, as mirrored in other aspects of the Zhenotdel experience, was that the local Party membership largely antagonistic to work on the woman question, and the Central Party leadership was indifferent, at least until it coincided with its own political goals. Central Asian women then only became of interest to provide a veneer of emancipation to a profoundly authoritarian campaign.

The Central Committee had never wanted an independent women's movement. This was reflected both within the manner in which the Zhenotdel was formed and

---

<sup>159</sup> L. Kaganovich, *Pravda*, 17 January 1930; *Partiinoe stroitel'stvo*, 2: 10 Moscow 1930 cited in E. Arfon Rees, *Iron Lazar: A Political Biography of Lazar Kaganovich* (Anthem Press, 2013)

<sup>160</sup> L. Kaganovich, 'Reorganizatsiia partapparata i ocherednye zadachi partraboty', *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp. 3-5

<sup>161</sup> L. Kaganovich, 'Reorganizatsiia partapparata i ocherednye zadachi partraboty', *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp. 3-5

<sup>162</sup> A. Nukhrat, 'Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

in the abandonment of non-Party meetings in 1921. It declined to enforce compliance with Party rules in relation to women during the period of what Terry Martin refers to as “functional Korenizatsiia.”<sup>163</sup> Clearly to do so would have conflicted with its goal of developing compliant national elites in Central Asia. Following the purge of the opposition within the Central Committee and the cementing of Stalin’s hold on power, the priorities shifted away from Korenizatsiia and towards a bureaucratic ‘class war’ to ready society for the mass mobilisations of the Five Year Plan. This goal implied a necessity to destroy the social fabric of Central Asian society and uproot the hold of Islam. The Hujum was the beginning of this process. Party members who had previously been able to combine their Marxism with their Muslim traditions now found themselves under immense pressure to conform. The lesson that the Central Committee took from the Hujum was the need to purge the national elite and pull the Party membership into line through threats and intimidation.

The Zhenotdel leadership had been hopeful in 1919 that its creation as a bureau of the Central Committee would validate the importance of women’s liberation in the eyes of the membership of the Party. However, as I have discussed in chapter one, this proved not to be the case, and the Zhenotdel struggled against attempts to close it down and undermine its work from the beginning. In contrast to Russia, the Central Asian Zhenotdel’s isolation from the rest of the Party had allowed it time to develop its own programme, and create the first shoots of indigenous organisation. Yet its efforts to work with other Soviet organisations, in particular the cooperatives, were impeded by the fact that neither the Sredazburo nor the Central Committee treated its work seriously. Some activists believed that they could overcome this problem by substituting delegate meetings for clubs and building direct connections with local Party organisations and Soviets. But this did not make any difference as long as the Party leadership remained disinterested. And when finally the Sredazburo decided to become involved, at the behest of the Central Committee, it was certainly not because it had become convinced of the Zhenotdel’s programme.

---

<sup>163</sup> T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pg. 139

The debate surrounding autonomy in 1928 is enlightening as it reveals the deep alienation felt by Zhenotdel activists. The Party was seen as a straitjacket which prevented the Zhenotdel reaching out to progressive sections of the indigenous population. Communist men were described as some of the worst offenders when it came to women's rights. The arguments for independent organisation published in *Kommunistka* in 1928 must have caused some alarm on the Central Committee. The presence of Yaroslavsky at the 1928 All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East reflects this concern. Yaroslavsky was there to send out a clear message that the Central Committee was taking charge of the situation, and both male and female Party members were to be brought into line. Instead of allowing autonomy to develop in the region, which could assist the project of women's emancipation, the entire debate had to be shut down. Instead the Zhenotdel was told it was to confront local Party members, but this time as an agent of a repressive purge.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

#### 7.1 The Zhenotdel's disappearance in Central Asia

March 1930 witnessed the end of the project of Zhenotdel Socialism. *Kommunistka* ceased publication and the Uzbek language Zhenotdel journal, *Yangi Yo'l* was transferred to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda and, according to Marianne Kamp's research, it no longer focused on women's issues.<sup>1</sup> Zhenotdel sections in Central Asia were converted Zhensektory, sections of local Party committees without any autonomy.<sup>2</sup> In the final issue of *Kommunistka*, Sokolova announced that activists now had to turn their attention to "uprooting the remnants of capitalism and feudalism" and would be sent out to the villages to push for women to unveil and to recruit them to the collective farms.<sup>3</sup> Marianne Kamp states that the majority were sent to the machine-tractor stations, which were in charge of supervising the "rapid and forced" collectivisation of Uzbekistan.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of the Five Year Plan was even more serious for the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. Alun Thomas describes "the chaos and turmoil of collectivization" in Kazakhstan, which produced famine and immense state repression. He states that the CPSU sent militia to force:

...famine refugees to settle in delineated areas, grossly exacerbating acute hardship. The demographic impact of collectivisation, sedentarization, and famine was catastrophic. Figures vary, but overall Soviet Kazakh fatalities

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam Modernity and Unveiling Under Communism* (University of Washington Press 2006), pp. 217-218

<sup>2</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp. 217-218

<sup>3</sup> A. Sokolova, '8 Marta na Sovetskom Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp.40-43

<sup>4</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg. 218

reached perhaps 1.5 million between 1928 and 1934, when collectivization was largely finalized.<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of this social disorder, veiled peasant women were subjected to continued coercion to unveil and begin work on collective farms. The success of the unveiling campaign in this period is disputed. Kamp reports that despite resistance, “veiling [had] decreased in a significant way by the late 1930s with collectivisation and an increase in the availability of both urban and rural schools.”<sup>6</sup> Douglas Northrop, whose research is based on OGPU police records, argues that resistance was more marked than Kamp believes. He concludes that “the party’s continuing efforts during the 1930s to emancipate Uzbek women often had the opposite result: they only strengthened local practices of veiling and seclusion.”<sup>7</sup> Despite this disagreement on the level of opposition, it is clear that, the unveiling of women acquired a new significance in a period when the obliteration of cultural barriers to the mass mobilisation of women for the Soviet industrial machine became crucial.

In these challenging times in Central Asia, women were profoundly weakened by their inability to organise as women or to share their experiences and ideas in a journal like *Kommunistka* or *Yangi Yo’l*. Goldman makes the point that this was precisely what that the Central leadership wanted.<sup>8</sup> It feared that “separate women’s organisations such as the Zhenotdel would distract women from production.”<sup>9</sup> No doubt, an organisation based on women’s rights would be likely to challenge the male chauvinism inherent in the authoritarian system of mass collectivisation. It would likely, as it did in 1928, raise questions that went to the core of the formal adherence of the Party to women’s emancipation. Even in 1928,

---

<sup>5</sup> A. Thomas, ‘The Caspian Disputes: Nationalism & Nomadism in Early Soviet Central Asia’ in *The Russian Review* Vol. 76 Issue 3 (2017), pp. 502-525

<sup>6</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pg.222

<sup>7</sup> D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press 2004), pg. 316

<sup>8</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics, Peasant Revolution and the Death of the Proletarian Women’s Movement in the USSR’ in *Slavic Review* Vol 55, No 1 (Spring 1996), pp.46-77

<sup>9</sup> W. Z. Goldman, ‘Industrial Politics, Peasant Revolution and the Death of the Proletarian Women’s Movement in the USSR’, pp.46-77



the Zhenotdel in Central Asia had proved to be too great a challenge to the Central Committee. Independent ideas and attempts at autonomy were no longer allowed.

## 7.2 The Zhenotdel - a complex organisation

The grim reality of women's lives in 1930s Central Asia reflected the death of an idealistic vision. Peasant women who had once been described as the "slaves" of a patriarchal society had now become victims of forced collectivisation. Kollontai had condemned the repression of women under capitalism and demanded their political and economic independence and liberation from the family under socialism. She had argued that "the solution of the family question is no less important than the achievement of political equality and economic independence."<sup>10</sup> Now, Central Asian women remained burdened with domestic labour and childcare and were being forced to leave their traditional lives and to work in degrading conditions. The conditions in the collective farms of Soviet Central Asia were arguably worse than those in the factories of pre-revolutionary Petrograd. In sum, women were still repressed and impoverished but now that repression was veiled in the language of liberation.

It was always going to be a difficult battle to make progress as a Bureau of a Party with such entrenched ideas of female inferiority. A women-centred project in Central Asia could only make genuine advances if indigenous women assumed proprietorship of that project. Marianne Kamp argues that many of the initiatives after 1924 reflected the ambitions of a female Muslim intelligentsia and were not simply an imposition of a Zhenotdel ideal from above.<sup>11</sup> This point is significant as it shows that the Zhenotdel had succeeded in connecting with something real within indigenous society, and that its project was therefore not simply a top-down Russian one. From 1925 until 1927 *Kommunistka* reflected a new far more successful phase of work, with indigenous women running shops in Uzbekistan.

---

<sup>10</sup> A. Kollontai, 'The Social Basis of the Woman Question' in *Alexandra Kollontai on Women's Liberation* (Bookmarks 1998)

<sup>11</sup> M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, pp.49-52

Certainly while Zhenotdel activists displayed a highly critical attitude toward indigenous culture, they attempted, as far as possible, to work within its boundaries. In chapter four I highlighted the significance its attempts to transform the existing skills base among indigenous women into economic enterprises led by women. The women's shops were examples of this, as were the cooperatives organised around carpet making, silk weaving and farming. The club model was aimed at providing women with work, education, childcare and other facilities in a safe and culturally appropriate environment. It appears from reports that these initiatives began to show real signs of success in 1925 and 1926, with the influx of indigenous women. The Zhenotdel's pragmatism in organisation had, despite its prejudices, allowed it to connect in an organic way with the female population.

On the other hand, the Zhenotdel's status as a bureau of the Central Committee meant that any organic women's movement would be directly under the control of the Party leadership. Its ability to develop self-activity among indigenous women would be ultimately determined by the political ambitions of the Central Committee. The Zhenotdel's loyalty to the CPSU had persisted over the decade, despite the enormous antagonism it faced within it. It was only in 1928 that some Zhenotdel activists began to reassess their organisational link to the Party and to see the advantages of independence. But by then it was too late. The battle within the Central Committee had been won by Stalin and there could be no more experimentation or debate on alternative ways forward.

The Zhenotdel's political and organisational dependence on the CPSU meant that it was crippled both morally and practically. It lacked resources for its cooperatives, buildings for clubs and shops and connections to the markets to sell goods. Activists also had little real support from the Central Committee in dealing with antagonism from male Party members, or in providing a model of progressive behaviour for indigenous men. The continued appeals to the Central Committee within articles in *Kommunistka* illustrate the depth of the disappointment and frustration among activists. Liubimova did not appear at the time to recognise that the isolation of the Central Asian Zhenotdel was also a strength. But it is clear that activists had attained a sense of identity and pride in their work. The 1928 debate on autonomy reflected the determination among a significant section to make progress without the impediment of the Party, either in terms of the local

membership's antagonism or the Central Committee's authoritarianism. As I demonstrated in chapter six, local male allies had been identified who were more advanced in their ideas toward women than Party men.

My research demonstrates that a weakness in the Zhenotdel's programme was its reliance on legislation to bring about new models of behaviour. In the absence of real social and economic alternatives, this state orientated policy was always going to result in crisis. One *Kommunistka* writer, Seifi, wrote of the problems among Kirghiz women who decided to apply for divorces and then found themselves in very dire circumstances, homeless and unemployed.<sup>12</sup> These women exchanged difficult and repressive marriages for homelessness and often prostitution. There was also hardship for the families that they left behind, who remained dependent on women's labour to supplement subsistence farming. Seifi expressed acute awareness of the consequences of divorce in a society that lacked an infrastructure to cope with new family forms. It is clear that at least some within the Zhenotdel recognised the limitations of a legalistic strategy. However, Seifi, like other Zhenotdel activists, was powerless to prevent such unintended consequences. She and others struggled to adapt Kollontai's ideal of family transformation to a society in which it was not easily applicable. To be sure, the Zhenotdel provided information and support to indigenous women on their legal rights and advocated that they use these rights. If women decided that they wanted a divorce or to reject an arranged marriage then Zhenotdel activists gave them assistance. Activists provided advice and promoted policies aimed at providing single women with economic independence. Yet, while women's cooperatives and shops were a beginning, they could not make meaningful progress in the conditions of Soviet Central Asia.

It is my contention that the Zhenotdel's confidence in the Soviet state as an instrument of liberation presented a more serious problem than the ethnocentric views of activists. The experience of club and cooperatives show that notwithstanding their often negative views of indigenous culture, Zhenotdel activists were committed to the self-organisation of indigenous women. They also recognise the importance of traditional skills like silk-weaving or carpet-making.

---

<sup>12</sup> M. Seifi, 'Pravovoe polozenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem'i', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

Liubimova's antagonism toward the influence of the Muslim religion within society and her determination to fight it with the weapon of Soviet law undermined what effectively were culturally sensitive policies. A debate around a more nuanced understanding of the interpenetration of culture and economic forms such as that put forward by Krupskaya at the December 1928 would have been very valuable, if conditions had allowed for it to take place. Krupskaya made important points against Liubimova's legal agenda, because of its overly bureaucratic tendencies and intolerance. However, at the point that these criticisms were made the entire project was coming to an end and the debate was over.

Yet, as I have demonstrated in chapter six, the legalism of the Zhenotdel programme did not lead it to support the Hujum. Activists sought to use legal transformation *alongside* safe women-only economic and social organisation, and did not want to jeopardise this programme. It is unsurprising that Liubimova and her supporters ignored the Hujum in their articles in *Kommunistka* in 1927. She, Butusova, Tunik and Bolshakova continued to make the case for shops and cooperatives throughout that year. It is little wonder that Nikolaeva accused them of not fulfilling their obligations as Party members. When Liubimova finally mentioned the Hujum in October 1927, it was only in the conclusions to an article which had praised the work of women-only cooperatives and clubs.<sup>13</sup> Those Zhenotdel activists who had been involved in club and co-operative work from 1923 were opposed to an aggressive attack on society which would endanger these initiatives. Liubimova and her allies had fought from 1923 to realise a programme first put forward by Kollontai in 1921. Their persistence in conducting this work right up to its collapse of clubs and cooperatives under the pressure of the Hujum, shows their strong commitment to Zhenotdel Socialism.

Barbara Evans Clements identifies the overall commitment of the Zhenotdel in Russia to small scale cooperative rather than mass production. She argues that Zhenotdel activists "stressed the importance of the creation of local organisations - day care centres, public dining rooms - as the means to communalising society."<sup>14</sup> These Zhenotdel policies were not in keeping with the dominant views

---

<sup>13</sup> S. Liubimova, 'Vostok k desiatletiiu Oktiabria', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1927), pp.55-61

<sup>14</sup> B. Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel' in *Slavic Review* Vol 51 No. 3 (Autumn 1992), pg. 485

of the Central Party leadership, whose representative Preobrazhenskii “argued that large centralised structures would be employed both to build communism and to run it; society would be a mammoth cooperative presided over by ‘various kinds of book-keeping offices or statistical bureaux’”.<sup>15</sup> This divergence illustrates a further difference between the policies of the Central Committee and what Evans Clements calls the Zhenotdel’s utopianism, and I describe as Zhenotdel Socialism. The Zhenotdel wanted the collective to take over the tasks of the family and therefore its economic strategy necessitated communal forms of domestic labour and child care. The clubs, cooperatives and shops of Central Asia provided a framework for women to come together in economic activity which was very different to the large scale collective farms of the 1930s. The former allowed for the slow drawing in of women, as opposed to their forcible recruitment under the latter.

The failure of Gregory Massell and Douglas Northrop to consider *Kommunistka* in its entirety from 1920 to 1930 has led them, in my view, to wrongly interpret the role of the Zhenotdel in the Hujum and other CC-imposed policies, and to misunderstand its relationship to the CPSU. It is true that Massell drew very significantly from *Kommunistka*, but only from 1925. Although both writers conceded the existence of women-only shops and clubs prior to the Hujum, they did not recognise that these forms of work indicated a very different approach to that of the Central Committee. They did not see that the Zhenotdel was firmly grounded in a programme that conflicted with the Central Committee’s strategy of putting indigenous women in direct conflict with their own society. Instead both writers focused on the Zhenotdel’s legalism as the implicit link between it and the Hujum. However, as I have shown in this thesis, the legal strategy operated as part of a multi-faceted strategy of incremental change, rather than an assault. Zhenotdel activists believed that the Soviet courts would issue decisions that supported women and provided a model for the rest of society.

Furthermore, I have shown that the Zhenotdel cannot be judged as a monolith, and that there were significant differences within its ranks over its programme of semi-autonomous activity. Furthermore, a rising layer of Party loyalists existed

---

<sup>15</sup> B. Evans Clements, ‘The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel’, pg. 485

led by Nukrat, were insistent on cementing the authority of the Sredazburo and the Party Centre over the Zhenotdel. The number of articles printed in support of the Hujum, were very few in comparison to the many others which either ignored or criticised it. It is also true that leading activists like Liubimova demanded a legal ban on the veil in the aftermath of 1927. But again Liubimova's position needs to be understood in the context of her desire to protect and reassure indigenous women who faced enormous pressure and physical danger in that period. It should also be recognised as a compromise with the Party leadership. If there was to be unveiling then it needed to take place in such a way as to provide women with the security of knowing the government was on their side. Interestingly, Marianne Kamp sees Liubimova's view as reflecting an astute understanding on her part of the importance of formal rules within indigenous society.<sup>16</sup> Kamp also confirms that the call for a ban was supported by many indigenous women and was campaigned for by *Yangi Yo'l* after 1928. The fact that no ban was ever issued shows that the Central Committee was not in favour of such a move, preferring to use the Party to exert political and social pressure to conform.

In truth it was only in 1929 that the Zhenotdel can be described as having been reduced to a servant of the Central Committee. By then, all effective dissent had been quashed, most notably that of Krupskaya and Liubimova. However, even in 1929, there were continuing complaints from activists about the gap between official Party policy and regressive attitudes among male Party members. Even at this stage, a genuine commitment to indigenous women appeared to prevail among some Zhenotdel activists. The decision to close the Zhenotdel had everything to do with silencing those voices. It had nothing to do with the claim made by Stalin that the woman question been resolved.<sup>17</sup>

Kaganovich had informed Zhenotdel activists in February 1930 that the 'organising of women would henceforth be taken up by the entire Party and no longer be left

---

<sup>16</sup> Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman In Uzbekistan*, pp. 205-214

<sup>17</sup> Scheide C., 'Born in October: the Life & Thoughts of Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina 1889-1969' in *Women in the Stalin Era* editor Melanie Ilić (Palgrave Macmillan 2001), pp.9-28

to the Zhenotdel to cope with on its own.<sup>18</sup> This article mirrored the speech of Yaroslavsky to the December 1928 meeting, where he pledged the support of the Central leadership to ensuring a purge of all Party members who refused to treat women as equals.<sup>19</sup> Yet reports in 1929 showed Yaroslavsky's commitment to have been meaningless. The purge did not change attitudes among men in the Party.<sup>20</sup> Those now deemed to be working class and trustworthy by the Central Committee were no different in reality to the petty bourgeois intellectuals who had been purged.<sup>21</sup> Even Nukrat admitted in late 1929 that attitudes among male Party members toward women entering the workforce were hostile and disrespectful.<sup>22</sup> The purge, like the Hujum, was aimed at exerting control over the Party membership and eradicating religious practices among them, not with creating more enlightened views toward women. If the Central Committee genuinely wanted to change attitudes then it would have adopted Krupskaya's proposals and begun educational initiatives rather than expulsions.

In conclusion, I consider that the leadership of the CPSU in 1919 was forced to create the Zhenotdel so as to prevent the rising women's movement becoming an oppositional force. Its decision to do so connected with the desire among a section of Bolshevik women to develop the Marxist programme in the conditions of the Soviet Union. And although ultimately unable to achieve their ideals, the Central Asian Zhenotdel did develop a multi-faceted strategy, aspects of which were successful momentarily in creating autonomy among women in their working and family lives. Its activists were able to provide a limited glimpse of what was achievable through a nuanced and to some degree culturally sensitive approach. In the final analysis it can be argued that the attempt of some to split from the Party should have taken place far earlier, or indeed that activists should have refused to allow the women's movement to be led by a bureau of the Central Committee. It seems to me that it was this very problem that lay at the heart of its ongoing contradictions and ultimate demise.

---

<sup>18</sup> L. Kaganovich, 'Reorganizatsiia partapparata I ocherednye zadachi partraboty', *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp. 3-5

<sup>19</sup> Y. Yaroslavsky, 'Reshitel'nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchaniu', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

<sup>20</sup> N. Vekova, 'Za Novyi Byt', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1929), pp. 39-40

<sup>21</sup> N. Vekova, 'Za Novyi Byt', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1929), pp. 39-40

<sup>22</sup> A. Nukhrat, 'Na vazhneishem uchastke nashei raboty', *Kommunistka*, 19 (1929) pp. 34-27

The Zhenotdel was motivated by a liberatory agenda which was flawed in many respects. It provided glimpses of what was possible if indigenous women had autonomy over their lives. Moreover, it created pockets of opportunities for indigenous women to do begin doing so. Ultimately however, the Zhenotdel was trapped politically and organisationally in a Party that had failed to genuinely absorb its formal support for women's rights. This Party was to transform into a machine bent on subjugation.



## Appendix 1

### Timeline - significant events for the Zhenotdel in Central Asia

October 1917 (November according to the old Julien Calendar) - the Bolsheviks take power in the Russian Empire.

November 1917 - Petrograd Conference organised by Bolshevik women's journal *Rabotnitsa*.

November 1918 - All Russian Congress of Working Women organised by Bolshevik women which formed Women's Commissions, the precursors of the Zhenotdel.

March 1919 - 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party which endorsed formation of Women's Commissions.

August 1919 - formal creation of the Zhenotdel as Women's Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

June 1920 - first issue of *Kommunistka* published.

September 1920 - death of Inessa Armand, first Director of the Zhenotdel and replacement by Alexandra Kollontai.

April 1921 - First All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East.

June 1921 - death of Konkordiia Samoilova, central founding member of the Zhenotdel.

April 1922 - Removal of Alexandra Kollontai as Director and replacement with Sofia Smidovich.

January 1923 - Appointment of Serafima Liubimova as Head of the Central Asian Zhenotdel.

March 1923 - Second All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East.

1924 - Resignation of Sofia Smidovich as Director and replacement with Klavdiia Nikolaeva.

1925 - Removal of Klavdiia Nikolaeva as Director and replacement with Alexandra Artiukhina.

1925 - Third All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East.

1926 - Central Committee instructs Central Asian Party to launch radical campaign against indigenous society and meetings with Zhenotdel activists take place between June and December.

Late 1926 - Removal of Serafima Liubimova as Head of Central Asian Zhenotdel.

March 8 1927 - First unveiling demonstrations take place in Uzbek cities.

May 1 1927 - Second unveiling demonstrations take place in Uzbek cities.

December 1927 - 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party, where Stalin announced Five Year Plan to commence in October 1928.

December 1928 - Fourth All Union Meeting of Activists among Women of the East.

March 1930 - Final issue of *Kommunistka*.

March 1930 - Zhenotdel closed down.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### *Kommunistka*

#### 1920

Kollontai A., 'Pervaia mezhdunarodnaia konferentsiia kommunistok', *Kommunistka*, 1-2, pp. 3-5

Kollontai A., 'Sem'ia i kommunizm', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 16-19

Kollontai A., 'Posledniaia rabynia (k s'ezdu zhenshchin narodov Vostoka)', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp. 24-26

Preobrazhenskii E., 'Put' k raskreposhcheniiu zhenshchiny', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1920), pp.20-21

Samoilova K., 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920) pp. 31-32

Samoilova K., 'Vseross s'ezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1920), pp. 32-33

Zinoviev G., 'III Internatsional I rabotnitsy', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1920), pp. 1-2

#### 1921

Kollontai A., 'Rezoliutsii I vsepossiiskogo soveshchaniia organizatorov po rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp. 49-51

Putilovskaya, 'Rabota Kommunistcheskikh Partii sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 12-13 (1921), pp.52-54

Rosanova A., 'Priezd zhenshchin narodov Vostoka v Moskvu', *Kommunistka*, 14-15 (1921), pg. 36-37

## 1922

Dryzhinina, 'Probuzhdenie zhenshchiny vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 18 (1) (1922), pp.19-20

Ralli E., 'Zhenskie musul'manskie kluby', *Kommunistka*, 6-7 (1922), pp. 30-32

RT, 'O rabote sredi Kalmychek', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1922), pp. 36-37

Tsetlina V., 'God raboty sredi zhenshchin Azerbeidzhana', *Kommunistka*, 18 (1) (1922), pp. 28-30

## 1923

Dorogie toverishchi' in *Kommunistka* 10 (1923) pg. 1

ER 'Nesmeniaemyi pedaktor *Kommunistka* N.K Krupskaya', *Kommunistka* 7 (1923) pp. 6-7

Kasparova V., 'Trudiiashchiny zhenshchiny stran Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1923), pp. 25-26

Kasparova V., 'Pervye dostizheniia v rabote sredi Vostochnykh truzhenits', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1923), pp.40-43

Kislova, 'Zapiska o rabote Turkmenskogo oblastnogo otdela rabotnits', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 34-36

Ishkova K., 'Rabota sredi musul'manok v Azerbeidzhane', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp. 34-36

Ishkova K., '4 Soveshchanie Zavzhenotdelami Azerbeidzhanskoj Kommunisticheskoj Partii', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pp. 45-47

Liubimova S., 'Rabota na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1923), pp. 27-29

Liubimova S., 'Rabota na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3-4 (1923), pp. 27-29

Liubimova S., 'K itogam soveshchanie po rabote sredi zhenshchin Vostochnykh narodnostei', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1923), pp.11-12

Liubimova S., 'Eshche shag na puti k raskreposhcheniiu', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1923), pp. 32-34

Liubimova S., 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Kirgizii', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pp. 43-45

Liubimova S., 'Vostok', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1923), pp. 28-30

Otmar- Stein, 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Bukhara', *Kommunistka* 8 (1923), pp. 33-34

Seifi, 'Kashgariia', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1923), pp. 34-37

Seifi, 'Pravovoe polozhenie zhenshchiny Vostoka - vopros ob ukreplenie Kirgizskoi sem'i', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1923), pg.43

Smidovich S., 'Znachenie Kommunistka dlia raboty sredi zhenshchin' *Kommunistka*, 7 (1923) pp. 7-9

## 1924

Kasparova K., 'Itogi I Perspektivy raboty na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp.45-48

Liubimova S., 'Pis'ma iz Turkestana', *Kommunistka*, 1-2 (1924), pp. 40-41

Liubimova S., 'Na Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp.13-14

Liubimova S., 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Turkestane', *Kommunistka*, 7(1924), pp.19-20

Liubimova S., 'Kursy volostnykh organizatorov', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pg. 49

Liubimova S., 'Na puti k raskreposhcheniiu', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1924), pp.36-39

Orgbureau, 'Ocherednye Zadachi partii v rabote sredi rabotnits I krest'ianok', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1924), pp.6-11

Otmar Shtein L., 'Kraevoi pokazatel'nyi klub imeni Krupskoi dlya musul'manskikh zhenshchin v starom' Tashkente', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1924), pp 49-50

Seifi M., 'K trekhletnemu lubileiu komm. universitetu trudiashchikhsia vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924), pp.46.

Seifi M., 'Professional'noe Dvizhenie na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924), pp. 46-47

Seifi M., 'Itogi raboty del. Sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp. 42-44

Seifi M., 'God raboty s praktinankami', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp. 45-46

Seifi M., 'O rabote sredi devushek na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8-9 (1924), pp. 47-49

Smidovich S., 'Itogi vse. Sov. Zaveshenotdelami', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1924), pp. 15-17

Tineva, 'Vostok i 8 Marta', *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1924), pp. 48-49

## **1925**

Glebeva, 'V Bashkirii', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1925), pp. 69-70

Kasparova V., 'Novye rezervy na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pp. 21-27

Kasparova V., 'K vostochnomu soveshchanaiu', *Kommunistka* 3 (1925), pp.21-27

Kasparova V., 'Zadachi partii v rabote sredi zhenshchin narodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp. 85-93

Kasparova V., 'Formy i metody massovoi raboty sredi zhenshchin vostochnikh narodov', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp.67-75

Tineva K., 'Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp.21-26

Kasparova V., 'Formy i metody raboty v zhenshchin narodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1925), pp. 84-87

Niurina F., 'V Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 77-84

Niurina, 'Itogi raboty del sobranii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1925), pp.21-26

Seifi, 'O rabote na Vostoke i nasem kadre', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1925), pp. 73-77

Seifi M., 'Pomoshch' v proizvodstve zhenshchin v Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 75-80

Semenova G., 'Soveshchanie sekretarei iacheek i organizatorov v zhenshchin v Samarskom uezde', *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pg.61

Untitled, 'Postanovlenie plenuma Ts.K RKP (b)', *Kommunistka*, 2 (1925), pg. 20xd

V. K., 'Formy i metody raboty v zhenshchin narodov Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1925), pp. 67-75

## 1926

Liubimova S., 'Na Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1926), pp. 56-59

Liubimova S., 'Zhenskie lavki v Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp.70-72

Liubimova S., 'Bor'ba na ideologicheskom fronte', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 74-76

Nukrat A., 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin Kalmytskoi stepi', *Kommunistka*, (1926), pp. 67-69

Prishepchik Z., 'Opyt raboty klubov v Srednei Azii', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1926), pp. 76-79

Ross, 'Kak rabotaet dom dekkhanki', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1926), pp. 57

Zavaryan N., 'Brachnoe i semeinoe pravo na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1926), pp. 42-45

Zavaryan N., 'Nekotopye momenty iz raboty sredi zhenshchin Sredi Azii', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1926), pp. 66-69

Zavaryan N., 'Delegatski sovershennii v Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1926), pp. 35-40

## 1927

Anisimova S., 'K itogam raskreposhcheniia zhenshchin Uzbekistana', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp. 56-60

Artiukhina A., 'Zametki o Zakavkaz'e', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1927), pp. 53-55

Artiukhina A., 'Pod zhakom proverki', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 9-11

Bolshakov V., 'Kooperirovanii zhenshchin v Vostochnykh natsional'nykh raionakh', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 53-55

Butusova E., 'Zhenskie lavki v Uzbekistane pp. 62-67', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1927), pp. 62-67



Liubimova S., 'Pervoe vsesiuzhnoe soveshchanie rabotnikov Zhenskikh klubov', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1927), pp. 28-33

Liubimova S., '8 Marta v Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 2 (1927), pp. 50-52

Liubimova S., 'O kooperirovani zhenzhchin vostochnykh narodhostei', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 51-52.

Liubimova S., 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin v Tataria', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp. 72-76

Liubimova S., 'Vostok k desiatletiiu Oktiabria', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1927), pp.55-61

Liubimova S., 'Vsesoiuzhyi s'ezd rabotnits I krest'ianok I rabota sredi zhenshchin Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1927), pp. 33-77

Nikolaeva K., 'Pervye itogi', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1927), pp.52-54

Nukrat A., 'Delegatskie sobraniia na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.31-36

Nukrat A., 'Perevybory v sovery i zhenshchiny Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1927), pp. 41-44

Prishepchik Z., 'Ob uchastii trudiashchikhsia v perevyborakh v rabote sovetov v Uzbekistane', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp.77-79

Sudakov V., 'Devushka Vostoka i komsomol', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1927), pp. 22-29

Tunik M., 'Rabota sredi zhenshchin potrebkooperatsii Uzbekistana', *Kommunistka*, 5 (1927), pp. 56-58

## **1928**

Arikova B., 'Obshchestvo 'doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo'', *Kommunistka* 6 (1928), pp. 81-83

Artiukhina A., 'Ot 'nastuplenie' k sistematicheskoi rabote (k obsledovaniuu raboty v Sredei Azii)', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 57-62

Ishkova K., 'Nushno li izdat' decret, zapreshchaiushchii noshenie chadra', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.59-62

Khairova, 'K voprosu o zhenskom obrazovanii na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.86-87

Krupskaya N., 'Ot redaktsii', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pg. 83

Krupskaya N., 'Puti raskreposhcheniia zhenshin vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1928), pp. 5-12

Liubimova S., '8 Marta v Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 2 (1928), pp.83-86

Liubimova S., 'Decret o chadra i obshchestvo 'doloi kalym I mnogoshenstvo'', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp.73-78

Maksimoro M., 'Krest'ianka-vostochnitsa v pereustroistve sel'skogo khoziastva', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.93-95.

Nukrat A., 'XV s'ezd i zadachi raboty sredi vostochnits krest'ianok', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1928), pp. 53-56

Nukrat A., 'Osnovnye voprosy soveshchaniia', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp.77-80

Nukrat A., 'Pora gotovit'sia', *Kommunistka*, 7 (1928), pp.55-61

Nukrat A., 'Rezul'taty obsushdenii', *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.57-59

Safodoi A., 'Perevybory v sovety v Vostoke' *Kommunistka*, 11 (1928), pp.30-35

Sakhudri, 'Vovlechenie vostochnits v proizvodstvo', *Kommunistka*, 4 (1928), pp.71-73

Zhukova, 'Novye uvlechenne i staroi idei', *Kommunistka*, 10 (1928), pp. 79-81

Smirnova A., 'Zhenskoe obrazovanie v Uzbekistane', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1928), pp. 82-83

ZP 'Dobrovol'noe obshchestvo 'za novyi byt'', *Kommunistka*, 6 (1928), pp. 84-85

## 1929

Achun Babaev, 'Mesthye rabotniki: ob izdanii dekreta', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.32-33

Amosov M., 'Shire organizuite massy', *Kommunistka*, 14 (1929), pp. 23-30

Artiukhina A., 'Vypolhim resheniia', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp.7-12

Artiukhina A., 'Zakrepit' vnov' vydvynutye kadry', *Kommunistka*, 12 (1929), pp.3-10

Dimanstein F., 'Protiv mull, ishanov', *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1929), pp. 49-51

Olushek F., 'Ukrepit' antireligiozhyi front', *Kommunistka*, 15 (1929), pp. 9-13

Karimova Sh., 'Na bor'bu s bytovymi pereshitkami', *Kommunistka*, 3 (1929), pp.43-45

Mukhitdinova E., 'V zashchitu tryzhenitsy Vostoka', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp. 39-41

Niurina F., 'Usilit' podgotovu kulturnykh', *Kommunistka*, 5-6 (1929), pp. 22-25

Nukrat A., 'Ot zatvornichestva k proizvodstvo', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 24-28

Nukrat A., 'Podniat novye plasty Vostochnits', *Kommunistka*, 17-18 (1929), pp.17-20

Nukrat A., 'Kul'tpokhod v Turkmenistan', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp. 32-35

Nukrat A., 'Na vazhneishem uchaste nashei raboty', *Kommunistka*, 19 (1929), pp. 34-27

Perimova, 'Protiv primirenchestva v bytu', *Kommunistka*, 9 (1929), pp.37-39

Smirnova A., 'Pochin po bor'be s religiei na Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 8 (1929), pg.27.

Vekova N., 'Za Novyi-Byt' *Kommunistka*, 11 (1929), pp. 39-40

Yaroslavsky Y., 'Reshitel'nee udarim po bytovymi perezhitkam (iz rechi Tov. Yaroslavskovo na Soveshchanii', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 28-31

Zhukova, 'Mestnye rabotniki - ob Izdanii dekreta', *Kommunistka*, 1 (1929), pp. 34-35

## 1930

Kaganovich L., 'Reorganizatsiia partapparata I ocherednye zadachi partraboty', *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp. 3-5

Sokolova A., '8 Marta na Sovetskom Vostoke', *Kommunistka*, 2-3 (1930), pp.40-43

## Secondary Sources

Ali J., 'Aspects of the RKP (B) Secretariat, March 1919 to April 1922' in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (July, 1974), pp. 396-416

Alimova, D. A., 'A Historian's View of the Khudjum' in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 17 No. 1 (1998), pp. 147-155

Allen B. C., 'A Proletarian from a Novel': Politics, Identity & Emotion in the Relationship between Alexander Schliapnikov & Alexandra Kollontai, 1911-1935' in *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 35, No. 2 (2008), pp.163-191

Allen B, C., 'Alexander Schliapnikov and the Origins of the Workers Opposition March 1919-April 1920' in *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 53 H.1 (2005), pp. 1-24

Allen B., *Alexander Shlyapnikov 1885-1937, Life of an Old Bolshevik* (Haymarket Books, Chicago 2016)

Badcock S., 'Women Protest and Revolution: Soldiers Wives in Russia during 1917' in *IRSH* Vol. 49 (2004), pp. 47-70

Balabanoff A., *My Life as a Rebel* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1973)

Bebel A., *Women under Socialism* (Schocken Books Incorporated New York 1971)

Beissenger, M. R., 'Soviet Empire as 'Family Resemblance'' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 65 No. 2 (Summer, 2006), pp. 294-303

Blum A., 'Identities in Soviet History' in *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (May, 2003), pp.213-223

Bobroff A., 'The Bolsheviks and Working Women' in *Soviet Studies* Vol. 26 No.4 (October 1974), pp. 540-567

Boxer M. J. & Quartet J. H., Editors *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Elsevier Press, New York 1978)

Buckley M., 'Women in the Soviet Union' in *Feminist Review*, No 8 (Summer 1981), pp. 79-106

Buckley M., *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York 1989)

Buckley M., 'Wife-Activist' down the Farm' in *Social History*, Vol. 26 No. 3 (October 2001), pp. 282-298

Carleton G., 'Writing-Reading the Sexual Revolution in the Early Soviet Union' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (October, 1997), pp 229-255

Carleton G., *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2005)

Carr E. H., *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923 Volume 2* (Pelican Press, Harmondsworth UK 1972)

Carr E. H., *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923 Volume 3* (Pelican Press, Harmondsworth UK 1971)

Chatterjee C., *Celebrating Women: Gender Festival Culture and Bolshevik Ideology 1910-1939* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2002)

Corcoran-Nantes Y., *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition* (Zed Books London 2005)

Crouch D., 'The Bolsheviks and Islam' in *International Socialism* 110 (April 6 2006), pp.1-16

Donald M., 'Bolshevik Activity amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917' in *International Review of Social History* Vol. 27 Issue 2 (August 1982), pp. 129-160

Donald M., 'What did you do in the Revolution, Mother? Image, Myth and Prejudice in Western Writing on the Russian Revolution' in *Gender & History*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (April 1995), pp. 85-99

Draper H., *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat'* (Monthly Review Press New York 1986)

Draper H., *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: From Marx to Lenin* (Monthly Review Press New York 1987)

Edgar A. L., 'Genealogy, Class and 'Tribal Policy' in Soviet Turkmenistan 1924-1934' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 60, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 266-288

Edgar A. L., 'The Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-29' in *Russian Review* 62 (January 2003), pp. 132-149

Edgar A. L., *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford 2004)

Edgar A. L., 'Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 65, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 252-272

Edmondson L. H., 'Russian Feminists and the First All-Russian Congress of Women' in *Russian History* III 2 (1976), pp. 123-149

Edmondson L. H., *Feminism in Russia 1900-17* (Heinemann Educational Books London 1984)

Edmondson L. H., *Gender in Russian History and Culture* (Palgrave Hampshire & New York 2001)

- Elwood R. C., 'Lenin and the Social Democratic Schools for Underground Party Workers, 1909-11' in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (September 1966), pp. 370-391
- Elwood R. C., 'Lenin's Correspondence with Inessa Armand' in *The Slavonic & East European Review* Vol. 65 No. 2 (April 1987), pp.218-235
- Elwood R. C., *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992)
- Engel B. A., 'Women in Russia and the Soviet Union' in *Signs*, Vol. 12 No. 4, *Within and Without: Women, Gender, and Theory* (Summer 1987): pp. 781-796
- Engel B. A., 'Engendering Russia's History: Women in Post-Emancipation Russia and the Soviet Union' in *Slavic Review* Vol.51 No. 2 (Summer 1992): pp. 309-321
- Engel B. A., *Between the Fields and the City; Women Work & the Family in Russia 1861-1914* (Cambridge University Press 1994)
- Engels F., *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (International Publishers New York 1975)
- Ereveena A. N., 'Women and Violence in Artistic Discourse of the Russian Revolution and Civil War (1917-1922)' in *Gender and History*, Vol. 16 No. 3 (November 2004), pp.726-743
- Eubanks Hayden C., 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party' in *Russian History* III 2 (1976), pp.150-173
- Evans Clements B., 'Emancipation through Communism: The Ideology of A.M. Kollontai' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 32 No. 2 (June 1973), pp. 323-338
- Evans Clements B., 'Kollontai's Contribution to the Workers Opposition' in *Russian History* Vol. 2 No, 2 (1975), pp. 191-206



Evans Clements B., *Bolshevik Feminist, the Life of Alexandra Kollontai* (Indiana University Press Bloomington 1979)

Evans Clements B., 'Working-Class and Peasant Women in the Russian Revolution, 1917-1923', in *Signs*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (Winter, 1982), pp. 215-235

Evans Clements B., 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 51 no 3 (Autumn 1992), pp. 485-496

Evans Clements B., *Daughters of the Revolution - A History of Women in the USSR* (Harlan Davidson Inc. Wheeling Illinois 1994)

Evans Clements B., *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997)

Farnsworth B., 'Bolshevism, the Woman Question and Aleksandra Kollontai' in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 81 No. 2 (April 1976), pp.292-316

Farnsworth B. & Viola L., *Russian Peasant Women* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992)

Farnsworth B., 'The rural batrachka (hired agricultural worker) and the Soviet Campaign to unionise her' in *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 14.1 (Spring 2002), pp.64-83

Fieseler B., 'The Making of Russian Female Social Democrats, 1890-1917' in *International Review of Social History* XXXIV (1989), pp. 193-219

Fitzpatrick S., *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994)

Fitzpatrick S., 'Sex and Revolution: An Examination of Literary and Statistical Data on the Mores of Soviet Students in the 1920s' in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 50 No. 2 (June, 1978), pp.252-278

Fitzpatrick S. & Slezkine Y., *In the Shadow of the Revolution - Life stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 2000)

Fowkes B. & Gokay B., 'Unholy Alliance: Muslims & Communists - An Introduction' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* Volume 25, Issue 1 (2009), pp. 1-31

Gankin O. H., 'The Bolsheviki and the Founding of the Third International' in *Slavonic Year-Book. American Series*, Vol. 1 (1941), pp. 88-101

Glass B.L. & Stolee M.K., 'Family Law in Soviet Russia, 1917-1945' in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 49 no. 4 (November 1987), pp. 893-902

Goldman W. Z., 'Industrial Politics, Peasant Revolution and the Death of the Proletarian Women's Movement in the USSR' in *Slavic Review* Vol 55, No 1 (Spring 1996), pp.46-77

Goldman W. Z., *Women at the Gates - Gender & Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002)

Gorsuch A.E., 'A Woman is Not a Man: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia 1921-1928' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 55 No. 3 (Fall 1996), pp.636-660

Gordan F., 'Reproductive Rights; The Early Twentieth Century European Debate' in *Gender & History*, Vol. 4 No. 3 (Autumn 1992), pp. 388-399

Gorinov M.M., Tsakunov S.V., & Gurevich K., 'Life and Works of Evgenii Aleksevich Preobrazhenskii' in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50 No. 2 (Summer, 1991), pp. 286-296

Goscilo H. & Lanoux A., *Gender & National Identity in Twentieth Century Russian Culture* (Northern Illinois University Press, Dekalb 2006)

Gregor R., *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Volume 2 The Early Soviet Period 1917-1929* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1974)

Halfin I., *From Darkness to Light: Class Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2000)

Heinen J., 'Kollontai and the History of Women's Oppression' in *New Left Review* 1/110 (1978), pp.43-63

Hillyar A. & McDermid J., *Revolutionary Women in Russia 1870-1917* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000)

Hirsch F., *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press Ithaca & London 2005)

Hirsch F., 'Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities' in *Russian Review* Vol 59 No 2 (April 2000), pp. 201-226

Holt A., *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai* (Allison & Busby Ltd, London 1977)

Husband W. B., 'Mythical Communities and the New Soviet Woman: Bolshevik Anti-Religious Chastushki, 1917-32' in *The Russian Review*, Vol. 63 (January 2004), pp. 89-106

Johanson C., 'Autocratic Politics, Public Opinion and Women's Medical Education during the Reign of Alexander II, 1855-1881' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 38, No 3. (September 1979), pp. 426-443

Ilic M., editor, *Women in the Stalin Era: Studies in Russian & East European History & Society* (Palgrave, Hampshire & New York 2001)

Ingemanson B. I., 'The Political Function of Domestic Objects in the Fiction of Aleksandra Kollontai' in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 71-82

Kamp M., 'Three lives of Saodat: Communist, Uzbek, Survivor' in *The Oral History Review* Vol. 28 No. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2001), pp. 21-58

Kamp M., 'Pilgrimage and Performance: Uzbek Women and the Imagining of Uzbekistan in the 1920s' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol 34 No 2 Special Issue 'Nationalism & the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East & Central Asia' (May 2002), pp. 263-278

Kamp M., *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam Modernity and Unveiling Under Communism* (University of Washington Press, Seattle 2006)

Kamp M., 'Women initiated Unveiling: State led Campaigns in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan' in *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Modern World*, editor Stephanie Cronin (Routledge Press 2014), pp. 205-228

Kaplan T., 'On the Socialist Origins of International Women's Day' in *Feminist Studies* Vol.11 No 1 (1985), pp. 163-171

Keller S., 'Trapped between state and society: women's liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941' in *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 10.1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 20-36

Keller S., *To Moscow not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia* (Praeger Press, Westport 2001)

Keller S., 'Story Time and Dependent Nationhood in the Uzbek Curriculum' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 66 No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 257-277

Kennedy-Pipe H., 'Whose Security? State Security and the 'Emancipation' of Women in Central Asia' in *International Relations*, Vol. 18 (1) (2004), pp. 91-107

Khalid A., *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles & London 1999)

Khalid A., 'Society and politics in Bukhara' in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 19 No.3-4 (2000), pp. 367-396

Khalid A., 'Secular Islam: Nation, State and Religion in Uzbekistan' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 35 No.4 (Nov. 2003), pp. 573-598

Khalid A., 'Nation State & Religion in Uzbekistan' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 35 No. 4 (November 2003), pp. 573-598

Khalid A., *Islam after Communism: Religion & Politics in Central Asia* (University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles & London 2007)

Khalid A., *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and the Revolution in the Early USSR* (Cornell University Press, Itacha & London 2016)

Kingdom E., 'Co-habitation Contracts: A Socialist Feminist Issue' in *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1 Law, Democracy & Social Justice (Spring, 1977), pp. 77-89

Kollontai K., *'Vos'moi S'ezd RKP (b) Mart 1919 Goda Protokol* (Moskva 1959)

Kollontai A., *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* (Schocken Books Incorporated, New York 1975)

Kollontai A., 'Women's Day February 1913' in *Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Articles and Speeches* (Progress Publishers, Moscow 1984)

Kollontai A., 'The Social Basis of the Woman Question' in *Alexandra Kollontai on Women's Liberation* (Bookmarks, London 1998)

Kowalsky S. A., 'Whose Responsible for Female Crime? Gender Deviance and the Development of Soviet Social Norms in Revolutionary Russia' in *The Russian Review* Vol. 62 (July 2003), pp.366-386u

Krylova A., 'Beyond the Spontaneity-Consciousness Paradigm: "Class Instinct" as a Promising Category of Historical Analysis' in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 1-23

Larina A., *This I Cannot Forget: The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin's Widow* (WW. Norton & Company, New York 1998)

Lenin V. I., 'Speech to Third All Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers, Soldiers & Peasant Deputies, Pravda February 1918' in *Lenin's Collected Works* Volume 26 (Progress Publishers 1972)

Leblanc R. D., 'Trapped in a Spider's Web of Animal Lust: Human Bestiality in Lev Gumilevsky's Dog Alley' in *Russian Review*, Vol. 65 No. 2 (April 2006), pp. 171-193

Lih, L., *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be Done in Context* (Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008)

Lokaneeta J., 'Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism' in *Economic & Political Weekly* Vol.36 No 17 (Apr28-May 4 2001), pp. 1405-1412

Lubin N., 'Women in Central Asia: Progress & Contradictions' in *Soviet Studies* Vol. 33 No. 2 (April 1981), pp. 182-203

Martin J., 'Structuring the Sexual Revolution' in *Theory and Society* Vol. 25 No 1 (February 1996), pp. 105-151

Martin T., *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London 2001)

Massell G. J., *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women & Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919-1929* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1974)

Mies M., 'Class Struggle or Emancipation? Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe and the US' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 8 No. 50 (December 15, 1973), pp. 2221, 2223, 2225, 2227, 2229-2230

Mlechin L., *Kollontai: zhizn' zamechatel'hikh liudei* (Molodaya Gvardiya, Moscow 2013)

McClelland J. C., 'Utopianism v Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy: The Proletarian Culture Debate' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 39 No. 3 (September 1980), pp.403-425

McDermid J. & Hillyar A., *Midwives of the Revolution: Female Bolsheviks and women workers in 1917* (UCL Press London 1999)

McNeal R. H., *Guide to the Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1917-1967* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1972)

McNeal R., *Bride of the Revolution; Krupskaya & Lenin* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1972)

Michaels P. A., 'Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan 1928-41' in *Russian Review* Vol. 59 No. 2 (2000), pp. 159-178

Mullaney M., 'Gender & the Socialist Revolutionary Role, 1871-1921: A General Theory of the Female Revolutionary Personality', in *Historical Reflections* Vol. 11 No. 2 (Summer 1984), pp.99-151

Naiman E., 'Revolutionary Anorexia (Nep as a Female Complaint)' in *The Slavic and East European Journal* Vol. 37 No. 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 305-325

Naiman E., 'When a Communist Writes Gothic: Aleksandra Kollontai and the Politics of Disgust' in *Signs* Vol. 22 No 1 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 1-29

Naiman E., *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997)

Northrop D., 'Languages of Loyalty: Gender Politics and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan 1927-41' in *Russian Review* Vol 59 No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 179-200

Northrop D., 'Subaltern Dialogues: Subversion and Resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law' in *Slavic Review* Vol.60 No 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 115-139

Northrop D., *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London 2004)

Notz G., 'Clara Zetkin and the International Socialist Women's Movement' in *Clara Zetkin: Letters and Writings* editors Michael Jones & Ben Lewis (Merlin Press, London 2015)

Paletshek S. & Pietrow-Ennker B., *Women's Emancipation Movements in the 19th Century a European Perspective* (Stanford University Press, Stanford California 2004)

Pearson M., *Inessa: Lenin's Mistress* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Press, London 2001)

Peris D., *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Cornwell University Press, Ithaca & London 1998)

Pipes R., *The Formation of the Soviet Union; Communism & Nationalism 1917-1923* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1964)

Polonskaya L. & Malenshenko A., *Islam in Central Asia* (Itacha Press, London 1994)

Porter C., *Alexandra Kollontai A Biography* (Merlin Press, London 2015)

Quartet J. H., 'Feminism and Social Democracy in Pre-World War 1 Europe' in *International Labor & Working Class History*, Vol. 9 (May, 1976), pp. 6-9

Quartet J. H., 'Unequal Partners in an Uneasy Alliance: Women and the Working Class in Imperial Germany' in *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* editors M. J.Boxer & J. H. Quartet (Elsevier North-Holland, New York 1978)

Raccoppi L. & O'Sullivan K., 'Organising Women Before and After the Fall: Women's Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia' in *Signs* Vol. 20 No. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 818-850



Riddell J. editor, *To See the Dawn: Baku 1920 The First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (Pathfinder Press, New York 1993)

Rigby T. H., *Communist Party Membership in the USSR 1917-1967* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1968)

Rigby T. H., 'The Soviet Political Elite 1917-22' in *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (October 1971), pp. 415-436

Roberts G. L., *Commissar & Mullah Soviet-Muslim Policy from 1917 to 1924* (Dissertation Baco Raton 2007)

Sayers J., Evans M. & Redclift N., *Engels Revisited: New Feminist Essays* (Tavistock Publications, London & New York 1987)

Scheide C., 'Born in October: the Life & Thoughts of Aleksandra Vasil'evna Artyukhina 1889-1969' in *Women in the Stalin Era* editor Melanie Ilič (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire & New York 2001), pp.9-28

Service R., *A History of Modern Russia: From Nicholas II to Putin* (Penguin Books, London 1997)

Slaughter J. & Kern R., *European Women on the Left: Socialism Feminism and the problems faced by Political Women 1880-to the present* (Greenwood Press, Westport 1981)

Sinha M., Guy D.J. & Woollacott A., 'Introduction: Why Feminisms & Internationalism?' in *Gender & History*, Vol. 10 No. 3 (November 1998), pp. 345-357

Slezkine Y., 'Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism' in *Russian Review* Vol 59 No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 227-234

Smith-Peter S., 'Educating Peasant Girls for Motherhood: Religion and Primary Education in Mid-Nineteenth Century Russia' in *The Russian Review* Vol. 66 (July 2007), pp.391-405

Steger M. B. & Carver T., *Engels after Marx* (Manchester University Press, Manchester 1999)

Stites R., 'Zhenotdel: Bolshevism and Russian Women, 1917-1930' in *Russian History* III, No. 2 (1976), pp. 174-193

Stites R., *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia - Feminism Nihilism & Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990)

Strong A. L., *The First Time in History: Two Years of Russia's New Life* (The Labour Publishing Company, London 1924)

Strong A. L., *The Stalin Era* (Prism Key Press, New York 2011)

R.G. Suny & T. Martin editors, *State of Nations; Empire & Nation Building in the Age of Stalin & Lenin*, (Oxford University Press New York 2001)

Taylor B., *Eve & the New Jerusalem: Socialism & Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Virago Press, London 1983)

Thonnesson W., *The Emancipation of Women, The Rise & Decline of the Women's Movement within German Social Democracy 1863-1933* (Pluto Press, London 1973)

Tirado I. A., 'The Komsomol and the Krest'ianka: The Political Mobilisation of Young Women in the Russian Village, 1921-1927', in *Russian History* Vol. 23 Nos. 1-4 (Spring Summer Fall Winter 1996), pp. 345-66

Tolmacheva M. A., 'The Muslim Woman in Soviet Central Asia' in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 12 No. 4 (1993), pp. 531-548

Toth E., 'The Independent Woman and Free Love' in *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 16 No. 4 (Autumn 1975), pp.674-664

Transchel K., *Under the Influence: Working Class Drinking, Temperance and Cultural Revolution in Russia 1895-1932* (University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh 2006)

Turton K., *Forgotten Lives: The Role of Lenin's Sisters in the Russian Revolution 1864-1937* (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire & New York 2007)

Vesala T., 'The Hardening of Cement: Russian Women and Modernisation' in *NWSA Journal* Vol. 15 No.3 (Autumn 2003), pp. 104-123

Viola L., 'Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivisation' in *Russian Review*, Vol. 45, (1986), pp.32-42

Voronina O., 'Soviet Patriarchy: Past & Present' in *Hypatia* Vol. 8 No.4 (Autumn 1993), pp. 97-112

Waters E., 'The Modernisation of Russian Motherhood, 1917-1937', in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 44 No. 1 (1992), pp. 123-135

Waters E., 'The Bolsheviks and the Family' in *Contemporary European History* Vol. 4 Issue 3 (November, 1995), pp. 275-291

White S., *Russia Goes Dry: Alcohol State and Society* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996)

Wolfe B. D., 'Lenin and Inessa Armand' in *Slavic Review* Vol. 22 No. 1 (March 1963), pp. 96-114

Wood E. A., *The Baba & the Comrade; Gender & Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1997)

Zetkin C., 'My Recollections of Lenin' in *The Emancipation of Women, selected writings* (International Publishers, New York 1934)

Zetkin C., 'Guidelines for the Communist Women's Movement' in in *Clara Zetkin: Letters and Writings* editors Jones M. & Lewis B. (Merlin Press, London 2015)

Zetkin K., *The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V.I. Lenin* (International Publishers, New York 1966)

Zetkin K., 'Third Congress: Methods & Forms of Work among Women' in *Theses Resolutions & Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands NJ 1980)