

# International Women's Day as a platform of gender performativity in socialist Czechoslovakia

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## Abstrakt | Abstract

### ***Mezinárodní den žen jako platforma genderové performativity v socialistickém Československu***

*Pro studii genderových vztahů a roli žen v československé socialistické společnosti je velmi přínosné věnovat pozornost formám oslav Mezinárodního dne žen (MDŽ). Státní svátek věnovaný ženám jako sociální skupině byl nejlepší platformou pro artikulaci režimních strategií, týkajících se žen, a odhalení rozporů, v nichž československý státní socialismus ženy vnímal. U příležitosti MDŽ navíc nevyplouval na povrch pouze prototyp ženského ideálu stanovený komunistickou stranou. Přímé či neopatrné narážky, problémy obyčejných žen, nedostatky socialistické společnosti, pravá podstata deklarované "rovnosti", genderové stereotypy a celý komplex dobového diskurzu o ženách se odhalovaly uvnitř patriarchálního systému. Primárními zdroji pro tuto studii jsou periodika (zejména Rudé právo a časopis Vlasta), která jsou chápána jako prostředky "autoritativního diskurzu". Autoritativní diskurz zprostředkovaný mimo jiné prostřednictvím režimních médií je ústředním faktorem stabilizace a legalizace systému. Takový diskurz je zároveň souborem výroků a jevů udržujících konsensus mezi vládou a ovládanými. Další cennou položkou jsou archiválie uložené v Národním archivu, dobové sociologické průzkumy a stenografické záznamy z jednání Národního shromáždění.*

*For the study of gender relations and the role of women in the Czechoslovak socialist society, it is very beneficial to pay attention to the forms of celebrations of International Women's Day (IWD). The national holiday dedicated to women as a social group was the best platform for articulating the regime's strategies concerning women and revealing the contradictions in which Czechoslovak state socialism perceived women. Moreover, on the occasion of IWD, not only the prototype of the female ideal set by the Communist Party came to the surface. Direct or incautious hints, the problems of ordinary women, the*

*shortcomings of socialist society, the true nature of the declared "equality", gender stereotypes and the whole complex of contemporary discourse about women were revealed inside the patriarchal system. The primary sources for this article are periodicals (especially the Rudé právo newspaper and Vlasta magazine), which are understood as means of "authoritative discourse". This authoritative discourse mediated, among other things, through the regime media is a central factor in the stabilization and legalization of the system. Such a discourse is also a set of statements and phenomena maintaining a consensus between the rulers and the ruled. Other items of value for the study are the archival materials stored in the National Archive, period sociological surveys and stenographic records from the proceedings of the National Assembly.*

### **Klíčová slova | Keywords**

*genderová performativita; Mezinárodní den žen; Národní shromáždění; autoritativní diskurz; socialismus*

*gender performativity; International Women's Day; National Assembly; authoritative discourse; socialism*

### **International Women's Day as a platform of gender performativity**

An analysis of the practical implementation of the celebrations and a comparison of the reception of the holiday in society during the long period between 1948 and 1989 can uniquely convey the tactics with which society approached the holiday. At the same time, it has the potential to partly reveal a contradictory relationship to women's emancipation in Czechoslovakia. From a woman as a mother— meaning as a producer of new workers—through a woman as a hitherto unexplored and now needed labour force, to a coping being with almost superhuman abilities who gives birth to children, works 8 hours a day, takes good care of her husband and household and raises her family politically consciously. She should also be able participate in public life as a member of the Women's Union and the National Committee. The models of socialist ideals, so often called "stagnant", changed dynamically in the case of women (and demands for them) during the 40 years of communist dictatorship. How the regime constructed the female gender was most noticeable through IWD. The article aims to describe the ways which the authorities in socialist Czechoslovakia used to shape women's gender, especially with regard to the organization and course of IWD. The text deals with the complex significance of IWD for the evolution of the gender image of women in Czechoslovakia. The article describes the development of

the International Women's Day celebrations during this period. It seeks to analyse speeches, public media presentations of the holiday as well as the statements and attitudes of the actors to IWD. Its goal is to take a small part in the research on gender strategies of authoritative regimes. It aims to help create a holistic image of the Czechoslovak public relationship to women's emancipation as a phenomenon. Through the most comprehensive view of IWD, the article attempts to contribute to the research of the role of women in socialist society and to the research of the festivities in the communist regime.

### **Communist festivals and symbolic communication**

A common feature of all major communist festivals was the explicit effort to celebrate and legitimize the communist establishment and ideology.<sup>1</sup> This happened not only in the case of holidays established for political purposes such as the celebration of anniversaries of significant events leading to the establishment of the communist regime (e.g., Victorious February, Liberation Day, the anniversary of the October Revolution) but also in a situation where the holiday had historically nothing to do with the political agenda (for example harvest holidays, Universal Children's Day, International Youth Day, International Women's Day, etc.). According to Schmitt's Concept of the Political (*Der Begriff des Politischen*)<sup>2</sup>, which connects the very existence of the modern state with the existence of "the political", it can be stated that every celebration, regardless of the topic or content, becomes essentially political if the state or institutions or authorities associated with the state are involved in its implementation. In other words, International Women's Day and many other holidays were colonized by the communist regime and used to legitimize it. The totalitarian ceremonial events are also connected by the maximum degree of the organization of their course, which inevitably led to the absence of almost all manifestations of spontaneity. The ceremonial rituals also had an educational function.<sup>3</sup> The communist festivities were to educate new socialist men and women who would pursue the imaginary historical end—a communist society.<sup>4</sup> This created a system of festivities organized around the basic goals and values of communist ideology. In the case of IWD, we are talking about

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1 Jana RATAJOVÁ, *Pražské májové oslavy 1948–1989. Příspěvek k dějinám komunistické propagandy*, *Kuděj: časopis pro kulturní dějiny* 2 (1), 2000, p. 52.

2 For more on the fundamental political work of the controversial legal and political thinker of the 20th century, see Carl SCHMITT, *Der Begriff des Politischen: Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien*, Berlin 1996

3 Jiří VOSÁHLO, *Splněný závazek*, Prague 1954, p. 7.

4 Erik van REE, *Stalinist Ritual and Belief System: Reflections on 'Political Religion'*, *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 17 (2–3), 2016, p. 145, compare with: Stephen KOTKIN, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a civilization*, Berkeley 1997.

two fundamental ideological moments. On the one hand, it was a celebration of the role of women in a socialist society embodied in the socialist "superwomen". This role combined all the functions assigned to women in socialism. On the other hand, during IWD, a list of qualities that socialism brought to women was presented, often in comparison with the Western world.<sup>5</sup> IWD undoubtedly had its firm position in the hierarchy of communist holidays. Despite how essential women's emancipation was supposed to be for socialism, IWD was not one of the biggest celebrations such as 1<sup>st</sup> May, the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution or Liberation Day on 5<sup>th</sup> May.

Another of the oft-mentioned characteristics common to all communist festivities was their gradual emptying of content.<sup>6</sup> By the term "emptying" we mean the gradual alienation from the ideal behind the celebration, the stagnation of the external form of the ritual, which no longer meets the requirements of the public, the formalization and loss of authenticity of the celebration. The true inner essence of the celebration was overshadowed by its external propaganda.

To understand the wide range of ways of receiving communist festivities, it is necessary to realize that each ritual is a specific form of symbolic communication. Working with symbols is an integral part of all festivities.<sup>7</sup> We can talk not only about specific tangible artifacts, such as banners, allegorical cars, flags, ceremonial clothing or carnations, but also the functions of symbols represented by various speech acts, speeches, declarations of friendship, manifestations of goals or social values.<sup>8</sup> During the ritual, the meaning of these performative<sup>9</sup> acts is anchored and redefined, and on the other hand, they are decoded.<sup>10</sup> Although rituals in the period of state socialism were undoubtedly a one-sided formalized reproduction of the social order, they cannot be understood as socially homogeneously reciprocated. The symbols used in the broadest

5 Rudé právo journal (RP) 59 (57), 1979, pp. 1–2.

6 Compare: Lane CHRISTEL, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case*, Cambridge 1981; Christopher A. P. BINNS, *Ritual and conformity in Soviet society*, *Journal of Communist Studies* 5 (2), 1989, pp. 211–219; Petr MALČÍK – Dušan ŠLOSAR, *Totalitní jazyk v československé publicistice na konci roku 1989*, *Časopis Matice moravské* 133 (1), 2014, p. 140.

7 Adam KUPER, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*, Harvard 1999.

8 Compare with, e.g., John Langsaw AUSTIN, *Jak udělat něco slovy*, Prague 2000, p. 105.

9 In general, gender performativity is defined as an activity that produces what it seems to only describe. According to Judith Butler, this means that a seemingly neutral description of "what a woman is" is just what this description creates. Gender performativity is a way of creating gender prototypes and reproducing them. Gender is created in the reiteration of behaviour and norms of masculinity and femininity. It is a long-term process, not a one-time performance. People perceive their performative behaviour as natural, although performativity is only a reproduction of the norms that precede and shape man. (Judith BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York 2007, pp. 184–192)

10 Judith BUTLER, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, *Theatre Journal* 40 (4), 1988, pp. 520–524.

sense can evoke various associations in individual participants. Each of the participants in the festival can attach various meanings not only to the individual artifacts and speech acts used, but also to the whole ritual.

There are undoubtedly a lot of different motivations to participate in social events such as IWD. As in everyday life (not only) in the period of state socialism, everyone works with different interests and roles. The circumstances of the participation of the general public in the rituals of state socialism form a complex research question. John Austin's concept of speech acts can be used fruitfully to analyse motivations to participate in events of this type.<sup>11</sup> Austin attaches a performative character to each statement, arguing that the word has not only the function of describing reality but also the ability to create reality. From the point of view of the interpretation of Austin's follow-up American anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, speech acts conceived in this way can then be transferred by analogy to all human actions.<sup>12</sup> According to Emil Durkheim, a ritual is not made up only by the active performers of the ritual. The spectators also have an indispensable function and, especially, in the case of rituals of totalitarian regimes. The spectators of the ritual, with their simple and passive presence, legitimize the current regime. Such ritualized behaviour is primarily a repeated production of social roles and a manifestation of belonging to society.<sup>13</sup> For the communist regime, mass participation in events was a public manifestation of a collective agreement with development, the establishment, and ideology in the broadest sense. In the case of IWD, by simply participating in the holiday, men and women clearly presented their affiliation to the society and gender order in which they lived.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, communist holidays, especially in the period of normalization, were characterized by a considerable degree of content emptiness and the absence of ceremonial spontaneity. The behaviour was thus not entirely authentic. Crowds of people did not take to the streets out of their authentic motives, and men did not give flowers to their wives and co-workers each year on the 8th of March out of their deep convictions.<sup>15</sup>

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11 J. L. AUSTIN, *Jak udělat něco slovy*.

12 Alexei YURCHAK, *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation*, Princeton 2006, p. 22.

13 Émile DURKHEIM, *Elementární formy náboženského života. Systém totemismu v Austrálii*, Prague 2002, pp. 400–401.

14 J. BUTLER, *Performative Acts*, pp. 519–531.

15 This statement is evidenced, among other things, by many of the interviews held in the Digital Collection of the Center for Oral History at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences; Institute of Contemporary History, Center of Oral History Interviews Collection. The interview with František Lukeš conducted by Jana Nosková, 22 February 2007. Institute of Contemporary History, Center of Oral History, Interviews Collection. The interview with Alena Růžičková conducted by Miroslav Vaněk, 25 August 2007; Jitka SOBOTKOVÁ, *Slavnosti a oslavy v komunistickém Československu*, in: Miroslav Vaněk (ed.), *Obyčejní lidé...?! Pohled do živo-*

However, the mass acceptance of such “theatrical” behaviour, in which the general public manifests its affiliation to something in which they do not see real content, seems difficult to understand. American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander presents a definition of several conditions, the fulfilment of which should lead to a wide social acceptance of a particular social performance—the ritual.<sup>16</sup> Among the most relevant is a kind of power monopoly of the ruling elites, a wide audience and actor participation, and a legible symbolic base of the ritual.<sup>17</sup> Translated into communist regime practices in the case of IWD, we talk about aspects such as mass media promotion of the holiday, the participation of important personalities, a stable symbolic and language system, the generality of its promotion at all levels of society and the unforgettable latent fears of possible repression.

### Short history and the origin of International Women's Day (IWD)

To understand the meaning and nature of IWD in socialist Czechoslovakia, it is necessary to outline its history and origin. The demonstration of New York seamstresses in 1857 is often described as the beginning of the reflections on IWD. The protest was conducted against inappropriate working conditions, long working hours, and low wages.<sup>18</sup> Thus, women did not protest against the domination of men, but against economic oppression, which can be interpreted (as communist ideology later did) as a class struggle. However, active offensive action led by women in the interests of women's needs without class distinction was not exceptional in the United States or the United Kingdom, even in the mid-19th century.<sup>19</sup> In 1908, the US Socialist Party staged a demonstration in support of women's rights on the anniversary of the 1857 march. The American Socialists have consistently sought completely different women's rights than those that led to the seamstresses' demonstration. The protesters tried to recall the police brutality that the demonstrating workers allegedly encountered.<sup>20</sup>

The first Women's Day with this name took place on 28 February 1909, and the central figure of the whole event was (often neglected in the Czech milieu) the Amer-

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ta tzv. mlčící většiny. *Životopisná vyprávění příslušníků dělnických profesí a inteligence*, Prague 2009, pp. 398–429.

16 J. C. ALEXANDER, *Performance and Power*, Cambridge 2011.

17 Ibidem – Bernhard GIESEN – Jason L. MAST, *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics*, New York 2006, pp. 29–30.

18 Compare with, e.g., Temma KAPLAN, *On the Socialist Origin of International Women's Day*, in: *Feminist Studies* 11 (1), 1985, pp. 163–171.

19 Leila J. RUPP, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Princeton 1997, pp. 13–40; Mary WOLLSTONECRAFT, *Obrana práv žen*, Prague 1904; Pavla HORSKÁ, *Naše prababičky feministky*, Prague 1999, pp. 90–100.

20 T. KAPLAN, *On the Socialist Origin*, p. 164.

ican feminist writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman.<sup>21</sup> The idea of regular actions in support of women's suffrage has been discussed earlier in the environment of socialist-oriented women, at the latest since 1907. For this purpose, representatives of left-wing women's organizations (which were mostly formed as part of the Socialist Parties during the Second International) organized three International Conferences of Socialist Women. It should be noted that these women also understood women's suffrage as inseparable from the requirement of universal and equal suffrage. The discussion was most vividly led by socialist women's representatives, entirely with the intentions of socialist ideas and the Marxist ideology of the class struggle. Precisely because of the ideological differences between Western bourgeois feminists and representatives of socialist women's organizations, the participation of non-leftist feminists was not welcome in the following years.<sup>22</sup> The socialist orientation prevailed at the International Conferences before the First World War, and after the Second World War, we can already understand the successors of this international women's solidarity organization as purely communist and centrally controlled by the communist party.<sup>23</sup>

IWD was established on the 26th or the 27th of August 1910 at the second meeting of socialist women. The German journalist and later member of the Weimar Republic parliament, Clara Zetkin, is rightly considered to be the main initiator of the establishing of the annual demonstrations and the official day for women's suffrage support.<sup>24</sup> IWD formally became an international holiday on 8 March 1975, when the United Nations adopted it as its official holiday as a part of the International Year of Women.<sup>25</sup> IWD has also been a holiday in Czechoslovakia since the beginning with clear left-wing connotations. Its remembrance was not a mass affair during the First Republic, and women's organizations perceived it rather marginally. However, it was integrally linked to its original idea—the promotion of women's equality at home and abroad.<sup>26</sup> After the Second World War, the form of IWD changed radically through its transformation into a national holiday. From 1946, the Communist Party was the organizer of IWD, and already in 1947, these events acquired a mass character. When the communist regime

21 Charlotte GILMAN, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, Madison 1991.

22 *Second International Conference of Socialist Women*, in: International Socialist Congress 1910, Copenhagen 2009, p. 21, <https://archive.org/details/InternationalSocialistCongress1910SecondInternationalConferenceOf/page/n15/mode/2up> (29.05.2023); Kate WEIGAND, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation*, Baltimore 2001, p. 204.

23 Choi CHATTERJEE, *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival Culture, and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910–1939*, Pittsburgh 2002.

24 Karen HONEYCUTT – Clara ZETKIN, *A Socialist Approach to the Problem of Woman's Oppression*, *Feminist Studies* 3 (3–4), 1976, pp. 131–144.

25 *International Women's Day History*, Chicago 2017, <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/Activity/15586/The-history-of-IWD> (29.05.2023).

26 *Ženský list* 20 (11), 1911, p. 6.

colonized the celebrations and made it a national holiday, the holiday became associated with the struggle for peace and socialism. In the new discourse of IWD, women did not stand in the position of a neglected interest group, and in their unequal position, requirements, and needs were no longer the central ideas of the whole event.

At the same time, contrary to the original declarations, it was presented until the second half of the 1960s as a holiday exclusively for “working women” and not for women as a whole. The new character of this originally pro-female holiday was enshrined at the Women's Federation congress in Moscow in 1950.<sup>27</sup> The Women's Federation has clearly stated that “International Women's Day will become an educational event in favour of liberated labour.”<sup>28</sup> As I will show later, the role of women as mothers – producers of new workers and educators of “new socialist people” was equally discursively emphasized. In this context, the IWD has become a certain ideologically bent successor to the abolished Mother's Day, because since 1949, Mother's Day had been merged with IWD.<sup>29</sup>

The original feminist approaches and the idea of women's rights thus literally disappeared from year to year and did not return until 1989. As already mentioned, IWD was at its beginning closely connected with the support of women's movements and the support of women's emancipation. Along with the redefinition of the content of the term “women's emancipation”, all feminist ideas disappeared from IWD celebrations in socialist Czechoslovakia. The emancipatory policy promoted and practiced by socialist Czechoslovakia cannot be confused with so-called (and often branded by the socialist ideology of that era) “western feminist politics”. Emancipation “from above” included involvement of Czechoslovak women in the work process. With the growth of women's employment, there was a need to “liberate” women from “unproductive” domestic work. This was to be done through state-designated services (kindergartens, nurseries, laundries, canteens, etc.). However, de facto equality between women and men, discrimination against women in employment, and addressing issues traditionally described by western feminist movements, remained completely outside the socialist emancipatory discourse.

### **International Women's Day (IWD) in socialist Czechoslovakia**

IWD in Czechoslovakia, with its annual repetition, became a litmus test for the identification of changes in the social understanding of the term “emancipation” and changes in the reception of the role of women in society. The celebrations held on the 8th

27 Four big speeches of women in crowded halls – see RP 27 (30), 1947, pp. 2–3.

28 RP 30 (57), 1950, p. 4.

29 National Archives in Prague (NA), 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Consultation at A. Hodinová-Spurná on February 9, 1950, letter 3, p. 21.



of March included several rituals, which remained completely unchanged throughout the period under review, regardless of changes in political atmosphere. From the beginning of the observed period, mass women's organizations were the coordination centres of the whole event.<sup>30</sup> During the preparations, especially in the 1950s, very detailed instructions were given on how the day should go and how the space should be prepared for a possible cultural event or a hall for speeches to women.<sup>31</sup> Slogans and banners were also an integral part of the IWD celebrations. According to the organizers' interpretations, a suitable slogan was a guarantee of the demolition of the masses. It is significant that throughout the period under review, the slogans remained unchanged or only minimally reformulated.<sup>32</sup> In addition to attention and effort, a considerable amount of money was spent on preparations. For example, in 1950, CZK 60,000 was allocated for 13,000 notice boards about women working in production.<sup>33</sup> The newly acquired status of women was to be celebrated on all fronts. On the occasion of IWD, special issues of monthly magazines devoted to women were published. Stamps issued for IWD were no exception.<sup>34</sup>

### **The celebrations of International Women's Day at the Czechoslovak state level**

On the occasion of this holiday, delegations of women from the Eastern bloc and delegations of women representatives of socialist-minded Western organizations met every year.<sup>35</sup> During these meetings, the women "shared their experiences with the involvement of women at work" and eventually repeatedly manifested international cooperation in building socialism. In the "constructive" atmosphere of the late 1940s and the 1950s, the manifestation of national gratefulness to USSR for liberation and support was an integral part of the IWD celebrations.<sup>36</sup> The main contribution of the delegations should be political agitation among women. It should also present the Soviet woman as a model for further development in Czechoslovakia.<sup>37</sup> At the same

30 NA, f. 22, International Women's Day, inv. No.16.

31 NA, f. 21, International Women's Day in Brno, inv. No. 18; NA, fond 21, Meeting with comrade Boušová 24. 1. 1951, inv. No.18.

32 NA, f. 20, Slogans for International Women's Day 1949, inv. No.17.

33 NA, f. 21, International Women's Day in Brno, inv. No. 18; NA, f. 21, Meeting with comrade Boušová 24. 1. 1951, inv. No.18.

34 Various competitions to promote women's work were also popular. For this purpose, the Czech Women's Union announced a literary competition on the occasion of 8 March. The women were to send a movie theme, a play, a poem, or a song about a new role for a woman. The winner was then solemnly announced the following year.

35 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Report on the Delegation of Soviet women on IWD 1951.

36 RP 27 (30), 1947, p. 2.

37 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Report on the Delegation of the Soviet women on IWD 1951.

time, there should always be a transfer of practical experience from specific industries. In none of the numerous friendly statements issued on the occasion of international association do we encounter a commitment to improving the quality of life of women in Czechoslovakia or levelling out gender inequalities. Regarding the importance of the delegation of Soviet women from 1950, female deputy Anežka Hodinová-Spurná wrote: "The presence of Soviet women in the Czechoslovak Republic was mainly important in practice, which showed on living people what the motto "Soviet woman—our model" means.<sup>38</sup> Whenever a women's delegation arrived in Czechoslovakia, it was an event of international significance. The programme for each of the delegations has always been prepared over a long period. The women mostly spent two weeks in Czechoslovakia in March. Part of their work was concentrated in Prague at official events and meetings with the president and communist officials. In the following days, the women went to other cities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. They attended universities, state-owned enterprises, and ordinary collective farms. The members of the delegation gave lectures and talked about everyday problems at the prepared meetings with the workers. The organizers saw the successful course of the Soviet visit as a proof of loyalty to the Soviet Union. Ideally, the visit was to be warmly received everywhere and to be completely shielded from social misery. As evidenced by the report on the course of the international delegation, which arrived in the Czech Republic on the occasion of IWD in 1950, it was not always possible to ensure such a course. For example, the reception at the University of Bratislava was cold and hostile according to the participants. No one at the Brno Medical Faculty was interested in talking to the women, and they didn't even want to let them into the class because there was a regular lecture. A similarly embarrassing reception awaited them in the villages. There was no interest in a discussion with the women and the workers avoided the delegation.<sup>39</sup>

An important ritual was also the annual meeting of the president, ministers, secretary-general, prime minister, and other important government party officials with a delegation of award-winning selected women and representatives of women's organizations. It was usually held on the 7th of March or possibly directly at the IWD celebrations where the president or prime minister always gave a ceremonial speech. We can talk about this tradition from 1949.<sup>40</sup> In March 1948, only a short article tending to summarize the history of the day appeared in *Rudé právo* to commemorate

38 Ibidem, p. 77.

39 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Program of the Soviet delegation 1951.

40 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Report to the Regional Secretariats of the Communist Party to International Women's Day 1949, sheet 20.

IWD.<sup>41</sup> It was the only holiday during which important political figures spoke explicitly and out loud about the role of women. The nature of these statements was generally constant and always addressed exclusively to women. In the first years of the period under review, the speakers explicitly spoke to “working women”.<sup>42</sup> In later speeches, the circle of addressees was extended to include mothers in the household.<sup>43</sup> During the terms of office of Presidents Gottwald, Zápotocký and Novotný, women’s contributions to the country’s development and increasing women’s employment were traditionally emphasized. Ludvík Svoboda’s speeches more often showed signs of some of the problems that women have in Czechoslovakia. It considered a universal solution to improve the quality and availability of services that were supposed to reduce women’s household work. Despite the declared equality between men and women, the care of children and the household was a purely female issue in contemporary discourse.<sup>44</sup> Although presidents always mentioned such shortcomings in their speeches since the mid-1960s, this motive occupied only a small part of the speech. Cliches, which assured the improvement of conditions, also repeated themselves quite monotonously. The recipe and set of solutions have always been the same, and with knowledge of historical facts, it can be said that they did not have real results.<sup>45</sup> Since the late 1960s, presidents also criticized the “removal of women from the household.” Ludvík Svoboda and Gustav Husák also focused on the role of women as mothers and educators. “We do not want to divert women from childcare. Neglecting the upbringing of children would boomerang against both the family and society as a whole. On the contrary, they should be able to pay more attention to children.”<sup>46</sup> In matters of women’s leisure time, a kind of connection between their leisure time and time for raising children emerged. The mother’s role was thus seemingly relegated to the position of “leisure activity”. On the other hand, from the point of view of the pronatalist policy of the 1970s, it has had an irreplaceable function since the mid-1960s. A happy woman was a woman who could take care of her children and family. The role of the mother was then referred to as the “sacred mission”, while the role of the father did not carry these “sacral” connotations. The time for self-development was not considered for women here, and the free time of the childless was completely outside their interest.

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41 RP 28 (57), 1948, p. 3.

42 President’s speech, RP 29 (57), 1949, p. 1.

43 RP 55 (57), 1975, p. 1.

44 President’s speech, RP 49 (57), 1969, p. 1.

45 We point out the imperfect infrastructure and problems that make life uncomfortable for women in the speeches of the presidents every year, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, e.g., RP 52 (57), 1972, p. 2; RP 54 (57), 1974, p. 2; RP 55 (57), 1975, p. 1; RP 59 (57), 1979, p. 1.

46 President’s speech, RP 49 (57), 1969, p. 1; President’s speech, RP 52 (57), 1972, p. 1.

The common denominator of all national festivities during the period of state socialism was the effort to promote the regime. In the case of IWD, the ideological line was present constantly and strikingly. In addition, if there was a significant anniversary for the year in question, IWD was also affected. This was most often reflected in the content of presidential or prime ministerial speeches. In the speech to women, a special space was devoted to commemorating this or that famous anniversary. In 1975, Prime Minister Štrougal called on women to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic by the Red Army of the Soviet Union, which brought "not only freedom, but also a real hope that the old order is over and the time is coming when the people will finally be the lord in their country."<sup>47</sup>

The wives of presidents played a special role during IWD. The idea of natural inner belonging among women here has led to the creation of a unique space for women who stood by the head of state. Although it was not common for the first ladies to speak here (Marta Gottwald, on the other hand, always added at least a short speech to women)<sup>48</sup>, they always attended the informal part of the ceremony. The first ladies talked to the women and eventually "gave valuable advice."<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the speeches of politicians and the wives of the presidents, the speech of thanks held by the women's union representatives also became a part of the programme. The women's representatives always thanked the president first for the opportunity to meet at Prague Castle. Subsequently, they talked about the situation of women in Czechoslovakia.<sup>50</sup> As in other speeches held on the occasion of all the great communist holidays, even in the speech of the representatives of the Women's Union, there were entirely laudatory statements and words of thanks. It was also necessary to point out the need to fight for peace, socialism, and international women's solidarity.<sup>51</sup> Especially in the years of tense global crises (e.g., 1949, 1950, 1985, etc.), much of the speech focused on the threats of imperialism. In all the above-mentioned speeches we find an element of gender equality evaluation. The speech has always been primarily a matter of pointing out the achievements. The position of women was compared to times long past. At the same time, the promise of a better tomorrow was an integral part of the texts. The path to the "common goal", to the communist or at least a perfectly functioning socialist society, was a ubiquitous narrative.<sup>52</sup> After all, on the

47 RP 55 (57), 1975, p. 2.

48 Vlasta 2 (11), 1949, p. 2, Speech by Marta Gottwaldová.

49 RP 30 (57), 1950, p. 2.

50 It was an annual unchanging use. Vlasta 34 (12), 1954, pp. 2–3.

51 This is the case throughout the period under review. We will not find a speech that would lack this content line. To illustrate, see RP 30 (57), 1950, p. 1; RP 55 (57), 1975, p. 1.

52 Vlasta 3 (11), 1950, p. 2.

occasion of IWD, women were being called upon to work even harder for the state and socialism.<sup>53</sup> The award ceremony was also to have a motivating character. The women on display performed their task well, they were rewarded for it and were intended to motivate others of the same sex.<sup>54</sup>

The central actor of the described celebration was therefore the delegation of selected women. The number of ambassadors to Prague Castle changed over time, mostly oscillating between 150 and 250 women.<sup>55</sup> Delegates were invited to Prague Castle to meet with the President and be rewarded as exemplary socialist women for their work. The appearance of the delegation also changed during the period under review and reflected the contemporary ideal of a socialist woman. The delegation did not always have to consist only of the honoured women. For example, foreign students joined the awarded women in 1967, and other times delegations of women from the USSR, or several World War II veterans or widows of war heroes visited the president with them.<sup>56</sup> The selection of award-winning women was the responsibility of the Czechoslovak Women's Union. The first nominations were to be provided by the district committees and subsequently the candidate was to be assessed by the local party authorities. The principle was that women from all regions of the republic should be represented in the delegation. Furthermore, they were to be members of the party as well as non-partisan women, who, however, always formed a minority.<sup>57</sup> Women had to meet clearly defined criteria. All proposed women had their file which included the bio-notes of the nominated woman.<sup>58</sup> Traditionally, it was a short paragraph highlighting her qualities. In addition to the name and date of birth, we read from the text whether the person was married, what her relationship with the state institution was, how many children she had and subsequently what she was to be rewarded for. When comparing the profiles of women who were selected, we come across several funda-

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53 We encounter this motif mainly during the construction of the 1950s, both on the pages of women's magazines (e.g., *Vlasta* 3 (11), 1950, p. 2; *Vlasta* 4 (10), 1951, p. 2), as well as in the speeches of the presidents.

54 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter to the District Committees of the Communist Party, 30. 1. 1950, p. 1; NA, f. KSČ ÚV (Central Committee of the Communist Party) 02/4, Ideological focus and political-organizational security of the International Women's Day, 1982, inv. No. 25/82.

55 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Regional and District Commission of Women of the Communist Party, 26. 1. 1949, p. 6; NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter to all regional secretariats of the Communist Party 1950, sheet 20, p. 2.

56 RP 65 (106), 1985, p. 8.

57 NA, f. KSČ ÚV (Central Committee of the Communist Party) 02/4, Ideological focus and political-organizational security of IWD, 1982, inv. No. 525 / 82.

58 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter from Marie Tůmová to the clerks of the regional committees of the Communist Party 28. 1. 1950, sheet 19–20.

mental trends. The age composition of the awarded women was relatively stable throughout the period under review, although it is possible to note a tendency to appreciate younger women, especially from the mid-1960s. Women over the age of 40 were most often selected, but the proportion of younger people grew as time goes at the expense of women over the age of 60. It was no exception to appreciate a very young shock worker, sportswoman or member of the Youth Union.<sup>59</sup> The profile of the personality selected for the award reflected the ideas of the ideal woman of the time and perfectly represented the gender image of the socialist woman. The demands on the socialist superwoman, of course, changed during the period under review. In 1951, the Central Commission of Women reported on the selection of suitable women so that "not only work merit but also modesty, good attitude towards people, dedication, exemplary family life, proper upbringing of children, consistency in action, wisdom and willing passing on of experience to the younger were evaluated."<sup>60</sup> These traits are traditionally associated with the image of women and are part of the gender role of the "finer sex". Among other things, women were praised for having "female qualities" in terms of gender. Formulas such as "she is a common good woman" were related to these aspects of the image of the ideal delegate in the bio-notes.<sup>61</sup> "Conscientiously cares for the household,"<sup>62</sup> "Raises her children well,"<sup>63</sup> "Mother of three sons, all miners,"<sup>64</sup> "She, increases her performance of the tested and guaranteed standards to 231%. She transfers her experience to co-employees."<sup>65</sup>

The range of merits for which the woman deserved to become an award-winning model has expanded over time. In the delegations coming to Prague Castle, we would at the beginning find mainly workers, improvers, workers from collective farms, and deserving mothers. We were meeting scientists and sportswomen much more often from the 1960s, even though women representing the working class still made up the vast majority of the delegation. An interesting and easy-to-observe aspect is the visual appearance of the celebration. This is mainly a visual presentation of the women in

59 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Consultation at A. Hodinová-Spurná on February 9, 1950, letter 3, p. 21.

60 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter to the Central Secretariat of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, that, 27 February 1951, sheet 128, p. 22.

61 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter to the Central Secretariat of the Communist Party to the hands of Holečková, 26 February 1951, sheet 183, p. 22.

62 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Characteristics of a Merited Worker in the Czech Women's Union in the Dačice District, sheet 96, p. 22.

63 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter to the Central Secretariat of the Communist Party to the hands of Holečková, 26. 2. 1951, sheet 155, p. 22.

64 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Letter to the Central Secretariat of the Communist Party, Gottwald Region, sheet 169, p. 22.

65 Ibidem, sheet 179, p. 22.

the delegation. Despite the trends in advertising and design, the decoration of the environment did not change significantly and remained basically the same throughout the period. Apart from the carpet and flowers, the hall of Prague Castle did not adapt to the event in any way. The flower, specifically the carnation, as a symbol accompanied the whole celebration on several levels. It was different in the case of women. At first glance, when comparing individual delegations, we can notice differences in their order. In the first years of the period under review, the festive nature of the event did not manifest itself in the hairstyles or clothing of women. With their visuals, the women in the delegation represented the ideal of a worker rather than a woman as an erotic object. Especially in the second half of the 1960s and subsequently (with a break after 1970) from the beginning of the 1980s, women adapted to this opportunity in a completely different way. Contemporary fashion was reflected in the visual presentation of women. There was already an effort to “look good” and be festively groomed. This trend can be interpreted as a shift from representing what a woman is valued for, to the position of representing the personalities of the women and their ideas of what the woman should look like. Such a change included an effort to “look attractive” or “feminine” in the period’s perception of the term’s content with a clearly gendered undertone.

The whole event always required considerable media attention. Television, radio, and printed periodicals have always reported in great detail about the course of the event and its circumstances. The specific names of the awarded women appeared in the reports along with the specification of their employment or the reason for the award.<sup>66</sup> Conversations with women generally referred to the emotions that women are filled with on a fateful day. During the 1950s, the narrative was always almost identical. An ordinary woman who knew only misery until February 1948 was now invited to Prague Castle to see the President.<sup>67</sup> “When the postman brought me an envelope inviting me to President Gottwald, I was stunned. I’m a countrywoman and suddenly I have to go to the head of state.”<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the Prague Castle ceremony itself, we also learn from the media about another programme that was prepared for the delegates. It was usually a cultural experience. It took place the day before the ritual at Prague Castle. It was mostly a concert or theatre performance organized by the Women’s Union.<sup>69</sup> During the more informal part of the event at Prague Castle, women were not only able to refresh

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66 Vlasta 3 (11), 1950, p. 2.

67 RP 30 (30), 1950, p. 1.

68 RP 29 (30), 1949, p. 1.

69 Vlasta 34 (12), 1981, p. 2–3.

themselves but also had the opportunity to talk to politicians about their problems.<sup>70</sup> Television reports explicitly highlighted the numerous greetings from state-owned enterprises and workplaces that delegates handled for the president.<sup>71</sup>

The preserved records of interviews with the awarded women document happiness, a sense of satisfaction, enthusiasm for an unexpectedly proven honour and a good mood dominating the atmosphere of the whole ritual. The women talked about the experiences they had with the socialist regime. In *Vlasta* and *Rudé právo*, we also find references to the element of belonging that this celebration brings to women at Prague Castle.<sup>72</sup> Women were then to be united not only by a common goal, which was socialist society and world peace. They were united by a certain "femininity," which was the same for the hog slopper and the nuclear engineer.<sup>73</sup> The use of the traditional unchanging phrases of the socialist dictionary was not abandoned even in the case of the last type of speech, which was the speech of one of the delegates. Older women and women from manual occupations have traditionally been selected. By their nature, these, mostly shorter speeches, differed even less than the speeches mentioned above. The content was limited to a set of greetings and words of thanks.<sup>74</sup>

The first 150 women awarded arrived at Prague Castle on 8 March 1949. The deputy, Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, describes the whole event in *Vlasta* magazine in great detail. She especially highlighted some of the symbolic moments of the ritual. "They experienced the first joyful surprise on the front stairs. The members of the National Security Corps formed an honour guard here as a living testimony that in today's republic there is no profession where a woman cannot serve her homeland."<sup>75</sup> Women were to be rewarded for their daily work, especially in working-class positions. Among the women were shock workers, improvers, multiple mothers, rural women, active party members and young officials. IWD was used as a large-scale manifestation of the changing situation in the republic. Prague Castle, which was associated with a certain elitist morality, was to continue to be accessible to all, even the simplest of rural women. "In the past, it was not customary for the working people to enter Prague Castle's halls through the ceremonial Matthias Gate. Only during the people's demo-

70 *Vlasta* 25 (12), 1972, pp. 2–3.

71 The oldest, preserved in the archives of Czech radio, a record from the reception of women at Prague Castle, 7 March 1962, Interview with a delegate from Nová ves nad Popelkou, available from: International Women's Day under Socialism: Builders, Mothers and Housewives | Plus. Czech Radio Plus 1997, <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/mezinarodni-den-zen-za-socialismu-budovatelky-matky-i-hospodynky-7781058> (29.05.2023).

72 *Vlasta* 9 (12), 1956, p.3, Impressions from the Prague Castle.

73 RP 30 (30), 1950, p. 1; RP 52 (57), 1972, p. 1; RP 55 (57), 1975, p. 1.

74 *Vlasta* 9 (12), 1956, pp. 2–3.

75 RP 29 (30), 1949, p. 1, Speech by MP Hodinová-Spurná.



cratic republic, only the president, who himself was member of working class, welcomes to his desk the representatives of working women, who have earned this honour by performing their task well.<sup>76</sup> The motif of the removed barriers was still alive, at least in the mid-1970s when this symbolic moment was emphasized in their statements by the women at Prague Castle during IWD.<sup>77</sup> The complete removal of social barriers should have been reflected in the composition of the women's delegation, where workers and scientists stood side by side as equals. "The fact that the composition of your delegation, in which the best representatives of all the working class of our people stand side by side, testifies to the different conditions under which you celebrate your holiday today than how the women in the pre-Munich Republic did (...). Today, our constitution and the entire people's democratic order give you unlimited opportunities to exercise all your abilities in any area of public affairs." (...)<sup>78</sup>

Not only the Prague Castle event but also the entire IWD was given considerable space in the media and press every year. Promotions and invitations to participate in IWD were centrally managed and organized by the women's union management through the media. The radio in Brno was to dedicate its programme every morning at 10am to IWD. From 5 March, it was to invite its listeners to participate in the celebration several times a day.<sup>79</sup> Based on an analysis of the women's press, *Rudé právo* and *Lidové noviny*, it is possible to summarize the topics and trends with which the media worked on this day from 1948 to March 1989. As the best-selling women's magazine, *Vlasta* devoted the largest amount of time to IWD.

One of the traditional leitmotifs of the role of women, mentioned mainly during IWD, was the fight for peace.<sup>80</sup> Peace accents and a kind of intuitive labelling of women as patrons of peace gradually disappeared during the 1960s only to begin to return in the first half of the 1970s.<sup>81</sup> The coveted peace has been associated on all fronts with the struggle against "Anglo-American imperialism." "Anglo-American imperialism intimidates nations and blackmails politics with its military-strategic, economic and ideological fronts (...). But democratic nations see that even the strongest American imperialism is unable to hold back the steady growth of democratic forces and peace."<sup>82</sup> The women's solidarity movement was most strongly

76 Ibidem, p. 2, Speech by MP Hodinová-Spurná.

77 RP 55 (57), 1975, p. 1.

78 RP 30 (33), 1950, p. 1.

79 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Consultation at A. Hodinová-Spurná on 9 February 1950, letter 2, p. 21; NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, IWD Organization 1951, sheet 30, p. 21.

80 Denisa NEČASOVÁ, *Buduj vlast – posílíš mír! ženské hnutí v českých zemích 1945–1955*, Brno 2011.

81 RP 67 (57), 1987, pp. 1–2.

82 RP 29 (30), 1949, p. 2, Speech by MP Hodinová-Spurná.

emphasized in the 1950s and later in the second half of the 1980s. In 1951, on the occasion of IWD, female minister Macháčová- Dostálová called the issue of the struggle for peace “the most pressing issue that affects the hearts of our wives and mothers,” because “(...) their motherly hearts cannot remain cold when they hear about atrocities committed by American soldiers on innocent children and women.”<sup>83</sup> Petitions against war or to support the children in Spain were the ones most frequently written on IWD.<sup>84</sup> To manifest the international pacifist connection of women, the Council of Women and later the Union of Czechoslovak Women organized massive demonstrations and marches. Considerable attention has been paid to their planning. Attention was also paid to the suitability of mottos and banners, which were produced under the control of local women's organizations. Even in this case, the spontaneity of the action was kept to a minimum and was to be replaced by strict central management. Even after such crucial preparations, the events did not avoid the confusion of organizational failure. During the demonstration procession held on 8 March 1951 in Prague, some branches of the procession failed to “find” the rest of the marching women. Subsequently, the women were not allowed into Industrial Palace, where the whole event was to culminate. The complaint letter of the chairwoman of the local women's organization notes that many “muddy” and disgusted women left the event prematurely because they heard nothing of the speech. At the same time, she notes that especially older women, mothers and employed women were completely discouraged by this excess and they will not participate in other IWD.<sup>85</sup>

In the days of March, the press also regularly focused on listing the results of women's emancipation that had already been achieved by the socialist regime. Each IWD had a clearly and in advance defined central theme, which all promotional and educational activities were to adhere to. In 1957, the female deputy Černá said, “This day of the struggle for peace and equality of women, commemorated by all women in the world, is an annual show of Czechoslovak achievements and a platform for new challenges. This year's IWD will be the mobilization of women to fulfil the tasks of the economic plan at plants and in agriculture in connection with the preparation of the IIIrd Congress of United Agricultural Cooperatives. For all women, it will be the start of elections to national committees.”<sup>86</sup>

83 RP 31 (56), 1951, p.1, International Women's Day – Day of Struggle for Peace.

84 Vlasta 6 (12), 1952, p.11.

85 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Complaint letter of the chairwoman of the local branch of the Czech Women's Union Prague – Strasnice M. Podlipská and executive V. Jindrová to the course and organization of the IWD 1951, 14. 3. 1951, sheet 34, p. 22.

86 <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1954ns/stenprot/016schuz/s016005.htm> (29.05.2023).

As President Gottwald's speech said, "I would especially like to emphasize the figure that the number of working women has recently risen to 32.7% of the total number of workers. This figure proves better than most statements that women's equality is the most real thing in our country."<sup>87</sup> Emancipation was considered equal to the involvement of a woman in the employment.<sup>88</sup> It had nothing to do with gender equality, independence, and the freedom to decide one's destiny, as emancipation is interpreted by the original humanistic philosophy. On IWD, we can learn from the press mainly about the number of women who have been actively involved in work: "International Women's Day will be a show of how Czechoslovak women became involved in socialist construction. Reports coming from factories and villages every day show that Czechoslovak women do not want to stay back. The shock-worker movement is developing in factories and companies. Women in textile factories are moving to an increasing number of weaving looms and setting themselves more and more tasks (...). Rural women are also participating in the socialist competition. Recently, women's conferences were held in almost all regions, at which rural women pledged to compete to increase the production of products farmed by women in rural areas."<sup>89</sup>

The image of a socialist woman underwent certain changes during the period under review. However, the emphasis on women's employment was a completely constant motive. The definition of a woman was derived from her contribution to society, with only economically productive work and work on population development being considered valuable. The regime, therefore, constructed two clearly defined and accepted types of women: working women, mothers, or a combination of both. Both of these positions included the role of women in the development and the spread of socialism. However, the female role has always been interpreted as "helpful" and, under the guidance of men, secondary to the men leading and directing the process. Unemployed, childless housewives thus completely disappeared from the IWD discourse. The role of the wife, which was still perceived as socially important in the pre-war republic, also lost its importance, and was not discussed in the women's press. In the 1950s, the female worker was the dominant narrative—a shock worker's fight for peace with a socialist commitment.<sup>90</sup> An example is a rhetorical question from the speech in 1952: "Which mother loves her children and her family more than the one

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87 RP 31 (56), 1951, p. 1, Speech by President Gottwald.

88 For more on the concept of female emancipation in the Eastern bloc, see Shana PENN – Jill MASSINO (eds.), *Gender politics and everyday life in the socialist state East and Central Europe*, New York 2009.

89 RP 29 (30), 1949, p. 2.

90 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Božena Hladíková, *Why I Became a Striker*, sheet 188, p. 22.

who goes to make tractors, weave linen, grow grain to multiply the power of the peace camp against the enemies of human happiness?"<sup>91</sup>

### **International Women's Day in the late 1960s**

From 1948 until the second half of the 1960s, texts and speeches that respond to the actual problems of women and their unequal social status were not encountered in the press. Due to the ceremonial nature of the event, the emphasis on objectively existing problems and controversies of socialist society did not appear in the speeches at IWD. Although the gender profile of women was influenced by phenomena such as the change in abortion policy and the ever-increasing divorce rate, they were not a topic discussed on IWD. The importance of socialism for women was recalled on all fronts. Between 1967 and 1969, however, IWD became a day when certain critical evaluations of the position of Czechoslovak women appeared on the pages of magazines.<sup>92</sup> The strongest was then the expression of the reform wing between female officials.<sup>93</sup> The disproportionate burden on women at work and at home and the lack of time for children and personal development were emphasized. The image of the woman thus took on "more traditional" contours, while the role of the mother was emphasized not in the context of struggle, but in the context of upbringing. A woman is a mother and should have time for her natural role. In 1968, the relevant issue of *Vlasta* addressed the issue of unequal pay, high female occupancy and low representation of women in management and high positions.<sup>94</sup> For the first and last time, IWD was used to openly criticize the Women's Union. According to the authors of the articles, the Women's Union was to help women in various positions to effectively solve their problems and to take care of women as an interest group. During the Prague Spring, women in politics were generally loudly criticized for neglecting women's issues and how little they cared for women. Even the *Vlasta* editorial office opposed the approach of Božena Macháčová-Dostálová, the only woman in government. She allegedly made insufficient efforts from the position of minister to solve the problems of women in the consumer industry and rejected legitimate criticism. According to the editors, *Vlasta* was also significantly limited by the censorship of the Women's Union, through which articles pointing to the shortcomings of a socialist society

91 RP 31 (30), 1951, p. 1.

92 *Vlasta* 21 (13), 1968, pp. 2–3.

93 A major revision of the CSSA's position was made possible only after personnel changes in 1968 when the current chairwoman Helena Leflerová resigned at a meeting of the CSSA OV in response to criticism of the CSSA's conservative approach. NA ČR, f. ÚV ČSSZ, box 75, Meeting of Chairpersons and Secretaries of OV ČSSZ and Czech Regions on 25 April 1968.

94 *Vlasta* 21 (6), 1968, p. 2.

concerning women were not to go through.<sup>95</sup> We cannot read in any of the numerous interviews provided by the female deputies to *Vlasta* magazine that they are taking the position of deputies to focus more on the problems and interests of neglected Czechoslovak women. In the dynamic atmosphere of 1968, the women in the National Assembly split into two very different wings, labelled “feminist reform” and “conservative.” Criticism of discrimination and the living conditions of women in Czechoslovakia, especially among the more educated and younger deputies, appeared. In a speech led by deputy Šťastná, we read: “Today we are not and cannot be satisfied with any slogans about socialism (...). We want to hear a real answer to the questions that real life in a socialist society poses for us. We want to hear the answer to our worries and our own experiences.”<sup>96</sup> In matter of changes in the content of the term “emancipation,” the easing and loosening of the censorship during the Prague Spring was absolutely crucial. “Until a few years ago, we all thought that there was no so-called ‘women’s question’ that socialism had not solved. We had to correct the ideas we had in 1948–1949 and later to some extent. It is not enough that the employment of women has increased in our country to an unprecedented level. With the growing employment of women, without which our society cannot be, many new tasks have been added to the woman, but the burden of old responsibilities has not been lost.”<sup>97</sup> There is a question to what extent are the revisions of reduction of female emancipation to women’s employment associated with the new ideas of the 1960s, and to what extent they were constantly present in society. According to the way women evaluated their motivations for work in the 1950s during questionnaire surveys<sup>98</sup>, one can also consider the possibility that the late 1960s did not bring new ideas, but only gave space to those which were already present in society, but were silenced by discourse.<sup>99</sup> The tradition of the non-communist bourgeois women’s movement, which was completely prevalent in Czechoslovakia before the war, was profound. It seems quite probable

95 *Vlasta* 21 (40), 1968, p. 2.

96 RP 48 (57), 1968, p.1, Speech by V. Šťastná Chairwoman of the ONV School and Cultural Commission in Hradec Králové.

97 *Ibidem*.

98 Alena WAGNEROVA, *Žena za socialismu: Československo 1945–1974 a reflexe vývoje před rokem 1989 a po něm*, Prague 2017, p. 90.

99 According to period questionnaire surveys, the work of women by their husbands was tolerated if it was necessary for the financial security of the household. Conversely, if a man could manage to support his family on his own, most men would prefer a traditional arrangement in which the woman does not go to work and takes full care of the household and family. Women themselves also found the motivation to come to work in the need to contribute to the domestic budget, but more often than men they emphasized a positive attitude towards the work team. (This model is evaluated by the interviewed men as preferred, for example, in the sociological survey of A. WAGNEROVÁ, *Žena za socialismu*, pp. 95–97).

that the ideas and the models of the emancipated woman constructed by the democratic women's movement could not be completely pushed out of society. First Republic feminism did not work with the "employment" reduction in the issue of women's emancipation. Their broader understanding of the emancipation phenomenon better responded to complex women's needs.<sup>100</sup> The perceived inadequacy of the communist version of emancipation could then enter an open debate in times without harsh censorship.

### **International Women's Day and the perception of women emancipation during normalization**

During the normalization of the 1970s and 1980s, articles in the press and speeches on IWD were again in the spirit of celebrating socialism as the only regime that can bring emancipation to women.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, the commitment to further involve women in its construction was an integral part of all speeches. We encounter similar rhetoric throughout the period under review until 1989. In Miroslava Němcová's speech of March 1989, we read: "Therefore, women—mothers, educators, teachers, masters—will do their best to influence the working attitudes of young people to cultivate in them a relation to values and to the socialist homeland."<sup>102</sup>

While the elites were silent about the unequal position of Czechoslovak women, it is possible to trace a subversive interpretation of emancipation as a burden (namely self-sacrifice) in the statements of ordinary Czechoslovaks (and in the 1960s even in regime women's magazines). On IWD, various wishes and greetings aimed at women were regularly broadcast on television and radio. Very often their difficult fate is mentioned here.<sup>103</sup> However, it was not perceived as something worthy of criticism. Due to the economic conditions of households, the participation of women in the financial security of the family was necessary. The propaganda sought to ensure that a woman forced out of the domestic sphere did not appear in the eyes of the public to be pressured by circumstances. The woman chose her extremely difficult role at the time and did so completely freely. The objective need to bring money into the family did not appear at all in the range of arguments presented by the regime. In the questionnaires, on the other hand, this motivation was mentioned most often.<sup>104</sup> Employment was to be presented not only at IWD as the self-realization of the woman, which was made

100 Štěpánka KOPŘIVOVÁ, *Od ženy v politice k političce. Společné aktivity československých poslankyň mezi lety 1918–1948*, Diploma thesis, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, Prague 2020.

101 RP 69 (56), 1988, p. 2.

102 RP 69 (57), 1989, p. 1.

103 *Vlasta* 20 (10), 1967, p. 3.

104 A. WAGNEROVA, *Žena za socialismu*, p. 91.

possible only by socialism, for which she must work alongside men.<sup>105</sup> However, this presentation of the situation presented in official politics and the press was in sharp contradiction with the results of the survey of the statistical office and the statements of witnesses.<sup>106</sup> The double shift at work and at home was not considered a fightable phenomenon. This is not something that could be changed. The men wished the women “to forget that they were emancipated for at least one day.”<sup>107</sup> The motive of emancipation as something harmful to women persisted at least until 1989. It seems that this is where we can look for the roots of Czech women’s reserved and even negative approach to feminism and contemporary women’s movements.<sup>108</sup> Emancipation carried out from above, without the support of the subjects of this social change, completely degraded it in the eyes of Czech women as a phenomenon and was not perceived as a “success” of social development.

### **International Women’s Day at the workplace**

In addition to the already described state dimension of Women’s Day, IWD celebrations took place mainly at the level of state-owned enterprise. On this day, the workplace was to be properly cleaned and, if necessary, decorated with flowers. It was customary in companies to post photos of the best employees.<sup>109</sup> However, even in the 1950s, IWD celebrations at the workplace, when the greatest emphasis was placed on the proper performance of the celebration, were mostly limited to “handing over a bouquet without context.”<sup>110</sup> Despite this, according to the Women’s Union’s instructions, the companies were to be the main celebrating entity right after the state officialities. Such an approach was fully in line with the idea of women as a workforce. It is clear from the respondents’ remembrance that there were probably companies in which IWD was celebrated “in style,” and such companies were also repor-

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105 Vlasta 31 (10), 1978, p. 3; Vlasta 4 (12), 1952, p. 2, Promise of women to the president of the republic.

106 A. WAGNEROVA, *Žena za socialismu*, p. 94.

107 Recording of the wishes of actor Petr Kostka in the programme Kolotoč. Available from: International Women’s Day under Socialism: Builders, Mothers and Housewives Plus. Czech Radio Plus, 1997, <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/mezinarodni-den-zen-za-socialismu-budovatelky-matky-i-hospodynky-7781058> (29.05.2023).

108 Bohuslav BLATEK, *Bariéry feminismu v Čechách na konci 20. století*, in: Marie Chřibková (ed.), *Feminismus devadesátých let českýma očima*, Prague 1999, pp. 193–203; Kirstie RATZER-FARLEY, *Feminism Movement in Czech Republic*, in: Running head: *Feminism in Czech Republic*, Ohio 2017, <http://kentnprague.com/wpcontent/uploads/2013/09/The-Czech-Feminist-Movement.pdf> (29.05.2023); Jiřina ŠIKLOVÁ, *Feminism and the Roots of Apathy in the Czech Republic*, *Social Research* 64 (2), 1997, pp. 258–280; Eadem, *Má feminismus v Čechách šanci?*, *Nová Přítomnost* 3 (1), 1998, pp. 8–10; Eadem, *Why Western Feminism Isn’t Working in the Czech Republic. Feminism in Czech Republic*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/cz4.html> (29.05.2023).

109 NA, f. 21, Letter to all regional secretariats of the Communist Party, 30. 1. 1950, inv. No. 18.

110 Vlasta 22 (15), 1968, p. 15.

ted by the press.<sup>111</sup> So we meet with concerts, social evenings, trips, balls, educational discussions, etc.<sup>112</sup> In some cases, the range of events related to IWD could take several days. For example, lantern parades, usually organized on 7 March, became popular.<sup>113</sup>

As for the participation of women in the organization of their International Day, there was an interesting transfer of the initiative during the period. While in the 1950s, IWD was organized mainly by women for women in municipalities and companies. Over time, men took over this position, and in the normalization period, women were most often in the position of spectators. This change was probably the result of many factors. Generational change played an indispensable role in this process. The female IWD initiators in the early 1950s had a demonstrably deep interest in the organization of IWD. Their interest in the holiday is evident from the amount of documentation, surveys, and detailed instructions that these women created in the early 1950s. The surviving correspondence also shows a very intense interest and shows that IWD was indeed without exaggeration the most important day of the year for these women. In the second half of the 1960s at the latest, this first generation was not replaced by women with a similar passion for organizing the day. The post-war initiators with a really deep interest in the organization of IWD were mainly women with pre-war political experience, widows of important communists and women who were part of the party during the First Republic. There were personalities like Anežka Hodiňová-Spurná, Gusta Fučíková, or Marie Švermová who enjoyed general respect from their male colleagues and companions. This was also reflected in their presence on the highest levels of the political management of the republic in the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. That mentioned interest manifested itself in long discussions and meetings. The women around Marie Švermová and other pre-war connoisseurs worked out extensive sets of proposals for the course of IWD, proposed suitable slogans, sought financial and human resources, advocated the spread of IWD to all corners of Czechoslovakia, and generally devoted an immense amount of time and effort to the whole event. With the retirement of these women, the above activities also disappeared. The proposed ideas remained the same from year to year and the nature of IWD stabilized, the slogans, visuals and programs of the event did not change, and the implementation of the event was generally taken over by managers of individual companies and institutions. At the same time, the composition of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia changed fundamentally. Only two women ever reached the highest levels of the Central Com-

111 RP 51 (56), 1971, p. 2.

112 Ibidem.

113 NA, 1564 1261/1/17, poster Where after work in the week from 5 to 11 March 1951, Banská Bystrica, p. 22.



mittee. At the VIIIth Congress, only Marie Švermová was elected to the presidency of the Central Committee at the communist congress, and from 27 June 1948, after the merger of the communist party with the social democracy, Ludmila Jankovcová was co-opted to the presidency.<sup>114</sup>

At the IXth Congress in 1949, Švermová and Jankovcová were re-elected, while Švermová was removed from her post as a result of political trials on 21 January 1951.<sup>115</sup> After the Congress of 1954, Ludmila Jankovcová appeared only in the position of a candidate of the political bureau of the Communist Party. She remained in this position even after the congresses of 1958 and 1962.<sup>116</sup> At the 1966 convention, no woman was elected to the presidency.<sup>117</sup> After the extraordinary congress of the party, held on 22 August 1968 in Vysočany, Libuše Hrdinová appeared in the presidency and held her position until April 1969.<sup>118</sup> Until after the XVth Congress of April 1976, a woman, even “only” as a member of the secretariat, Marie Kabrhelová, reappears on the highest levels of the Central Committee. If we are dealing with the period between 1948 and 1989, we cannot talk about the real share of women in the government, and this was the case especially after the 1960s.

Some specific women’s activities on the occasion of 8 March were women’s socialist work commitments in the 1950s.<sup>119</sup> Corporate initiatives were frequent, with a group of women pledging to increase their performance in the interests of peace and socialism in the coming year. Another specific feature of the 1950s was the evaluation of the best employees at the corporate level. Appreciation of female employees in socialist Czechoslovakia was generally understood as an effective form of motivating women to work. Especially in the first years of the observed period, we came across countless different diplomas, awards, recognitions, etc., which employees could receive for their exemplary work.<sup>120</sup>

The management of the companies, as we have already mentioned, was instructed directly from the centre of the Women’s Union about the required form of the reminder of IWD. The chairman of the state-owned enterprise or another represen-

114 <https://www.upn.gov.sk/projekty/funkcionari-ksc-kss/> (29.05.2023).

115 <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1948ns/rejstrik/jmenny/sb.htm> (29.05.2023); For more on the trial, see e.g.: Marián LÓŽI, *Hledání nepřátel uvnitř KSČ Fóra, aktéři a konfliktní témata vnitrostranické komunikace v regionální perspektivě (podzim 1950–jaro 1951)*, *Securitas imperii* 32 (1), 2018, pp. 222–249.

116 <https://www.upn.gov.sk/projekty/funkcionari-ksc-kss/vysledky-vyhľadavania/?priezvisko=Jankovcov%C3%A1&meno=Ludmila> (29.05.2023).

117 <https://www.upn.gov.sk/projekty/funkcionari-ksc-kss/zobraz/zjazd?id=6> (29.05.2023).

118 For more on the congress, see Lukáš CVRČEK, *Vysočany 1968: mimořádný XIV. sjezd KSČ*, *Securitas imperii* 15 (1), 2009, pp. 138–183.

119 *Vlasta* 7 (11), 1953, p. 14; *Vlasta* 9 (7), 1955, p. 10; *Vlasta* 10 (4), 1956, p.10.

120 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Proposal for the wording of the diploma, sheet 10.

tative of the company was to give a speech at the beginning, which had been prepared for him in advance by the members of the local women's organization. Most often, however, the company did only the requisite minimum. There was a simple handover of a flower from one of the managers. Due to the low representation of women in management positions, the handler was almost always a man. A priori assumptions that there will always be a man in the leading position in the company can also be found in the instructions. The one who had to appreciate a woman was always a man, and by this assumption, he was always placed in a superior position. The woman's work was praised as helpful, and the man, as a superior, symbolically handed her a flower.<sup>121</sup> It is the act of handing over a flower that can be associated with the relatively traditional concept of a woman as the fairer sex, and it was thus presented in the period media. According to the official statement of the chairwoman of the Women's Union, the flower handed over to women at IWD was "an expression of gratitude for the values that women create for our society."<sup>122</sup> But for the most part, women saw the act as "a necessity."<sup>123</sup> IWD was not an internalized need for participants to present personal beliefs about the need to celebrate women's merits in society. They were motivated to participate in the celebrations by the state and the regime embodied in the management of the company. This corresponds to the complaint published in *Vlasta* in 1968. "Mostly, we know this from our own experience: on 8 March, we get a bouquet or a treat, they tell us how great and important we and our colleagues are and also state enterprises have their duty over. Ninety-nine percent of them don't even think about remembering us another time."<sup>124</sup> In the case of celebrations in a larger company, especially in the 1950s, the ceremonial handing over of so-called shock-working books, or the public "promotion" of successful women to formerly purely male positions was to follow. Particularly successful women, improvers and women who passed on their experience to other employees were also to be awarded. The number of newly employed and retrained women was to be evaluated. An integral part was also the declaration of commitments made by women. One of the main points of the programme was either the ceremonial opening of one of the infrastructure sites helping women (e.g., company laundries, nursery, canteens), or there was a commitment to build such a facility. The situation was similar in the case of the construction of a new part of a collective farm, a park, or a playground.<sup>125</sup>

121 NA, f. 21, Instructions for the organization of IWD. International Women's Day in Brno, inv. No.18.

122 RP 69 (57), 1989, p. 1.

123 *Vlasta* 33 (6), 1979, p. 18.

124 *Vlasta* 22 (15), 1968, p. 15.

125 *Vlasta* 14 (9), 1960, p. 12.

Another possible women's initiative was a temporary takeover of leadership. In the week around 8 March, women took over the leading positions in the Kablo company in Kladno. The way in which events of this type have been reported clearly shows how exotic the women in the management of the company were and how the change of roles was understood. Such a temporary exchange of positions has a carnival effect. Although women were apparently given the opportunity to prove their abilities, at the same time they were not expected to be led into the leadership other than as an attraction.<sup>126</sup> These events were criticized from above as early as 1952, precisely because of their ambivalent sound and zero impact, and their organization was abandoned in the future. In the words of deputy Anežka Hodinová-Spurná, "We want us to have women leaders year-round."<sup>127</sup> Another analogous exchange of roles, held on Women's Day in the 1950s, was the handing over of the leadership of local National Committees to women.<sup>128</sup> These were most often the wives of officials or women active in the Czechoslovak Women's Union. Although the official discourse sought to involve women more in politics, the psychological effect of women's National Committees was quite the opposite. The exchange was always conceived as temporary. It was organized by men as a "public game" for women. The women themselves always presented it as an interesting experience, after which they most valued all the work that the National Committee did. The women themselves constructed their position during this exchange as being "just for help" and short-term. Their work had the character of an exceptional and unusual ecstasy from the everyday norm of social order. In terms of understanding the position of women in socialist society, these events were a demonstration of the patriarchal concept of gender order. An example of such an action could be the takeover of the local National Committee in Sovinky. The women ran the village here for 14 days. It is no surprise that they did not try any changes, interventions in established orders or statements. During their tenure, they "examined" what their men were doing at meetings, and as they reported in *Vlasta* magazine, "thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned their offices."<sup>129</sup> Although initiating similar events was intended to motivate women to become more involved in public life, the desired effect was not achieved. As late as 1989, an extensive article related to women in public office or business management as anomalies appeared in *Vlasta* magazine.<sup>130</sup>

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126 *Vlasta* 4 (14), 1950, p. 16.

127 NA, 1564 1261/1/17, Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Consultation at A. Hodinová-Spurná on February 7, 1952, letter 3, p. 22.

128 *Vlasta* 3 (16), 1950, p. 7.

129 *Ibidem*, p. 8.

130 *Vlasta* 44 (25), 1989, p. 22.

According to the respondents and the analysis of the relevant period texts, the motivations for participation in IWD were different. Despite the fact that the respondents equally rated IWD as embarrassing and meaningless<sup>131</sup>, participation in the group “celebration” was mass. This is also evidenced by period reports on the course of IWD. For example, in 1951, in Slovakia, IWD celebrations took place in 3,318 municipalities and 1,093 state enterprises. A total of 971,891 citizens took part in the celebrations. That the participation was really general is also evidenced by the organizers’ claim that a certain priest in Moravia also preached about peace and women on Sunday, 8 March.<sup>132</sup> The pressure to participate was a common feature of all communist holidays. Participation was voluntary, but unofficially mandatory. It is paradoxical that it was women rather than men who expressed opposition to their own holiday. “Years ago, I preferred to take a vacation on this day, but my manager accused me of having bourgeois behaviour when I sided with the team.”<sup>133</sup> Respondents often rated the official nationwide dimension of IWD, associated with the appreciation of women, as completely inauthentic and uninteresting, and did not consider women to be performing as role models or inspiration. Contrary to the speeches made on IWD every year by prominent political figures, women in Czechoslovakia did not get the impression that the state would pay them any special honour on this day.

IWD celebrations did not rouse any internal affiliation among all women as a social group associated with common interests and difficulties. It seems, that mainly due to zero reflection of social trends in the development of society and blindness to problems and discrimination of socialist women, the holiday gradually lost its significance and potential in the eyes of Czechoslovak women and influenced gender representations and the transmission of coded gender content. Although it is difficult to substantiate this thesis scientifically, this claim is supported by a number of analysed egodocuments and recorded evidence of women in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>134</sup> In the period of late socialism, the emptiness of the IWD celebrations was obvious and corresponds to previous research related to other socialist rituals. As a rule, the organizers of IWD did not come up with anything new, nor did they use this day for social criticism. As with other holidays, IWD was a necessary annual routine, both for the organizers (usually men since the early 1970s) and for the “spectators” (usually women). However, among the witnesses, we encounter a relatively wide range of approaches to the celebration of the international women’s holiday. Most of the time,

131 E.g. Klára DAŇKOVÁ, Diploma thesis, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague 2019.

132 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954, Report on the course of IWD 1951, 14. 3. 1951, sheet 113, p. 22.

133 Vlasta 32 (6), 1979, p. 18.

134 E.g. K. DAŇKOVÁ, *Mezinárodní den žen*, pp. 47–76.

however, they are united by explicit opposition to the official form of the holiday.<sup>135</sup> According to a well-known thesis by Michel de Certeau, the relations between the state apparatus and the management of companies can be interpreted as relations between “strategy and tactics.”<sup>136</sup> The author uses the terms “strategy,” which refers to the practices of the strong and superior; and “tactics,” as a term referring to the daily and often unconscious activities of the weak. Thus, while strategies are determined by their own space, tactics favour the dimension of time and rely on its skilful use to overwhelm the system. Strategy is the formal directive structure of action that is sent from the central authority to individuals. On the contrary, tactics are the real experience of subordinates. The company’s management and ordinary individuals were looking for ways to cope with the situation in a directive-controlled area—controlled by the party and the government.

Many corporate celebrations were then perceived more as an opportunity to have fun or get drunk without a clear connection to the celebration of women and their merits. However, since the 1970s, we have also seen a clear departure in the official women’s press from the will to celebrate and participate in its celebrations. The women were bothered by the already mentioned inauthenticity of state celebrations and the form of the holiday in companies. In their statements, the women mentioned the “boredom” and “leatheriness” of the Prague Castle celebrations. In the case of corporate celebrations, they reacted explicitly to some negative phenomena such as drunkenness of participants, or to the fact that IWD is no longer a holiday of women and women’s rights or merit, but rather an opportunity to organize a party for men. The evaluation of the nature of IWD is illustrated by comments such as: “This holiday has become a day of drinking” or “Drinking with colleagues probably tastes better for men. This results in infidelity.”<sup>137</sup> Women often complained that they could not attend the evening part of the celebrations due to worries about the household, while their husbands did not take care of the household even on this day. “Of course, a man will not enter the kitchen and will not take care of the children. The women cannot celebrate their women’s holiday differently than at the stove. Of course, the evening part of the celebrations can be attended mainly by childless and single women, who do not yet know much about family worries. They enchant a married man without restraint.”<sup>138</sup> The lived practice of IWD corporate celebrations in many cases confirmed the traditional gender order not only by an act of congratulation but also by subsequent

135 In addition to the direct testimonies of witnesses, some feuilletons in the periodical press also refer to this phenomenon. E.g., NEPIL, František, *K mezinárodnímu dni žen*, *Vlasta* 37 (11), 1984, p. 23.

136 Michel de CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley 1984.

137 *Vlasta* 32 (4), 1979, p. 18.

138 *Vlasta* 32 (6), 1979, p. 18.

merriment. "As a thanks for congratulations, women must give money and prepare meals for men. And again, we are cooks also at work, and men can rejoice."<sup>139</sup>

### **Celebrating International Women's Day in households**

When it came to celebrating IWD in the family, it is definitely not possible to work with the mass reception of this holiday in the private/domestic sphere. On the contrary, IWD celebrations have been associated with some negative effects on family life since the 1970s at the latest. Occasional infidelities as well as divorces caused by unbridled entertainment on IWD were often mentioned. The men then defended themselves on the pages of the women's press in the section "Dialogue" of the IWD celebration, claiming that "Defending the admiration of co-workers is not typical for men, and no man wants to be under the slipper of his own wife."<sup>140</sup> IWD celebrations, probably also for the reasons mentioned above, did not become a part of the holidays held in the family circle to a greater extent. Also, the internalization that achieved Mother's Day during the First Republic never occurred.<sup>141</sup> The tradition of children's greeting cards for mothers, already remembered in pre-war Czechoslovakia, was thus integrated into the "family" celebrations of Women's Day. The school also became involved in celebration of the 8th of March. The children made greeting cards for their mothers and teachers. In the first half of the 1950s, greeting letters were written in schools under the supervision of teachers to shock workers and exemplary peasants.<sup>142</sup>

### **Conclusion**

IWD celebrations in socialist Czechoslovakia had clearly defined rules and procedures at all levels. By participating in an event celebrating a socialist woman, each of the participants confirmed the ideological anchoring of the current gender regime and became a co-creator of images of ideal men and women. A clear definition of gender roles was an integral and indispensable part of socialist ideology. Its clearly defined criteria were then closely linked to the functioning of the regime as a whole and were absolutely necessary for it. Through the presentation of good examples of the women suitable for the regime, the communist party consistently sought to shape Czechoslovak women. IWD was not a women's holiday in socialist Czechoslovakia, but a celebration of the gender image of a woman shaped by authoritative discourse. As the regime's demands of the ideal woman changed, so did the image presented during IWD. Like other communist festivities, the course of the day maintained its standardized

139 Vlasta 32 (4), 1979, p. 18.

140 Vlasta 32 (6), 1979, p. 18.

141 Národní listy 65 (121), 1925, p. 4; Národní listy 67 (126), 1927, p. 3; Národní listy 68 (102), 1928, p. 2.

142 NA, 1564 1261/1/17 Central Commission of Women 1945–1954.

form and was organized centrally at all levels. The IWD celebration took the form of something mandatory and demanded by the regime's authority, or directly by a company's management. IWD, as it was presented and as it took place in Czechoslovakia, was fundamentally different from its original purpose and from the ideological corpus that initially constructed it. It lacked spontaneity and did not respond to the current needs and difficulties of women, even in the line of ceremonial speeches. At the same time, it did not develop symbolically and visually. The explicative potential of this festivity in relation to the successful shaping of Czechoslovak women has lost its strength over time. It was not a holiday for women, but a holiday for the regime. It was much more a tool for shaping society than a day of festivity. At the national level, the IWD was also day of the presentation of benefits of socialism for women as a social group. With the exception of the late 1960s, it always presented the so-called women's issue as a solved problem. The regime during the IWD sidelined long-term problems of women in Czechoslovakia, their gender discrimination and often unequal position towards men. The Czechoslovak form of emancipation was understood as a clearly positive achievement in the IWD discourse. In the eyes of the general public, the emancipation (about which was talked about, especially during the IWD) on the other hand, was presented more as a burden. At the national level, emancipation was seen as a benefit and the merit of socialism. There was a very close connection between the socialist regime and how the public understood the term "emancipation". This connection and the connection of the IWD with the communist regime is also evidenced by the fact that the whole mass holiday, so massive until the coup, disappeared with no regret in November 1989.

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## **Summary**

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The article aims to describe and analyse the ways in which the authorities in socialist Czechoslovakia shaped the female gender, especially with regard to the organization and course of International Women's Day. The text deals with the complex significance of International Women's Day for the development of the gender image of women in Czechoslovakia. The article describes the development of the celebration of this festivity. International Day in Czechoslovakia is considered as a day with significant gender performative potential. It works with the speeches, speech acts, public media presentation of the holiday and the actors' attitudes towards the IWD. With this article, the author aims to contribute to the research of gender strategies of authoritarian regimes. The national holiday dedicated to women as a social group was the best platform for articulating the regime's strategies in relation to women. It has the potential to reveal how Czechoslovak state socialism perceived women. The text aims to contribute to the creation of a comprehensive picture of the Czechoslovak public's relationship to women's emancipation as a phenomenon. By examining the IWD, the article attempts to help the research on the role of women in socialist society and research on communist celebrations.