



Dance Around a “Sacred Cow”: Women’s Night Work and the Gender Politics of the Mass Worker in State-Socialist Hungary and Internationally

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In a 700-page *Report on the Textile Industry*, published in 1980 under the main title *The Sacred Cow*, well-known author György Moldova, with disarming precision, described the hardship and host of complicated circumstances characterizing the work and life of textile workers in state-socialist Hungary.¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, the industry was one of the backbones of the country’s economy, epitomizing the rising tide of women’s employment and the fact that women workers, often low- or “semi-skilled” and in any case low-wage employees, stood at the core of the expanding social stratum of the state-socialist mass worker.

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During the period, both the percentage of women within the industrial labor force and their involvement in night work were on the rise. In the early 1970s, 193,000 women worked in the light industries; the proportion of women reached 65–75% of the workforce in the textile industry and 86% in the garment industries. In the textile industry in 1972, 73.5% of women workers worked the night shift.² In the middle of the 1970s, 77,000 women, or 20% of all women employed in state-owned industries (i.e., including non-manual workers), worked the night shift.³

The growing number of women workers in industry, particularly those employed in light industry, formed part of the Hungarian and state-socialist Eastern European model of “catch-up” development. In the 1950s and 1960s, income generated by the light industries sustained investment in the development of the heavy industries. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state-socialist catch-up strategies saw a measure of success, producing a steady increase in employment figures, e.g., in the textile industry. At the same time, starting with the onset of the “oil crisis” in 1973, the terms of trade deteriorated, and states began accumulating debt in Western currencies. Hungary expanded its light industries’ involvement in production for Western companies and (their) markets. In the textile and clothing industries among others, the need to stay internationally competitive against the background of deteriorating terms of trade translated into both massive investment—to raise productivity—and high wage pressure, and a politics focused on maximizing the use of all available production assets.⁴ Women workers’ large-scale involvement in night work was one pillar sustaining these economic and political dynamics. At the same time, this reality massively and permanently violated Hungary’s obligations under international labor law. In 1936, Hungary had ratified the Night Work (Women) Convention of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (C41, 1934), which abolished women’s night work in industry. After numerous rounds of discussion and negotiation between Hungarian policy-makers and the ILO, Hungary denounced the Convention in 1977 rather than finally inscribing the stipulations of C41 into national labor law. This step was preceded by prolonged domestic conflict over women’s night-shift work. A number of other state-socialist countries had already denounced (some of) the relevant ILO Conventions earlier or had never been party to them (Table 1). Communist-led international trade unionism, however, remained dedicated to extended, gendered labor protections.

Table 1 Ratification and denunciation of ILO Conventions restricting night work in industry

<i>Country (ILO member- ship)</i>	<i>Conventions, ratified (year) / denounced (year) or f (= in force)</i>							
	<i>C4 1919 Night Work (Women) Convention</i>	<i>C6 1919 Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention</i>	<i>C41 1934 Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised)</i>	<i>C89 1948 Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised)</i>	<i>C90 1948 Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention (Revised)</i>	<i>C171 1990 Night Work Convention</i>		
Hungary (1922)	1928 / 1936	1928 / f	1936 / 1977	-	-	-		
Albania (1920–1967; 1991)	1932 / 1964	1932 / f	-	-	-	2004 / f		
Bulgaria (1920)	1922 / 1960	1922 / f	-	-	-	-		
Czechoslovakia (1919)	1921 / <i>early</i> 1960s	-	-	1950 / f to 2001–2002	-	1996 (CZ); 2002 (SK) / f		
Poland (1919)	-	1924 / f	-	-	1968 / f	-		
Romania (1919–1942; 1956)	1921 / 1957	1921 / f	-	1957 / f	-	-		
Soviet Union (1934–1940; 1954)	-	-	-	-	1956 / f in RF	-		
Yugoslavia (1919–1949; 1951)	1927 / 1957	1927 /	-	1956 / f to 1992	1956 / f to 1992	2014 (SL); 2016 (ME); 2018 (MKD) / f		

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The GDR became a member of the ILO in 1974; the country did not have restrictions on women’s night work in line with the ILO Conventions. Sources: Normlex, and other official ILO data and publications

This chapter explores the dance around the “sacred cow” of women’s night work in industry in state-socialist Hungary, and between Hungary and the ILO, during the 1960s and 1970s. These political struggles epitomized the clash between laborist politics and the politics of the cheap and heavily burdened woman mass worker⁵ sustaining state-socialist economic development. The inherited laborist and laborist-feminist policy vision, which in Hungary was espoused most visibly by a diverse group of women trade unionist functionaries jointly co-responsible for the politics of women’s work, included the notion that women-specific night-work restrictions—which served as a measure of protection for a large group of workers—strengthened the position of the labor force vis-à-vis employers and helped control or reduce the exploitation or overburdening of workers. This vision had long been controversial among laborist feminists themselves.⁶ In my reading, one key reason for the opposition to sex-specific restrictions on night work was the concern that the laborist vision of such special protections would work in practice only if specific policy circumstances were created around the women-specific abolition of night work, namely those that would ensure that the envisioned (gendered) class advantage (i.e., the exemption of a large group of workers from night work) would not, in reality, translate into the marginalization and devaluation of the specially protected female labor force on the labor market. This could be achieved through measures such as not granting or strictly controlling night-work bonuses, or, more generally, regulations aimed at ensuring that women workers would not be discriminated against in response to their reduced exploitability. The Hungarian women trade unionists were clearly aware of the need to bolster women-specific night-work protections with such measures in order to achieve their gendered laborist policy goals.

Internationally and in Hungary, many protagonists of the laborist policies of women-specific night-work restrictions regarded such a policy as a first step toward introducing (equally) strict restrictions for the male work force. Having pursued an unconditional politics of women-specific night-work restrictions since its founding in 1919, signs of change appeared in the International Labour Office from the 1930s onward. Leading figures began to argue that such a second step, which sought to combine legal gender equality in labor law with class gains for the working population as a whole, should be at the top of the longer-term agenda. This happened at the same time a parallel notion of strict legal equality between men and women in the world of work was on the rise; this position was espoused

by liberal and some socialist feminists and many employers who did not combine the demand for legal gender equality in labor law with a politics of expanding labor protections for all.⁷ Internationally and in many countries, women-specific night-work restrictions were increasingly questioned by the 1970s and 1980s, and they were finally removed or replaced by weaker, more “flexible” gender-neutral restrictions. The partial de-gendering of the state-socialist politics of the cheap mass worker discussed in this chapter, and the ILO’s 1990 adoption of a new, gender-neutral Night Work Convention C171 formed part of this long-term process.⁸ The former combined the removal of women-specific restrictions on night work with continued gendered wage discrimination.⁹

By exploring the decades-long interaction between the micro- and macro-dimensions of the dance around the “sacred cow” of women’s night work, which involved many Hungarian actors and the ILO, this chapter aims to contribute to key debates in gender and labor history as well as to the historiography on state socialism and transnational history. First, the chapter helps overcome overgeneralizing ideas about the status of “the” working class under state socialism. It demonstrates that the state-socialist world of work experienced tremendous change over time and that “the” working class was highly stratified and differentiated. Second, this chapter argues that the struggle over gender played a key role in bringing about historical transformation and producing and challenging difference in the state-socialist world of work. The politics of the mass employment of (formally) low- and semi-skilled, low-paid women workers in three-shift and often continuous (i.e., including Sunday) production formed an important element of state-socialist economic development in materially scarce conditions. The dance around the “sacred cow” showcases key historical change in terms of the interaction of gender and class politics within this constellation, resulting, I argue, in the transformation of the woman mass worker into an economic being suffering from gendered economic discrimination. Gendered difference, embodied in women-specific labor protections, was superseded by formal gender equality in such a manner that overall, the labor force as a whole came to enjoy less protection; i.e., its class position was weakened. Third, through its focus on the interconnection between state-socialist and international gender and labor regimes, the chapter contributes to overcoming compartmentalized views of the history of state socialism. The Hungarian road to the denunciation of the ILO Convention restricting women’s night work in industry formed part of a larger historical trend. The

employment *en masse* of women workers in night work in Hungary and state-socialist Eastern Europe signaled changes in a policy reorientation that elsewhere and internationally would occur only later, in the context of accelerated economic liberalization.

Last, but not least, by bringing to the fore the manifold and complex encounters between political actors within Hungary and Hungary's interaction with the ILO, this chapter contributes to a new and more inclusive history of socio-political action, overcoming the simplistic contrast between activism and the state. In Hungary, as I will demonstrate, the question of women's night work greatly accentuated the conflict between, on the one hand, the politics of gendered labor protections pursued by high-ranking Hungarian women trade union functionaries co-responsible for the politics of women's work, and, on the other hand, the gendered politics of the mass worker in the service of state-socialist economic development. Acting within the limits of their political self-identification and the basic principles of the state-socialist regime to which they adhered,¹⁰ these women long insisted that, in the politics of women's work, equality and difference were complementary rather than mutually exclusive, and that women workers' difference, as they construed it, must not translate into material disadvantage.

HOPE FOR GRAND REFORM DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, AND WORK WITH THE ILO ON PAPER IN THE 1960S

In Hungary in the middle of the 1960s, the only binding legal restriction on women's night work concerned pregnant women (from the fourth month) and breastfeeding women (for a period of six months), who could not be assigned to night and overtime work but were guaranteed their previous "average income."¹¹ Among the domestic actors monitoring women's work, high-ranking (women) trade union functionaries took the lead in provoking a debate on the abolition of women's night-shift work in industry. They did so within a context of existing piecemeal practices that addressed some of the most glaring problems in relation to women's night work (which comprised traditional three-shift work, "continuous" shift work including the weekends, and night-shift-only work arrangements). This debate largely concerned the exemption of women textile workers from the Saturday night shift with wage

compensation, a measure decreed in 1957.¹² In 1963, the Women's Committee of the Budapest branch of the National Federation of Trade Unions (Szakszervezetek Országos Szövetsége, SZOT) proposed that the SZOT Presidency "review the possibilities" for further restrictions. The Committee "initially" advocated for single mothers in other branches to be "gradually" exempted from the Saturday night shift, while "at a later stage, during the next Five-Year Plan" (1966–1970), care should be taken to "permanently abolish women's night work."¹³ For years to come, the exemption of women from the Saturday night shift would constitute a core, practical goal of trade unionists concerned with women's work.

Developments in Hungary were directly connected to international activities. The preparations for the upcoming "2d International Trade Union Conference on the Problems of Working Women" organized by the communist-led World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) which was to take place in Bucharest in May 1964, were underway. In the run-up to the Conference, the WFTU Secretariat initiated a "world-wide examination" on the position and problems of working women, and SZOT carried out a variety of related activities in Hungary.¹⁴ The WFTU adopted—and subsequently laid before the ILO—a Charter on the Economic and Social Rights of Working Women. Regarding women's night work, the Charter included a double demand. While confirming the incremental or piecemeal approach present both in practice and discursively in Hungary at the time, the double demand was far-reaching in principle. All countries "should ratify and guarantee the application" of the ILO's Conventions restricting women's night work, and "special and urgent steps should be taken for excluding expectant mothers and mothers of young children from night-work."¹⁵ Before the WFTU-aligned trade union conference in Bucharest adopted the Charter, a SZOT Committee considering the special situation of working women had already demanded—with explicit reference to the draft Charter¹⁶—that night work for women in industry be abolished in principle. "We consider the employment of women in night work acceptable only when taking into consideration the present economic and labor force conditions. In perspective ... a solution must be found so that we can do without women's night work."¹⁷ After the WFTU women's conference in Bucharest, the SZOT Presidency indeed made a related decision interpreting the road to abolition as a "gradual" process that should begin—without a final deadline given—during the third Five-Year Plan (1966–1970). Night work was listed as the first of six major "tasks

awaiting solution, which if timely” would be brought before the politburo and the Council of Ministers.¹⁸ All of this signaled that SZOT, at the behest of its officers concerned with women’s issues, identified the question of women’s night work as a burning problem. At the same time, the discussion and the wording showed that overarching reforms in this area were not likely to follow suit.

SZOT’s aim to reduce and abolish women’s night work in industry was in step with the policy template pursued by the WFTU as well as with Hungary’s adherence to ILO Convention C41 in principle. However, after World War II, state-socialist Hungary never took action to actually implement the Convention, i.e., to inscribe its provisions into national labor law, even as it reaffirmed ratification. From 1955 onward, the ILO regularly reprimanded the Hungarian government for its tardiness. The critique was voiced formally by two ILO bodies: the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEA) and a tripartite Conference Committee; these committees discussed the CEA reports and reported to the plenum at the annual sessions of the International Labour Conference (ILC). Longer-term and serious forms of non-compliance put offending governments at risk of being pilloried in front of the ILO public and beyond via “special notes” contained in the CEA reports and a “special list” of states included in the Conference Committee reports to the ILC plenum.¹⁹

In response to ILO criticism, responsible ministerial functionaries and government officials in Budapest waffled between plans spanning the full political spectrum between denouncing Convention C41 as soon as possible and various strategies of holding out on, if not deceiving, the ILO regarding the real state of affairs already in the 1960s. None of these strategies, however, was without serious problems. Denunciation would run counter to the laborist ideology of the self-identified “workers’ state.” The foot-dragging strategy involved tactics such as, e.g., the deliberate avoidance of “responding [directly] when [the ILO] provides data [on the situation in Hungary] (*adatszerűségekre válaszadás*)”²⁰ and the practice of pointing to planned or contemplated reforms and piecemeal progress of various kinds year after year.

The foot-dragging strategy employed by the Hungarian government in all its varieties is amply documented in the reports produced by the CEA in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1964, one official of the Hungarian Ministry of Light Industries who oversaw labor force economics evaluated the situation produced by this approach:

Even taken in context, it does not seem realistic to declare by law the prohibition of night work for all women employed in industry ... Therefore, the possible denunciation of the Convention should be seriously considered; before that, we must weigh and judge what is more acceptable for us from the point of view of the ILO's political effects and assessment: sending a report year after year that justifies why the Convention is not being observed, or denouncing it once and for all ...

Another—purely formal—variant of the solution would be to legally prohibit night work for women in industry but, at the same time, give the Ministry of Labor and [SZOT] the power to authorize night work for women based on the labor situation in certain areas, the production needs of certain industries, etc. With this alternative approach, we would get closer in form, but not in practice, to the Convention.²¹

In 1967, after more than a decade of foot-dragging and political maneuvering, Hungarian high officials made concrete plans to denounce C41. This was due to a particular conjuncture of domestic and international factors. First, as was the case with other ILO Conventions, C41 could be denounced only during a period of one year every ten years,²² and the deadline of the denunciation period for C41 was November 22, 1967. Second, in January 1967, a new element was introduced into the politics of women's work: starting in January 1967, (many) working women were granted the opportunity to remain at home on extended childcare leave, receiving a substantial benefit until their child was 2.5 years old (shortly it would be 3). The new Childcare Benefit (*gyermekgondozási segély*, also known as *gyes*) was provided to women with very small children, a key group of women workers that trade unionists in particular tried to release from the night shift, with a—as it would soon turn out, highly attractive—longer-term temporary alternative to returning to the factory and, thus, to night-shift work. This development might well have led policy-makers to expect less outcry domestically to a possible denunciation of C41. In turn, however, *gyes* in fact raised the demand for women workers in three-shift factories, because it reduced the number of workers available to work the night shift.

Third, the New Economic Mechanism (Új Gazdasági Mechanizmus, NEM) was introduced in Hungary in January 1968, which put into effect far-reaching changes in economic planning. NEM involved elements of decentralization and flexibilization, shifting important elements of decision-making regarding economic and labor matters to the enterprise level. The new spirit certainly was not conducive to the idea of inscribing a

general ban on women's night work into national labor law. At the time, SZOT, "if not too enthusiastically," declared its approval of NEM and closely cooperated in its development.²³ While NEM certainly challenged SZOT's traditional role in the central decision-making process, it included important additional rights for trade unions at the enterprise level. Some of these were enshrined in the new Labor Code, a key element of NEM that would come into effect together with the broader NEM reforms.

Taken together, the political constellation in 1967 appeared to cater to the interests of those actors in the Ministries of Labor and Foreign Affairs who, with a view of both the international plane (i.e., problems with the ILO) and—more significantly—the domestic sphere (the economic motivations to maintain and even expand the "third shift" in women-dominated industries), were supportive of the denunciation of C41. Indeed, the new Labor Code, which went into effect in January 1968, would replace the earlier abolition of night work for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers in the first six months after delivery with a more flexible and less protective regulation. From 1968 onward, pregnant women and mothers could "not be obliged to engage in night work," and "as far as possible," these women were to be scheduled for the morning shift until the first birthday of their child.²⁴ In its follow-up order, the Ministry of Light Industries renewed the abolition of the Saturday night shift with wage compensation in the textile industry (first enacted in 1957).²⁵

Within this complex context, the high-ranking Hungarian officials who in 1967 aimed to denounce C41 amply referenced developments in the ILO as they prepared for denunciation. In the 1960s, the ILO's CEA, and in particular its Conference Committee charged with discussions related to the application of ILO instruments, gradually became more impatient as Hungarian officials took pains to explain (away) non-compliance time and again, coming up with a whole range of bizarre statements and assertions. During one meeting of the Conference Committee, the Hungarian government representative asserted—referring to the existing exemptions of certain groups of women from night work and those modalities by which individual women could be relieved from night work—that the "present legislation contained only minor discrepancies" from C41, a gross misrepresentation of the state of things. Hungarian representatives also argued that after 1945, "the Government had to rebuild the country's whole economy," the implication of which was that Hungary

needed to maximize its resources.²⁶ In 1967, the government representative explained that pursuant to the socialist principle of guaranteeing the working population uniform conditions and due to the fact that night work in agriculture could not be prohibited in Hungary, “no prohibition should be made in regard to night work in the textile industry or similar branches [of the economy].”²⁷

Back in Budapest, the Hungarian Minister of Labor moved forward with the plan to denounce C41 in February 1967 while the Minister of Foreign Affairs wished to “discuss this question with the socialist states participating in the [ILO], asking for their help to repel any attacks that might be launched against us in course of the denunciation” before the plan would be submitted to the government.²⁸ During the ILC session in the summer of 1967, the issue came to a head. Hermann Beermann, the representative of the (Western German) Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German Trade Union Confederation, DGB), Vice President of the Workers’ Group at the 1967 session of the ILC, and a member of the Governing Body of the ILO “pointed out”—or so the Hungarian delegation reported back home—“that in the event that ... we do not prohibit night work for women in industry, the inclusion of Hungary on the special list will be proposed next year.”²⁹

In early October 1967, a proposal to the government signed by the Ministry of Labor József Veres and supported by the Minister of Foreign Affairs proposing denunciation was ready. The document,³⁰ which formed part of a case file classified as “strictly confidential,” exploited the fact that three different ILO Conventions on women’s night work existed to downplay the importance of women-specific prohibitions on night work in international comparison. It correctly pointed to the fact that “[t]he new Labor Code recently adopted by the Hungarian Parliament doesn’t abolish women’s night work in general in the future either, and it is to be expected that at the [ILC], after publication of the [Code], the contradiction between the Convention and our internal labor law will be spotlighted even more.” The core of the justification for denunciation read as follows: “At the present stage of our development, it is particularly justified to strive after the maximal utilization of fixed equipment, and the abolition of women’s night work would have—in the textile industry specifically—the opposite effect.... Women are present in the labor force in ever higher percentages as compared with earlier periods, a fact that similarly runs counter to the abolition of night work.” The proposal noted without much ado that SZOT “disagrees” with the plan

to denounce C41, a rather unusual occurrence in advanced highest-level decision-making.

It would soon turn out that SZOT was not the only opponent. Decision-making in this delicate matter, the Minister of Labor learned, required the involvement of the “responsible party organs.”³¹ Soon thereafter, the Minister of Foreign Affairs turned against his colleague in the Ministry of Labor. Because the international “political drawback” of denunciation was likely to be bigger than the possible advantage, and “since there is no state interest tied up with the termination of the contract, I suggest not putting the proposal before the government.”³² With this, denunciation was off table. Only a few months later, the Minister of Light Industries issued an order that overruled even the principal exemption of non-adult workers from the night shift (see also Table 1), thus allowing night-time employment for workers starting at the age 16 in the—women-dominated—light industries.³³

The denunciation of C41 attempted in 1967 could have functioned domestically as a signal that in the conflict over women’s night work, any quest for general abolition was inappropriate and that realistic alternative policy goals, i.e., measures that were narrower or different in scope, could be pursued. In the absence of such an international and domestic caesura, an altered political conjuncture emerged starting in 1968.

THE HEYDAY OF GENDERED WORKERIST WOMEN’S POLITICS AROUND 1970 AND IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES

The new conjuncture regarding the politics of women’s night work formed part of a larger reshuffling of the landscape of Hungarian women’s politics. The reform resulted in a remarkable transfer of women’s agendas—which had to this point been handled by the National Council of Hungarian Women (Magyar Nők Országos Szövetsége, MNOT)—to SZOT. The preparatory report laid before the politburo explained that NEM, as it “significantly expanded the possibilities for independent enterprise management, ... has created new conditions. Today’s life is such that ... the maximal exploitation of local possibilities” must take precedence. The “higher-level women’s organizations no longer have, and cannot have ... all the information needed to monitor and influence the political, economic, and social situation of women on a permanent basis.”³⁴ In the preparatory phase, special attention was already given to women’s work and to industrial workers, in other words to the woman mass worker in

particular. The reform process was set in motion by a nationwide inquiry into "the development of the circumstances of women factory workers at work and at home," which was carried out by the Central People's Supervision Committee (Központi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság, KNEB) in 1968 under the leadership of Mária Nagy (Mrs. József Nagy), in collaboration with SZOT and MNOT.³⁵ A foundational government decision issued in February 1969 "on the development of the circumstances of women factory workers at work and at home" followed up on the findings, summarizing the actions to be pursued in six points. "Together with local societal organs," i.e., the factory-level party and trade union bodies, the management of three-shift factories was called on to "make greater efforts to ease women's family and childcare tasks, in particular the further reduction of their night-time employment."³⁶

The 1969 government decision led to an epoch-making Directive on women's work issued by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP) in February 1970. The MSZMP Directive was followed by a whole chain of orders, regulations, and official statements soon collectively referred to as *nőhatározat*, literally "women directive," translated in the following as "Directive(s) on Women's Issues."³⁷ During the preparations for it, the nationwide branch trade unions were called on to take stock of the position of women workers. The report produced by the Trade Union of Textile Workers (Textilipari Dolgozók Szakszervezete, TDSz) stood out for its—however qualified—advocacy for the abolition (as such) of the night shift in the textile industry.³⁸ Referring directly to the continuous violation of C41, the report highlighted that "in the near future," only the abolition of the Saturday night shift seemed realistic (thereby indirectly pointing to ongoing violations of the 1957 and 1968 regulations?) while, at the same time, pointing out that three-shift operations "deterred" workers from the industry. This exacerbated the omnipresent labor shortage and contributed to growing overtime demands and the fact that, in reality, the night shift "in many places" could only be run during periods of "partial operation." In a typical move that connected wishful thinking with reference to impeding factors, the "gradual abolition of the third shift in the textile industry" nevertheless figured prominently among the summary suggestions. "In perspective, a plan for how the switch to two-shift operations can be facilitated must be prepared. The solution to this task is extraordinarily complex, it is connected to national income, the task of

stabilizing the currency, foreign trade, and employment opportunities for women.”

With NEM in place promoting enterprise-level and more generally decentralized action, 1969 also saw a considerable number of local, factory-level initiatives around the issue of night work; at the time, these plans were considered a preliminary step in larger-scale and possibly “central” action to come. In some cases, local action surpassed the 1969 government vision with its emphasis on preferential treatment of women with small children. These instances tended to apply to factories where women constituted the minority of the workforce, such as the wagon factory of the Hungarian Wagon and Machine Factory in Győr (Győri Magyar Vagon és Gépgyár). The wagon factory employed a workforce of approximately 18,000 persons; among the 4,000 female employees, 600 worked the night shift, which was now abolished.³⁹

The run-up to the 1970 Directive(s) on Women’s Issues, in sum, saw a combination of multi-level initiatives, sobering realism, and diehard perseverance. The Directive(s),⁴⁰ in substance, mirrored this state of affairs, yet ran parallel to it, as they changed the institutional landscape of the politics of women’s work in Hungary, generating new optimism among women trade unionists and their allies. The Directive(s) announced the establishment of a multi-level, decentralized, and hierarchically constructed network of women’s committees and “Trade union representatives responsible for women’s issues” (*nőfelelős*) at the workplace, in all branch trade unions, and within each county-level trade union council. This included the appointment of SZOT’s own Central Women’s Committee (Központi Nőbizottság, abbreviated SZOTNB in the following pages).

The reform of Hungarian women’s politics, of course, did not challenge the overall asymmetric and complex set of arrangements governing the relationship between trade unions, factory and enterprise management, and the various party, political, and administrative actors as (re-) shaped by NEM in 1968. Fundamentally, trade unions self-defined their role as fulfilling a dual function in the workers’ state. “Our trade unions,” explained SZOT General Secretary Sándor Gáspár at the time, “are the organs of the working class which has taken power, and they share in and defend that power. They have a weight in society which could never have a parallel under capitalist conditions. [...] Under socialist conditions the trade unions must support and criticize the organs of the state at one and the same time.”⁴¹ The fact that NEM, on the one hand, instituted a

combination of additional rights and tasks assigned to economic managers and, on the other, expanded the role and rights of enterprise-level trade unions, including veto power in certain areas, must be read within this overall context.⁴²

In so far as women's night work was concerned, the MSZMP Directive on Women's Issues called on the relevant actors to examine the "cost-efficiency of three-shift operations" and the "practicability of the reduction of the number of night shifts" in the textile industry. The follow-up government decision added that "improvement" had to begin during the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1971–1975), with a focus on "single mothers and mothers with several children." The follow-up SZOT statement called for the concrete preparation of the measures "necessary for the gradual, systematic abolition of the night-shift" and called on "enterprise-level trade union committees" to take "the initiative to exempt, as much as possible, mothers of small children and mothers with several children from the night shift, and the Saturday night shift in particular."⁴³ The newly established SZOTNB echoed SZOT's goals.⁴⁴

The first year after the Directive(s) on Women's Issues were issued in 1970 can be considered a zenith of action regarding women's employment in night-shift work. This included far-reaching trade union plans and attempted actions as well as the instant or closely monitored granting of special privileges to certain groups of women within factories or enterprises. However, in the higher echelons of Hungarian labor politics, including top-level trade union decision-making, the period also saw the instant thwarting of even the idea that the general abolition of women's night work would be on the political agenda in the foreseeable future. Interaction between top-level trade unionists and the top-level protagonists of NEM during the year 1971 exposed this friction. At the time, tensions between the trade unions and top- and enterprise-level economic management was building. SZOT General Secretary Sándor Gáspár publicly criticized central decision-makers for sometimes focusing on economic growth and the expansion of production "in a one-sided manner," and pointed out the hyperbole of enterprise-level managers who repeatedly abused their new decision-making powers to implement "measures that violated humanism" at the workplace (i.e., workers' interests), provoking trade union opposition.⁴⁵ It was against this backdrop that NEM protagonist and Prime Minister Jenő Fock, speaking at SZOT's annual congress in May 1971,⁴⁶ addressed women's politics in general and the night shift in particular. Highlighting the ongoing multi-level

close cooperation and agreement between the trade unions and state- and party-organs, Fock stated that the one area where, as a rule, unity was achieved most easily concerned “social questions” including the “improvement of women’s position.” Turning to the concrete side of things, women’s night-shift work figured prominently in the Hungarian Prime Minister’s speech to SZOT:

Of course, the government could facilitate a radical improvement if there was the financial ability to do so, especially in the textile industry and other sectors where there is the third shift, and we should not actually tolerate [the present state of affairs] (*nem szabadna ezt túrnünk*). Unfortunately, we must put up with it for a while longer, and we need to ask the factories to at least do what they can to use their own resources (*saját erőből*)—by way of local consultation—to avoid putting mothers on the night shift.

Fock construed women’s interests as “social” and, thus, non-economic and as issues that required coherent actions developed by all the stakeholders involved. Yet the tension between economic development—in this period often associated with NEM—and the burden of workers, which was epitomized by e.g., three-shift production, hindered an appropriately “social”—or as Sándor Gáspár might have labeled it: “human”—resolution to the issue of women’s night work. Singling out women with children and relying on enterprise-level action, Fock proposed a highly reductionist model for easing this tension. Women with children should enjoy preferential treatment on “social” grounds within the NEM-based politics of accelerated and more efficient economic development.

Prime Minister Fock’s speech to SZOT in 1971 pretty much captured the retrograde tendencies present in the higher echelons of Hungarian labor politics, within the trade unions, and on the ground in enterprises at the time. A key decision indicating that trade unions would have to “put up” with the night shift “for a while longer” had been made months before the SZOT Congress. In January 1971, Ilona Futó (Mrs. Pál Futó), the long-standing doyenne of Hungarian trade union women’s politics and Representative Responsible for Women’s Issues of the Trade Union of Workers in the Iron, Metal, and Electrical Energy Industries (Vas-, Fém- és Villamosenergiaipari Dolgozók Szakszervezete, Vasas), reported to a large nationwide assembly of leading trade union representatives responsible for women’s issues about a recent decision made by the Committee of Economic Politics of the MSZMP Central Committee. The decision,

Futó reported, departed from the 1970 Directive(s) on Women's Issues in that it explicitly spelled out that it was impossible to abolish the night shift because of the strained labor force situation. "Either we took a step back today or the situation was not appropriately considered upon the adoption of the Directives," Futó pondered. "I already had misgivings at the time [...] that the abolition of the night shift would not happen. I feel that the present decision is more realistic."⁴⁷ Futó's statement in the non-public nationwide meeting of leading trade union women representatives signaled that those leading women trade unionists who might have wished to push for the abolition of women's night-shift work would need to adopt an accommodationist stance.

Tension regarding the night-shift issue was most critical within TDSz; in the eyes of many of its members, this question was one of the most burning issues. Not unexpectedly, then, TDSz was shaken more than other trade unions by its leadership's willingness to give in to opposing forces. At its 1971 congress, TDSz settled on a limited demand which was, however, concrete and envisioned substantial change compared to the preexisting realities, namely the elimination of third-shift work without wage reductions for all women with several children and single mothers before the end of the Fourth Five-Year Plan in 1975.⁴⁸ In the widely read daily *Népszava*, General Secretary Éva Baranyai (Mrs. Tibor Baranyai, later Éva Biró [Mrs. György Biró]) described this decision as "our minimal demand." She acknowledged that the combined outcomes of the congress regarding women's night work "generated some disappointment among workers and our members." But it was, she explained, necessary to be realistic. The industry was entering a phase of large-scale investment and development, and the plan of a 35% production increase could not be achieved without the three-shift system. Still, enterprise-level action should continue, and TDSz supported the vision and practice that any enterprises for whom the instant reduction of the night shift was indeed possible should pay a "monthly, permanent 'big-families allowance'" to counterbalance the loss of earnings.⁴⁹

In the meantime, however, further "contradictions"—a term used time and again in the debate on women's night-shift work at the time, emerged. Pointing to a "large-scale increase in the night shift bonus" experienced in several enterprises, the SZOT Secretariat declared that it opposed such policies because they "unduly encourage women to do night work, which is detrimental to them."⁵⁰ The Ministry of Light Industries, for its part, acknowledged that "the demand for the abolition

of the third shift has expanded to ever broader circles”; yet, accelerated studies conducted by the ministry in response to these concerns brought to light “those objective (in large part material, financial) conditions that the abolition of the third shift would require and which are not taken into account in the Fourth Five-Year Plan” (1971–1975).⁵¹ Concrete preparatory work for future reductions in night-shift work was, however, to be continued. The “guiding principles” issued by the Ministry in relation to the collective agreements for the period of the Fourth Five-Year Plan explicitly referred to night work. The enterprises were asked, so these guidelines advised, to come up with figures and explanations regarding the planned “reduction of the number and proportion of women employed on the night shift,” including the discussion of material and other conditions needed to achieve the stipulated goals.⁵²

THE WOMAN MASS WORKER TRANSFORMED INTO AN ECONOMIC BEING

In the period that followed, the night-work issue indeed remained on many of the actors’ agendas. SZOTNB was regularly given reports concerning the position of various branches, achievements, ongoing problems, and plans and demands regarding women’s night-time employment. These reports demonstrated that reducing the most problematic night shifts for the oft-cited groups of women entitled to special treatment through a plethora of local arrangements formed part of the agenda pursued in many places. Yet, especially in those places and industries where the proportion of women in the workforce was high, it was considered extremely difficult to advance. By 1973, the time had come for official high-level policy-makers to make a new effort to put an end to the ongoing, increasingly messy dance around the “sacred cow” and its “contradictory” consequences. The Council of Ministers started down this road upon receipt of another detailed report produced by the Ministry of Light Industries. “[I]n general,” the Ministry reported, women with several children and single mothers were exempted from the night shift. In light of the many detailed local reports submitted to SZOTNB, this statement must be considered whitewashing. The Ministry went on to explain why many of the women concerned still worked the night shift of their own volition. Many enterprises paid a night-shift bonus of 20–30%, and in numerous places, further raises were planned; additionally, “the majority” of enterprises declared that they were not in the position “to

use their own accounts to replace the loss of earnings of those workers relieved from three-shift work." Further reductions of the percentage of women workers working the night shift were not on the horizon of the overwhelming majority of enterprises.⁵³ In July 1973, the Council of Ministers hammered out a decision that captured the essence of the hesitation voiced by mostly non-trade union high-level political actors since the Directive(s) on Women's Issues were released back in 1970. The Council declared the politics of non-abolition as official state policy and combined it with an extremely vaguely sketched alternative vision. If the potential for reduction (to be pursued later on) was minimal, then "we need to strive for the more stimulating material recognition of night work and the further improvement of the conditions of night work." Accordingly, the conditions of night work were to be improved in all sectors of the light industries where women worked the night shift. In the guidelines, which previewed the Fifth Five-Year Plan to begin in 1976, questions related to night work were not addressed at all.⁵⁴

With this, there was a suspension of the urgency that characterized the attempted actions against women's night work in the late 1960s and the period immediately following the 1970 Directive(s) on Women's Issues. By the time the industrial and state leadership definitively abandoned even the long-term goal of general abolition in the summer 1973, important changes in Hungarian economic and labor policy were underway. Within the broader reform-oriented public at the time and later on, and in scholarship to the present day, these changes were discussed as the "curbing," "halting," or "reversal" of NEM. The reorientation, which was set in motion by a MSZMP Central Committee decision in November 1972, included the preferential treatment of key enterprises and above-average wage increases for manual workers. The raises were to be distributed in a differentiated manner among different groups of workers. The Hungarian political leadership aimed to convey the practical and symbolic message that the core working class constituted the most important strata of Hungarian society and was compensated as such. There was also a partial strengthening of central planning, without however undoing the somewhat decentralized system—in relation to most enterprises—of decision-making with regard to economic and labor matters introduced in 1968.⁵⁵ The Central Committee decision had been preceded by an extended period of preparation in the politburo. During this period, SZOT played an important role in anticipating the budding changes. The SZOT Congress that took place in May 1972 put its finger

on the effects of NEM, which many in the trade unions regarded as negative. Starting in September 1972, SZOT came up with “a whole range of suggestions, which, as it were, anticipated” the Central Committee statement issued in November 1972, which is considered the turning point of the history of NEM.⁵⁶ In addition to the disrespect of workers’ interests at the enterprise level, which was prominently addressed—as we have seen above—by SZOT General Secretary Sándor Gáspár already in 1971, the central concern of this statement was the living standards of the industrial working class.⁵⁷

Regarding the politics of women’s work and the politics of the (gendered) mass worker, the changes in economic and labor policy triggered in November 1972 did not alter the substance of the tension between “economic” and “social” policies. After the onset of the “oil crisis” in autumn 1973, the terms of trade for the Hungarian economy deteriorated rapidly, increasing the pressure to increase the efficiency of production and expand it in export-oriented branches of industry. Historian György Földes has characterized the deliberate politics of constantly increasing convertible currency debt pursued in the years 1974–1978 as a “flight forward.” Indeed, the period saw massive investments in (among others) the textile industry and a continued politics of—differentially—rising standards of living financed in effect by easily available loans.⁵⁸ Concomitantly, the vision of the abolition of women’s night-shift work, reduced de facto to a dead letter in the summer of 1973, remained off the table during this period. At the same time, within the framework generated by the Central Committee decision of November 1972, women mass workers employed in the export-oriented light industries were indeed considered members of preferentially treated groups of the working classes. This was in line with the linkage between the abandonment of the aim of the abolition of women’s night work and the improvement of conditions and the material acknowledgment of work done during the night, which was present in the July 1973 decision of the Council of Ministers. The Central Committee decision of November 1972 explicitly included women mass workers among those four groups that were to enjoy preferential treatment in terms of the further differentiation of the planned above-average wage increases for manual workers. “Higher qualification, performance, and the degree of complexity of the manual work should be accounted for, and preference must be given to factories operating in several shifts and employing a majority of women.”⁵⁹ The combined and gendered focus on both skilled and

mass workers contained in the 1972 Central Committee decision has been overlooked so far in the scholarship, which has associated the "curbing" of NEM with a turn toward the implicitly male worker performing skilled and/or heavy manual labor with above-average productivity levels. For their part, women workers seemed to appreciate the core wage increase and intra-enterprise differentiation. Regarding the latter, in April 1973, Rezső Nyers, the secretary of the division for economic questions of the Central Committee and architect and key figure (to 1973) of NEM, reported that in "many cases, the trade union committees discussed—always beforehand—allocation [within the enterprise, SZ] in a collective manner. [...] The workers were very much in favor of the information and the principles of distribution. The experience was that, in particular, foremen, certain categories of skilled workers, and working women appreciated the measure."⁶⁰

Given the comparatively low wages of women in general, the extremely low wages of women in the light industries in particular, and the parallel preferential treatment of many groups of workers in other industries dominated by men, the overall comparative effects of the preferential treatment of the textile industry and some groups of women workers more generally must be considered questionable in terms of closing the wage gap and other disadvantageous gendered elements of labor conditions in Hungarian industries. At the same time, the gendered "social" element of how the woman mass worker was addressed in the Hungarian world of work was visibly weakened from 1973 onward. Instead, the woman mass worker was approached as an "economic" being whose hard work was to be materially acknowledged—although her gendered economic disadvantage as compared to male workers was not resolved.

In the years to come, enterprise managers and top-level political decision-makers left no doubt that they were fully prepared to use financial incentives as well as legal measures to drive as many women as possible into night-shift work. Enterprise-level trade unions acceded in one way or another while continuing their engagement in the piecemeal and somewhat successful politics around exemptions for special groups. Only those groups of women understood as particularly vulnerable due to maternity and/or their intense involvement in childcare work were to enjoy "social" preferences. The politics of enticing women to work the night shift via material incentives reached unprecedented heights in the middle of the 1970s. Reports abounded confirming that night-shift bonuses were on the rise in most places. By 1976, the night-shift bonus

as such had increased to “30, 50, 100 percent in several enterprises.”⁶¹ On top of this, many enterprises accorded additional “special” monthly bonuses to those who had fulfilled their night-shift duties properly, and these add-on bonuses were sometimes higher for women than for men. One report underlined that the respective decisions in the factories were “always” taken “together” by the economic management and the trade union.⁶² Women with small and multiple children were relieved from the night shift if they wished, explained SZOTNB President Margit Czerván (Dr. Margit Czerván Mrs. Márton); but “due to financial considerations and the lack of daytime childcare, this stratum demands and even insists on night shifts. In many enterprises, women even work on Saturday nights.”⁶³

Legal measures complemented the material side of the new politics of women’s night work in the most unambiguous manner. One important step was the consolidation of those gendered politics already in place that partially undid the legal ban on night work for young persons. The 1967 Labor Code (effective from January 1968) had introduced a principle ban on night work for youngsters between 16 and 18 years old.⁶⁴ Soon thereafter, the Minister of Light Industries issued an order which, by way of exception, permitted the night-time employment of young persons from 16 years old in most sectors of light industry including the textile industry.⁶⁵ Exceptions would also be made in the male-dominated metal and heavy industries, but these concerned only young skilled workers 17 years old and up upon the completion of their vocational training and the workshop-based elements of such training.⁶⁶ Together, the scope of these exceptions amounted to the permission to selectively employ masses of underage workers in women-dominated light industries during the night, whereas in other industries these regulations were systematically connected to training and skill. In the middle of the 1970s, i.e., the period when the woman mass worker was transformed into an economic being, the Minister of Labor availed himself of the right to grant enhanced legal status to most of these exemptions by the force of law. The 1974 decree combined many of these preexisting regulations, including the exemption for underage workers in the textile industry.⁶⁷ The politics of putting underage women on the night shift was, thus, moved to a higher legal level and ossified. The 1974 decree on young workers constituted a violation of Hungary’s obligations under the ILO’s Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention C6 (1919) to which the country was party since 1928 (Table 1).

Júlia Turgonyi, a prominent representative of a pro-women politics of women's work, sociologist, and member of SZOTNB, discussed the new decree as a retrograde response to the nationwide policies of piecemeal pushback against the employment of women in night work. In the esteemed journal *Társadalmi Szemle*, Turgonyi explained that "sometimes endeavors that reverse our original intent are put into effect. When economic constraints do not yet allow us to eliminate three shifts for women but we, nevertheless, wish to exempt mothers with young children under all circumstances, there has been an attempt to resolve the resultant labor force problems by relaxing the regulations prohibiting night work for underage women. This 'solution' may not even be temporarily approved."⁶⁸

Other trade unionists dedicated to the improvement of the position of women workers characterized the situation created by the new politics of women's night work as "extraordinarily contradictory,"⁶⁹ and in a few cases voiced harsh and open critique. A final larger battle ensued when, by the end of 1974, the Ministry of Labor attempted to settle for a compromise it considered realistic while not undoing the new politics of the economically defined woman mass worker. Based on the explicit prerogative that a "significant" reduction of women's night work was not possible in the next 10–15 years,⁷⁰ the Ministry devised a "proposal for decision-making" that included the following points: women's night work would be abolished in industries where it was insignificant or altogether absent; the Saturday night shift would be abolished everywhere; women with children between the ages of 1–14 would be put on the night shift only if they agreed to it; the collective agreements and the minister have the right to introduce further restrictions; all of these decisions should be implemented "within approximately two years, starting from the year 1975."⁷¹ In its response, SZOT concluded that the remarks on the proposal received from all relevant trade union bodies and ministries were "contradictory" (*ellentmondásos*), and the interests at play "antagonistic" (*ellentétes*).⁷² The only high-level trade union body involved that expressed its wish to abolish women's night work in industry was SZOTNB. The women's committee voiced its dissatisfaction with both procedure and substance clearer than ever before. SZOTNB was concerned about the lack of consultation with the relevant ministries, the fact that there seemed to be no plan to solicit the "independent" position of the trade unions, and the lack of substantive information on the real situation concerning women's night work in the material circulated

by the ministry. The committee also bemoaned the lack of “perspective” characterizing the proposal and went on to state: “We must decide how long we want to plan for women’s night work [to continue]—10, 15, 20 years? When do we want to seriously consider, at last, the idea that we shall finally abolish the night shift for women in industry?” The Committee asked the SZOT leadership—“if it agrees with our objections”—to request the ministry prepare a new proposal and, as a first step, invite SZOT to come up with its own position.⁷³

Soon thereafter, in February 1975, SZOTNB President Margit Czerván refused to collaborate in planned preparatory work for “social” improvements for women working during the night. Such improvements were considered a key element, in addition to night-shift bonuses, of the politics of transforming the woman mass worker into an economic being. The preparations were set in motion by the Ministry of Labor with reference to a MSZMP Central Committee decision on the improvement of the situation of the “working class” dated March 1974, which in the historiography is considered another important historical moment epitomizing the advancement of “anti-reform” agendas.⁷⁴

The politics of night-shift bonuses continued in the years to come. In October 1976, during the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1976–1980), the government established that due to material constraints, “we cannot expect significant improvement” in terms of restricting women’s night-shift work. Instead, another increase of night-shift bonuses was planned, which was intended to “improve the situation of those women working multiple shifts.”⁷⁵ The raise would be granted by a central decree that came into force on July 1, 1977. The bonus for working the third shift was raised to (at least) 40%, with an added 10% if the work was carried out in continuously operating enterprises.⁷⁶

THE ROAD TO DENUNCIATION

These developments took place at a time when, after the missed opportunity of 1966/1967, another one-year window was opening for Hungary to denounce Convention C41. In the 1970s, the ILO’s CEA continued to voice harsh criticism of the country’s permanent violation of C41, and to this added a similarly harsh critique of the new 1974 decree regarding underage workers, with its focus on workers in the textile industry. In 1973, the CEA requested the Hungarian government to “supply full particulars” regarding its progress toward achieving “full

compliance" with C41 and the adoption of relevant national law to the ILC assembled that year.⁷⁷ In 1976, the CEA report laid before the ILC again detailed the various dimensions of non-compliance and expressed its hope for change.⁷⁸ SZOT Secretary József Timmer reported to the trade union community back in Hungary that "our report was accepted in the sense that there is change and progress," whereas capitalist countries such as Chile and Malaysia have been added to the special list for their serious violation of the Conventions on discrimination and forced labor.⁷⁹ At the session of the ILC, the Hungarian government indeed faced harsh criticism. In the spirit of economic liberalism, which increasingly challenged sex-specific labor legislation internationally, employers' representatives argued that the "provisions of the Convention reflected a different social philosophy from that now prevailing in many quarters, and if this philosophy could no longer be accepted by the States which had ratified the Convention, they should denounce it."⁸⁰

Against the background of the continuing international attention to Hungary's non-compliance and domestic developments signaling so clearly that women workers in industry must remain involved in the night shift, Hungarian high officials made another effort to finally denounce C41 a few months later. This time, the trade unions were on board. This included SZOTNB under its new President (since spring 1977) Júlia Nyitrai (Mrs. Lajos Nyitrai) and General Secretary of TDSz Éva Biró. In the second quarter of 1977, *Szakszervezeti Szemle*, the central theoretical and political trade union journal, opened its columns for an article penned by Pál Topálovich, the long-time responsible officer and group chief of the section for international affairs of the Hungarian Ministry of Labor, which was responsible for relations with the ILO. Since the beginning of the 1960s, Topálovich regularly participated in the ILC and repeatedly served as the Hungarian member of the Conference Committee charged with the application of Conventions. Without mentioning C41 directly in his article in *Szakszervezeti Szemle*, Topálovich effectively referenced international developments as he construed them in order to parochialize the inherited Hungarian discourse that disapproved of women's employment during the night on social grounds. His arguments eclipsed the idea of moving toward general restrictions on women's night work in industry from the horizon not only of that which might become possible at some point in the future. Rather, he construed such a vision as undesirable. In the international labor law of the ILO, there was consensus that non-adult workers should be exempted from night work, whereas

restrictions on night work for adult women were in retreat. According to Topálovich, internationally there were only two competing visions left: liquidating all types of restrictions on night work for adult workers or retaining restrictions on adult women's night work, "but in a form much more flexible than at present." These tendencies mirrored the fact that the "expansion" of night work was an "inevitable, concomitant feature" of contemporary social and economic development in Hungary and elsewhere. Therefore, well-designed policies must be developed that aimed "not at the prohibition [*megakadályozás*] of an inevitable process but at preventing or eliminating its negative consequences."⁸¹ Topálovich's contribution was accompanied by other articles in the trade union press that similarly presented the situation in Hungary in a new light. They quoted women workers who praised the material and other "advantages" of shift work and highlighted the role of the new shift-work bonuses in resolving many previous problems.⁸²

In February 1977, prior to these obviously coordinated interventions at the very center of trade union public discourse, the section for international affairs of the Ministry of Labor, i.e., the institutional home of Pál Topálovich, triggered the political process leading up to the denunciation of C41. In contrast to 1967, the action was well orchestrated from the start and combined top-level initiative with the early involvement of all other relevant actors in "consultations."⁸³

Within SZOT, General Secretary of TDSz Éva Biró took the lead in devising the position that would—following her direct exchanges with the relevant General Secretaries of the other relevant branch trade unions—be taken by SZOTNB as the top-level institutional body overseeing the politics of women's work.⁸⁴ In a letter to the new SZOTNB President Júlia Nyitrai dated May 7, 1977, Biró described how denunciation could and should be used as a window of opportunity to achieve what she must have felt would be a maximum in practical terms. Denunciation, Biró explained, should come with a party, government, and SZOT statement declaring that the existing decisions to step-by-step reduce women's night work would be kept in place and the achievements related to the Saturday night shift and special groups would not be jeopardized. She also demanded that the night shift be used only in those places where the efficiency principle required it; by contrast, factories and workshops working with obsolete technology or producing loss-making products should reduce night work. Finally, the implementation of all existing regulations and measures aimed at "easing women's work" should be

“strictly” monitored. If “we do more consistent work in this arena, we can demonstrate that the improvement of the living and working conditions of women in Hungary does not depend on the ratification of the [ILO] Convention.”⁸⁵

SZOTNB in its ensuing proposal⁸⁶ advised that SZOT should declare its agreement to the denunciation of C41 “beforehand”; in parallel with this, SZOT should assert that “the trade union movement is against the unsubstantiated (*indokolatlan*) and unlimited employment of women in the night shift” and bundle its acquiescence with conditions. SZOTNB now acknowledged as a fact what I have described in this chapter as the process by which, in course of the 1970s, Hungarian labor policy had come to treat women mass workers as economic beings in the first place, but pointed to some of the darkest consequences in no uncertain terms:

A substantial percentage of women working the night shift voluntarily undertakes the third shift, and they indeed consider unfair the restrictions in place in this regard. It is to be expected that the rise of the shift bonus coming into force on July 1 will, once again, spark the interest of mothers with multiple children and single mothers, [i.e., those] enjoying the biggest protections, in the night shift. Neither may we disregard the well-known experience that the many women with small children prefer to work the night shift because the placement of their children in kindergartens and after-school care facilities is not settled.

The SZOTNB proposal demanded that “before the Convention would be denounced,” the Council of Ministers and the SZOT Secretariat together “examine scope and direction of those measures which in connection with the night work of women require special attention in the present circumstances.” This included the goal that night work for women younger than 18 be abolished and that women be relieved of night work as soon as pregnancy was confirmed; in the textile industry, night work should not be compulsory, and several measures aimed at controlling and improving the circumstances of women’s night work should be put into effect.

SZOTNB, thus, left no doubt in its initial proposal that it disliked denunciation and opposed women’s night-shift work, and it tried hard to extract considerable restrictive measures in exchange for its assent. But defeat unmistakably colored its definite statement,⁸⁷ which—weeks after SZOT had to file its principal agreement in response to the formal

proposal circulated by the Ministry of Labor to all relevant actors⁸⁸—advised SZOT to accept denunciation. While still declaring that certain issues “of late (*újabbán*)” demanded “regulation” and would be examined, the hope that this would take place before denunciation had disappeared. The women’s committee, however, did maintain its desire that SZOT leadership “underline” its position that it regarded women’s night-shift work as “justified only in the most indispensable cases.”

When the SZOT Presidency moved to the final decision-making phase on August 29, 1977, Comrade Mrs. Králl, on behalf of the SZOT Presidency, praised the clear statement provided by SZOTNB but also detailed the many problems and “contradictions” regarding the issue of women’s night work in the textile industry. Mrs. Králl considered two issues particularly problematic. Both of these stood at the heart of the dominant economic rationale that guided the treatment of women textile workers at the time and which epitomized some of the essence undergirding the gendered construction of the state-socialist mass worker in 1970s Hungary: the night work of underage textile workers and the “lag in terms of wages (*bérben való elmaradás*)” of the textile industry, despite the recent preferential treatment of workers engaged in it. There were voices, Mrs. Králl added, “and not only a few,” that pointed “very clearly” to the fact that “the textile industry was far from the material recognition expected by those employed” in it. Yet, SZOT General Secretary Sándor Gáspár did not engage with these concerns. Rather, he made clear that it was high time to eliminate once and for all, at minimum, the dance around C41. The SZOT Presidency accepted the SZOTNB proposal with only a few minor modifications.⁸⁹

Attention to most of the issues addressed by SZOT and SZOTNB did make it into the material that accompanied the formal proposal for denunciation,⁹⁰ albeit in a heavily watered-down form. The list of arguments supporting denunciation contained in the document generated by the Ministry of Labor was long: no socialist country except for Hungary had ratified C41⁹¹; calculations showed that “until 1990,” there was no chance of replacing women with men in night work; shift work was necessary to better utilize production capacities; C41 “neither so far nor in the future” determined Hungary’s employment policies regarding women’s night work; and neither economic nor political interest were “attached to maintaining the ratification of the Convention.” The proposal highlighted the “special position” of the textile industry in which approximately 60% of the female workforce worked the night shift and 70% of the workers

working three or four shifts were women. It then turned the deliberations aimed at highlighting the undesirable consequences of the politics of night work pursued at the time, which were contained in the SZOTNB proposal quoted above, into a clear-cut argument in support of denunciation: “A significant proportion of the women employed during the night shift voluntarily undertake night work, wherein the improvement of labor conditions and the higher shift bonus play a role.”

The Council of Ministers supported the denunciation of C41 in September 1977.⁹² Within the Ministry of Labor, a last-minute in-house intervention by an officer who tried to advocate against denunciation with reference to SZOTNB’s proposals was unsuccessful. The “questions” that needed “to be resolved” in connection with women’s night work, as proposed by SZOTNB, were important; but issues other than denunciation were separate and subject to party and government decision-making based on social policy and economic considerations and were not to be discussed “at this point.”⁹³

In Hungary at the time, neither newspapers nor the trade union press reported on the denunciation of C41. The entire political process was conducted confidentially. Only in 1980 did SZOT Secretary József Timmer, in an interview with the daily *Népszava*, publicly refer to the past denunciation.⁹⁴ A few months earlier, President of SZOTNB Júlia Nyitrai portrayed the political turnaround of 1977 as “justified” by economic necessities in retrospect in an internal report taking stock of the decade that had passed since the 1970 issuance of the Directive(s) on Women’s Issues.⁹⁵ Soon after, Júlia Turgonyi publicly considered Hungary’s withdrawal from Convention C41 as an “embarrassing interlude in the practice of serving the improvement of women’s position.”⁹⁶ Discussing the persistence of the night shift in women-dominated industries in Hungary over the decades, she put her finger on an important gendered dimension of power relations in the world of work at the time: “The argument that women work where more shifts are needed to make better use of assets falls flat when we know that it is the productive assets operated by men that constitute greater value; i.e., where labor resistance is greater—and this is not an insignificant percentage of cases—the economic management “disregards” (*eltekint*) the economics of asset utilization.” Still, Turgonyi echoed Nyitrai when referring to the “current economic conditions” as the explanation for why a key vision of the women trade unionists had been simply dismissed. I have discussed elsewhere in more detail why and how women trade unionists constantly

weighed women workers' interests as construed in their gendered laborist discourse and policy against various "larger" political and economic framings of the state-socialist project in order to justify compromise and explain (away) defeat.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION

In his 1980 report discussing the textile industry as a "sacred cow," György Moldova quoted a textile industry manager who pointed to the fact that the industry was characterized by one of the lowest proportions of fixed assets to labor costs while it constantly operated in a three-shift system. Many textile professionals, the manager added, were of the "slightly exaggerated opinion that after the war, Hungarian heavy industry was built up based on the labor of and sacrifices made by the light industries."⁹⁸ Likely with a view to large-scale investment carried out in the textile industry in the decade following the introduction of NEM, the manager referred to 1967 as the final year of this conjuncture. In the 1970s, the ever-growing interest in increased productivity and cost-efficient export-oriented production characterized the state of the industry. Under all these changing prerogatives, the politics of operating the textile industry in a three-shift system remained in place throughout the decades. This chapter has not focused on the examination of the evolving economic rationale for this *modus operandi*; rather it has shown that both before and after 1967 and before and after 1972, the textile industry and other sectors of the light industry relied on the employment *en masse* of a predominantly female labor force that was retained as cheaply as possible compared to workers in other branches and was employed in three-shift work and in factories with continuous operations.

Through the lens of policies enabling versus restricting the involvement of women workers in industrial night work, the chapter has unpacked the relationship between the politics of gender and class in Hungary and the entanglement of the related struggles with the global labor policies of the ILO both before and after the introduction of NEM.

Throughout the decades under consideration, leading trade union functionaries, most of them women who engaged in the politics of women's work, aimed to relieve as many woman mass workers in industry as possible from the night shift without causing a loss of earnings and without other materially and socially negative consequences for the women concerned. They thus pursued a gendered laborist policy vision.

The demand or idea that night-work restrictions should include male workers, while not absent from the debate and the contributions of these women, was marginal. Three closely entangled sets of reasons explain the preference of these women for a laborist version of women-specific night-work restrictions. For one thing, the de facto position of Hungary regarding night work was that only minimal restrictions applied to workers (largely) regardless of sex. In practice, however, the burden of night work in industry was shouldered by women workers for the most part, and women trade unionists wanted to alleviate this gendered burden.

Second, in global and historical perspective, a state of affairs in which night-work restrictions were *absent* for both sexes always provoked a variegated group of political actors to demand, for similarly variegated reasons, sex-specific night-work restrictions for women alone. (Among these actors, many laborist activists and policy-makers, including the ILO, considered sex-specific measures a first step toward more general restrictions.) In contrast, in circumstances where, for one thing, women's night work was restricted already—a position *not* achieved in Hungary at the time—and, for another, the expansion of laborist policies appeared to be possible, policy-makers were more likely to turn their attention toward the goal of expanding restriction policies to male workers too. For the Hungarian women trade unionists, the latter option remained at the utopian margin of their political horizon in the given circumstances. This was not only because restrictions did not yet apply to women but also because these women trade unionists remained attached to the paradigm of state-socialist (catch-up) development. Keeping “excessive” laborist policy visions at bay constituted a foundational pillar of this socioeconomic regime.

Finally, the trade union women's focus on women-only night-work restrictions followed from how they construed women workers' special burdens in terms of infant care, childcare, and family responsibilities in their policy vision and their actual policies. The trade union women strongly advocated for the expansion of extra-family childcare and other social services aimed at relieving women from some of these responsibilities. They also engaged in the advocacy of men's increased involvement in family work, though in a much less vocal manner. But at the same time, their foundational perception of women workers as different in terms of their extra-work responsibilities—however mitigated by the related changes they advocated—and the related vision that it was imperative to

accommodate this difference within the world of work *without* jeopardizing women's substantive equality (as still to be achieved) formed a pillar of their conceptualization of women's emancipation. In sum, while reifying gendered difference in the world of both paid and unpaid work in this manner, the women actors highlighted in this chapter pursued—within the confines of their identification with the state-socialist project of economic development as resting on the mass employment of women (and men) under harsh work conditions—a politics of class and gender aimed at the improvement of women workers' class position.

The trade union women pursued the policy script of sex-specific night-work restrictions for the woman worker under political and economic conditions which, while undergoing substantial transformation during the decades explored in this chapter, were opposed to their ultimate policy goals. Success in terms of introducing and expanding restrictions on women's night work in a however-tiered manner remained, in actual reality, isolated and sometimes unsustainable, restricted to only factory or enterprise-level action and the practice of exempting pregnant women and women with small children from night work. The latter was in line with the introduction of *gyes*, which, in terms of the politics of the woman mass worker, undoubtedly constituted the most decisive policy change in the period examined. The early 1970s saw a particular political conjuncture, when a departure from the script of singling out only pregnant women and young mothers for exemption from night work seemed possible. Such a move would have combined the productivist and trade unionist orientation of NEM—as put into practice both before and after 1972—with the extension of the privilege of night-work exemptions without a loss of earnings to many women workers.

Yet, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and thus including the period of the anti-women's night-work conjuncture during the early 1970s, neither top-level party, state, and ministerial leadership nor enterprise managers bought into the laborist vision of the large-scale women-specific restrictions on night work in industry. Their constant reference to economic need as inevitably thwarting the related vision, plan, and implementation concealed the fact that the treatment of women workers in the textile industry and beyond constituted a gendered politics of the mass worker to the disadvantage of women workers as compared to large groups of men workers. In other words, the differential treatment of the industrial working classes associated with the period beginning with the introduction of NEM did not simply come with the favoring of skilled over

unskilled workers and other sectors of the working population as was often argued at the time and has been asserted in scholarship up to the present day. In parallel, NEM visibly prioritized large groups of male workers over women textile workers and other women workers in the light industries who were subject to low-wage policies and vulnerable to the special hardship of night work.

At the same time, under NEM—again, both before and after 1972—the textile industry was included in the politics of preferential treatment for the core working classes; women mass workers in the industry repeatedly benefited from special wage increases. Forming part of a larger set of preferential treatment, these new policies, as mentioned above, did not undo the overall unfavorable position of the light industries (as compared with other industries) in terms of wages. The changes within NEM starting in 1972, coupled with the worsening of the overall economic conditions by the middle of the 1970s, ushered in important changes regarding the status of the woman mass worker in the textile industry and in other sectors of the light industries where many women worked the night shift. In this period, ever enhanced material incentives were made available for (women) workers to entice them to work the night shift. The relevant sectors and enterprises saw a redistribution of the overall wage funds available in such a manner that the high compensation of night work combined with comparatively very low base wages. For the textile industry, a special politics of suspending the prohibition of night work for underage workers was added. Within the world of paid work in the mid-1970s, the woman industrial mass worker, therefore, was transformed more than ever before from a special gendered category of worker enjoying special protections for “social” reasons into an economic being—who worked in a low-paying industry, was subject to unequal pay and, thus, continued to suffer from gendered economic discrimination.

These eminently practical Hungarian developments and struggles formed part of and showcased a larger historical trend, discernible in state-socialist and capitalist Europe and internationally, related to how gender and class politics in the world of work interacted and changed over time. At the ILO, the 1970s saw renewed disagreement with and the questioning of the inherited politics of the sex-specific abolition of night work in industry. Toward the end of the decade, a tripartite advisory committee convened to examine the issue again found that employers’ and workers’ representatives held “irreconcilable” viewpoints. The latter argued, or so the International Labour Office summarized, that “existing restrictions

should not be lifted in the name of equality between men and women but rather the protection enjoyed by women should be extended to men.”⁹⁹ As documented in Table 1, important countries in state-socialist Eastern Europe eschewed an international (and domestic) commitment to (generalized) women-specific restrictions on night work in industry. The Hungarian denunciation of C41 in 1977 can be regarded as a drumbeat, which on the international plane signaled that state-socialist Europe was ahead in terms of transforming the woman worker from a special category of worker into an economic being. From the 1980s onward, the inherited employer, liberal, and feminist argument about sex-specific labor protections as constraining women’s individual choice and equal opportunity in the world of work and as discriminatory against women in terms of job opportunities and income, gained traction internationally. In Hungary, the press campaign surrounding the denunciation of C41 in 1977 (itself not publicized at the time) and the related discursive and policy efforts of the women trade unionists made use of this type of argument to a certain degree. The vision that night work should be humanized rather than abolished was present both in Hungary and at the ILO at the time.

The connection between international and Hungarian developments with regard to women’s night work was discernible not only in terms of the changing political atmosphere and the discursive challenges to women-specific labor protections in the 1970s. From the 1950s onward, the dance around the “sacred cow” of women’s night work in Hungary served to closely connect the policy clashes between Hungary and the ILO with domestic political struggle in Hungary. Against the background of the ongoing violation of the ILO Convention C41 in Hungary, domestic policy-makers and the ILO engaged in many rounds of conflict-ridden exchange. Given both the—still ongoing—commitment of the International Labour Office to sex-specific labor protections and the ILO’s profile as the key institution dedicated to the proactive and strictly legalistic promotion of global labor governance, this is hardly surprising. For Hungarian government officials, labor diplomats, manpower planners, high-ranking trade union functionaries and institutions, and the managers of state-run industries, a different set of issues was at stake in these interactions; these included the gendered politics of the mass worker, laborist self-identification—which informed the position of different actors in a highly variegated manner—and the international standing of Hungary as a country dedicated to the ideology of the workers’ state. In the domestic context, ministerial officials responsible for

labor politics within Hungary and connected to the ILO took the lead in jettisoning the commitment to C41, combining the outworn argument about economic necessity with strategic reference to the changing international conjuncture in the politics of women's work.

For SZOTNB and its allies, the denunciation of C41 in 1977 signaled a bitter defeat. To a degree and without success, the women trade unionists tried to make use of the political circumstances leading up to the termination of a principal international commitment, which stood at the heart of the gendered politics of women's work, to further promote some of their eminently practical goals regarding women's employment at night. Both before and after 1977, these women advocated for the exemption of special groups of pregnant women and women with small children from night work without material loss and the improvement of the conditions of night work. These endeavors formed part of their politics of persistent and granular engagement with the complex and difficult realities of the world of industrial work. Over the decades, they aimed to influence and juggle opportunities and restrictions built into wage systems as well as compromised with the interests of enterprises and labor force managers and engaged with women workers' options and interests as shaped by the complex circumstances they encountered within and beyond the world of paid employment. In 1977, the trade union women were forced to move away from the overt promotion of their inherited vision of the generalized, women-specific abolition of night work in industry. From a birds-eye view, the events in Hungary in 1977 can be considered a historical turning point in the global politics of women's work as crystallized in a small Eastern European state-socialist country. Retrospectively at least, Hungary's denunciation of C41 can be read as signaling that the old laborist and laborist-feminist vision for sex-specific restrictions, to be superseded by equally strict restrictions for both sexes, would succumb to the declining status of the workforce as a whole in the context of general economic liberalization.

NOTES

1. Moldova György, *A szent tehén. Riport a textiliparról [The Sacred Cow. Report on the Textile Industry]* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1980).
2. Könyvüipari Minisztérium, "Tájékoztató a könnyűiparban dolgozó nők helyzetének javítására hozott intézkedésekről [Information Brochure on the Measures Taken to Improve the Situation of the Women Working in

- the Light Industries],” 1973, 5, 9–10, SZKL Szakszervezetek Központi Levéltára [Central Trade Unions’ Archive] SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1973, box 1, folder 3, Politikátörténeti Intézet Levéltára [Institute of Political History, Archives, henceforth PIL].
3. SZOTNB, “Tájékoztató a nők éjszakai foglalkoztatásának helyzetéről [Information on the Situation Regarding Women’s Employment During the Night],” August 23, 1977, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1977, box 4, folder 17, PIL, Appendix.
 4. Franz Delapina, Andrea Komlosy, “Ungarn 1945 bis 1982: Zwischen Abkoppelung und Weltmarktintegration [Hungary from 1945 to 1982: Between Delinking and World Market Integration],” in *Ungarn im Umbruch [Changeover in Hungary]*, ed. Franz Delapina, Hannes Hofbauer, Andrea Komlosy, Gerhard Melinz, Susan Zimmermann (Vienna: Promedia, 1991), 93–129; Piotr Franaszek, “Poland,” in *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers 1650–2000*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (Farnham, England, Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2010), 397–420; Susan Zimmermann, “Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism,” *Aspasia. The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European Women’s and Gender History* 8 (2010): 1–24.
 5. This chapter does not discuss the evolving stratification of the male industrial workforce.
 6. Ulla Wikander, Alice Kessler-Harris, Jane Lewis (eds.), *Protecting Women. Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880–1920* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Susan Zimmermann, *Frauenpolitik und Männergewerkschaft. Internationale Geschlechterpolitik, IGB-Gewerkschafterinnen und die Arbeiter- und Frauenbewegungen der Zwischenkriegszeit [Women’s politics and men’s trade unionism. International gender politics, IFTU women trade unionists, and the labor and women’s movements of the interwar period]* (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 2021), chapter 6.
 7. Susan Zimmermann, “Equality of Women’s Economic Status? A Major Bone of Contention in the International Gender Politics Emerging During the Interwar Period,” *The International History Review* 41, no. 1 (2019): 200–227.
 8. The ILO study International Labour Office, *ILC 89th Session, 2001, Report III (Part 1B). Night Work of Women in Industry* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2001), gives a good overview of these developments.
 9. On the latter, see Susan Zimmermann, “‘It Shall Not Be a Written Gift, But a Lived Reality.’ Equal Pay, Women’s Work, and the Politics of Labor in State-Socialist Hungary, Late 1960s to Late 1970s,” in *Labor*

- in State-Socialist Europe, 1945–1989. Contributions to a History of Work*, ed. Marsha Siefert (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2020), 339–340.
10. Research has now begun to discuss the pro-women politics of women functionaries, researchers and activists in state-socialist countries in global comparison, highlighting how these politics were advanced as compared to women’s activism elsewhere and how they were characterized by serious flaws such as, e.g., involvement in pronatalist population policies and ethnonationalist agendas (issues not addressed in the present chapter). See most recently Zhivka Valiavicharska, *Restless History: Political Imaginaries and Their Discontents in Post-Stalinist Bulgaria* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: Mc Gill-Queen’s University Press, 2021), esp. chapter 2.
 11. Labour Code 1951 and related stipulations, *A Munka Törvénykönyve [The Labor Code]* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1966), 70–71, 150–51. All translations from Hungarian are mine.
 12. “Order 9/1968 Minister of Light Industries,” *Könnyűipari Értesítő* 21, no. 13 (April 20, 1968): 314.
 13. SZOT Budapest, Szervezési és Káderoktatási Nőbizottsága [SZOT Budapest, Women’s Committee of the Organization and Cadre Education Division], “Jelentés a budapesti dolgozó nők és a szakszervezetek tevékenységéről a SZOT Elnökség határozatának tükrében [Report on the Position of the Working Women of Budapest and on the Activity of the Trade Unions Against the Background of the Decision of the SZOT Presidency],” April 16, 1963, M-KS 288 f. 22 MDP-MSZMP 1964 folder 10, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [Nationwide Archives of the Hungarian National Archives, henceforth MNL MOL]. SZOT, just as the national branch trade unions, was constructed on territorial branches (among other components).
 14. SZOT-nak a dolgozó nők sajátos helyzetével foglalkozó bizottsága [SZOT-Committee considering the special situation of working women], “Jelentés a szakszervezetek nők körében végzett munkájáról, a dolgozó nők helyzetéről [Report on the work of the trade unions carried out among women and about the position of working women],” March 28, 1964, M-KS 288 f. 22 MDP-MSZMP 1964 folder 10, MNL MOL; Elena Teodorescu (WFTU Secretary), “A Végrehajtó Bizottság 26. ülészaka (Prága, 1963. január 29–31.) Beszámoló a nők problémáival foglalkozó II. Nemzetközi Szakszervezeti Konferencia előkészítéséről [26th session of the [WFTU] Executive Committee (Prague, 29–31 January 1963) Report on the preparations for the 2nd International Trade Union Conference on women’s problems],” January 29, 1963, M-KS 288 f. 22 MDP-MSZMP 1964 folder 10, MNL MOL (incl. quote).

15. WFTU, *Working Women Shape Their Future. 2nd International Trade Union Conference on the Problems of Working Women. Bucharest, May 11 to 16, 1964* (WFTU, n.d.), 108.
16. "A [WFTU] Elnökségének 44. ülészaka (Prága, 1964. január 15–16 és 17.) A dolgozó nők gazdasági és szociális jogainak alapokmány tervezete [44th session of the WFTU Presidency (Prague, 15–16 and 17 January 1964) Draft Charter on the Economic and Social Rights of Working Women]," January 15, 1964, M-KS 288 f. 22 MDP-MSZMP 1964 folder 10, MNL MOL.
17. SZOT-nak a dolgozó nők sajátos helyzetével foglalkozó bizottsága [SZOT-Committee considering the special situation of working women], "Report on the Work 28 March 1964."
18. SZOT Elnökség [Presidency], "A SZOT Elnökségének állásfoglalása, a dolgozó nők családelátásának és munkakörülményeinek javításával kapcsolatos távlati megoldására [Position taken by the SZOT Leadership on the long-term solution of the improvement of the family provision and the labor conditions of working women]," July 3, 1964, M-KS 288 f. 22 MDP-MSZMP 1964 folder 10, MNL MOL.
19. Kelvin Widdows, "The Denunciation of International Labour Conventions," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1984): 1052–1063; Virginia A. Leary, "Lessons from the Experience of the International Labour Organization," in *The United Nations and Human Rights. A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Philip Alston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 599–600; International Labour Office, *Monitoring Compliance with International Labour Standards: The Key Role of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations* (Geneva: ILO, 2019), esp. 20.
20. Dr. Nagy László, "Feljegyzés Dr. Horányi László részére [Note for Dr. László Horányi]," May 15, 1964, XIX-C-5-b 1957–1981 MüM box 92, MNL MOL.
21. Janovay Jenő, "Feljegyzés a Munkajogi Önálló Osztály részére [Note for the Autonomous Division on Labor Law]," May 12, 1964, XIX-C-5-b 1957–1981 MüM box 92, MNL MOL.
22. See also Widdows, "Denunciation," 1052–1053.
23. Lux Judit, *A magyarországi szakszervezetek történetéből. Átdolgozott kiadás [On the History of the Hungarian Trade Unions. Revised Edition]* (Budapest: Friedrich Ebert Alapítvány, 2008), 121–124.
24. "Labour Code (and Follow-up Regulations)," *Magyar Közlöny. A Magyar Népköztársaság Hivatalos Lapja*, no. 67 (October 8, 1967), here Labor Code §§ 38(3) and 44(3). This is my comparative reading of the new stipulations of the 1968 Labor Code, which is tentative in as much as I have not detected relevant original material or scholarship discussing the change.

25. “Order 9/1968 Minister of Light Industries.”
26. *ILC. Fiftieth Session. Geneva, 1966. Record of Proceedings* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1967), 589.
27. *ILC. Fifty-First Session. Geneva, 1967. Record of Proceedings* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1968), 662.
28. Péter János (Foreign Minister), letter to József Veres (Minister of Labor), February 18, 1967, XIX-C-5-a 1964–1981 MüM box 1, MNL MOL.
29. Munkaügyi Minisztérium, “A Nemzetközi Munkaügyi Konferencia 50. ülészakán részt vett küldöttség beszámolója [Report of the Delegation Participating in the 50th Session of the ILC] Draft,” July 17, 1967, XIX-C-5-a 1964–1981 MüM box 1, MNL MOL. Reprimanding Hungary via its inclusion on the “special list” had been considered already in 1965 and 1966.
30. Veres József, “Előterjesztés a Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormányhoz [Presentation to the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Government],” October 9, 1967, XIX-C-5-a 1964–1981 MüM box 1, MNL MOL.
31. Timár Mátyás (Deputy-President of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants Government), letter to József Veres (Minister of Labor), October 24, 1967, XIX-C-5-a 1964–1981 MüM box 1, MNL MOL.
32. Péter János (Foreign Minister), letter to József Veres (Minister of Labor), October 30, 1967, XIX-C-5-a 1964–1981 MüM box 1, MNL MOL.
33. “Order 9/1968 Minister of Light Industries.”
34. In the published Central Committee report, the opposition between central and local work was smoothed over to reference local tasks to be pursued “beside” central tasks. MSZMP Központi Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály, *Jegyzőkönyv a [MSZMP] Politikai Bizottság 1970. február 10-én tartott üléséről: Jelentés a Politikai Bizottságnak a nők politikai, gazdasági és szociális helyzetéről [Minutes of the Meeting of the (MSZMP) Politburo on 10 February 1970: Report for the Politburo on the Political, Economic and Social Position of Women]*, 1970, 10, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonyvek/hierarchia>; *Dokumentumok a nők gazdasági és szociális helyzetének megjavításáról [Documents on the Improvement of the Economic and Social Position of Women]* (Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1971), 14–15.
35. The President of MNOT and member of the politburo Edit Erdei (Mrs. László Erdei) claimed that MNOT had been the initiator of the KNEB inquiry; framing and focus of the inquiry point to *gyes* and its consequences as factor triggering the initiative, but NEM and other factors may well have played a role as well. Magda Salamon, “Országos szolgálat. Nagy Józsefiné életútja [Nationwide service. The biography of Mrs. József Nagy],” *Népi Ellenőrzés* 12, no. 4 (1970): 14–15; “Interview with

- Mrs. László Erdei, MNOT President,” *Igaz Szó* 14, no. 5 (March 1969): 18–19.
36. “A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány 2003/1969. (II. 15) számú határozata az üzemi dolgozó nők munkahelyi és otthoni körülményeinek alakulásáról [Decision 2003/1969 (15 February) of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Government on the development of the circumstances of women factory workers at work and at home],” *Határozatok tára* 18, no. 2 (February 15, 1969).
 37. A summary description can be found in Zimmermann, “Written Gift.”
 38. TDSz, “Jelentés a dolgozó nők társadalmi és szociális helyzetéről [Report on the Societal and Social Position of Working Women],” March 24, 1969, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1968–1969, box 1, folder 2, PIL.
 39. “Jegyzőkönyv a [MSZMP] Központi Bizottság 1970. február 18–19-én tartott üléséről [Minutes of the Meeting of the (MSZMP) Central Committee on 18–19 February 1970],” February 18, 1970, 181–182, MNL MOL, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonvev/hierarchia>.
 40. *Documents on the Position of Women 1971*.
 41. From a speech given at the World Congress of Trade Unions in Budapest in October 1969. Gáspár Sándor, *The International Trade Union Movement* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1980), 110–111.
 42. I am not aware of research that would have focused on the changing role of the trade unions as instituted together with NEM. “Labour Code (and Follow-up Regulations),” October 8, 1967, esp. 504–505; *A munka törvénykönyve 1966*, 14–19.
 43. *Documents on the Position of Women 1971*, 31–32, 34–35, 56–57.
 44. SZOTNB, “A SZOT Nőbizottság programja. Tervezet [Program of SZOTNB. Draft] (1 July 1970 – 30 June 1971),” SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1970, box 1, folder 1, PIL.
 45. The quotes are from an interview published in May 1971 and republished in PTI, ed., “Érdekegyeztetés dokumentumok 1966–1975 [Reconciliation of Interest Documents 1966–1975],” 105–107, <http://polhist.hu/erdekegyeztetes-1966-1975/> (accessed May 3, 2022).
 46. The following information and quotes are taken from documents reprinted in PTI, 107–122.
 47. SZOTNB, “Nőfelelősi értekezlet” [Conference of the trade union representatives responsible for women’s issues] Combined minutes 18, 19, and 29 January 1971,” January 1971, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1971, box 2, folder 7, PIL. The Committee of Economic Politics had made this decision, which had been shared with Futó and others in December 1970; I have not yet been able to find the original document.

48. TDSz, *A Textilipari Dolgozók Szakszervezetének XXII. Kongresszusa [The 20th Congress of the Union of Textile Workers]* (Budapest: TDSz, 1971), 53.
49. All quotes taken from “Éjszakai munka, rekonstrukció, nagycsaládos pótlék [Night Work, Reconstruction, Big-Families Allowance] Interview with Éva Baranyai,” *Népszava*, July 18, 1971, ADB (in part in italics i.o.).
50. SZOT Titkárság, “A SZOT Titkárság állásfoglalása a nőpolitikai határozat további végrehajtására” [Statement of the SZOT Secretariat on the Further Execution of the Decision on Women-Politics],” October 8, 1971, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1971, box 3, folder 4, PIL.
51. Könyvüipari Minisztérium, Közgazdasági Főosztály, “Beszámoló a nők gazdasági és szociális helyzetének javítására vonatkozó határozatok végrehajtásának állásáról a textiliparban [Report on the State of the Implementation of the Decisions with Regard to the Improvement of Women’s Economic and Social Position in the Textile Industry],” October 6, 1971, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1971, box 3, folder 4, PIL.
52. Könyvüipari Minisztérium, “Irányelvek a vállalati IV. öt éves tervek a nők helyzetének javítására vonatkozó kiemelt tervfejezetéhez [Guiding Principles for the Stand-Out Plan-Chapter on the Improvement of Women’s Position in the Fourth Five-Year Plans of the Enterprises],” July 1971, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1971, box 6, folder 22, PIL.
53. Könyvüipari Minisztérium, “Information brochure Ministry of Light Industries [1973],” 10, 20–21.
54. Verbatim in Könyvüipari Minisztérium [1].
55. “Jegyzőkönyv a Központi Bizottság 1972. november 14–15-én tartott kibővített üléséről [Minutes of the Enlarged Meeting of the Central Committee Held on 14 and 15 November 1972], including several attachments,” November 14, 1972, MNL MOL, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonyvek/hierarchia>.
56. Lux, *Hungarian trade unions 2008*, 125.
57. “Central Committee 14 and 15 November 1972”; Varga Zsuzsanna, “Why Is Success a Crime? Trials of Managers of Agricultural Cooperatives in the Hungary of the 1970’s,” *Hungarian Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (2013): esp. 154–156.
58. Földes György, *Az eladósodás politikatörténete 1957–1986 [The Political History of Indebtedness 1957–1986]* (Maecenas Könyvkiadó, 1995), chapters 3 and 4; Bognár József, “A gazdaságpolitikai és irányítási koncepciók fejlődése az elmúlt évtizedek során [The Developments of the Concepts of Economic Politics and Management During the Past Decades],” in *Az új Magyarország 40 éve. Társadalom, politika, gazdaság, kultúra [40 Years of the New Hungary. Society, Politics, Economy and Culture]*, ed. Kálmán Kulcsár and Pál Pritz (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1985), 140–141.

59. “Central Committee 14 and 15 November 1972,” esp. pdf-pp. 287, 408.
60. Nyers Rezső, “Jegyzőkönyv a Központi Bizottság 1973. április 18-án tartott üléséről. Tájékoztató a Központi Bizottság 1972. novemberi határozatában megjelölt gazdaságpolitikai feladatok végrehajtásának helyzetéről [Minutes of the Meeting of the Central Committee Held on 18 April 1973. Information on the Situation Regarding the Implementation of the Economic Policy Tasks Set in the Central Committee Decision of November 1972],” April 18, 1973, pdf-pp. 175–176, MNL MOL, <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/mszmp-jegyzokonvev/hierarchia>.
61. Czerván Margit, “Következetesség a nőpolitikában [Consistency in Women’s Politics],” *Szakszervezeti Szemle. A magyar szakszervezeti mozgalom elméleti-társadalompolitikai folyóirata* 3, no. 1 (1976): 70–71. (Elsewhere Czerván corrected the top mark of 100 percent downward.).
62. Lengyel Anna, “Megkülönböztetett figyelem a több műszakban dolgozókra [Distinguished Attention for the Workers Doing Several Shifts],” *Munka. A szakszervezeti mozgalom folyóirata* 36, no. 7 (1976): 15–16; Pék Imre, “A több műszakban dolgozó nők helyzete [The Situation of Women Working Several Shifts],” *Munka. A szakszervezeti mozgalom folyóirata* 36, no. 12 (1976): 22.
63. Czerván, “Consistency,” 70–71.
64. The 1951 Labour Code contained only a vague vision of exempting young people between the ages of 16 and 18 “if possible.” Labour Code 1951 and related stipulations, §102(1), contained in *A munkatörvénykönyve 1966*; “Labour Code (and Follow-up Regulations),” October 8, 1967, Labour Code §38(4).
65. “Order 9/1968 Minister of Light Industries.”
66. *International Labour Conference 57th Session, Geneva 1972. Report III (Part 4A). Third Item on the Agenda. Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. Volume A: General Report and Observations Concerning Particular Countries* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1972), 61; “6. sz. egyezmény. Jelentés [...] az 1975. július 1. és 1977. június 30. közötti időszakra vonatkozóan [Convention no. 6. Report on the period between July 1, 1975, and June 30, 1977],” 1977, XIX-J-1-k 1977 KüM box 89, MNL MOL.
67. “Decree 18/1974 Minister of Labor,” *Magyar Közlöny. A Magyar Népköztársaság Hivatalos Lapja*, no. 52 (July 25, 1974). The practical implementation of the stipulation concerning the textile industry was put on the shoulders of the responsible minister, and the (enterprise-level) collective agreements could still abolish night work for the groups specified in the decree.

68. Turgonyi Júlia, “A nő és a munka [Woman and Work],” *Társadalmi Szemle* 30, no. 10 (1975): 40.
69. Futó Ilona, “Vélemény a több műszakban dolgozó munkásnők szociális helyzete javításának lehetőségei tárgyában készült vázlatról [Opinion on the Draft Regarding the Possibilities of Improvement of the Social Situation of the Women Workers Working Several Shifts],” February 26, 1975, SZKL 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL. See also; SZOTNB, “Tájékoztató a nőpolitikai határozat időarányos végrehajtásának tapasztalatairól [Information on the Pro-Rata Implementation of the Directive(s) on Women’s Issues],” December 6, 1974, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 3, PIL.
70. The wording regarding the non-reduction of the night shift shows how the Ministry of Labor proposal was summarized in SZOT Munkavédelmi osztály, “Észrevételek a nőknek az iparban történő éjszakai foglalkoztatásával kapcsolatos előterjesztés-tervezethez [Remarks on the Draft Proposal Concerning the Employment of Women in Industry During the Night],” November 11, 1974, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL.
71. This plan for decision-making is given verbatim or de-facto verbatim in [SZOT], “Feljegyzés a nők éjszakai foglalkoztatásának problémáiról [Proposal on the Problems of Women’s Employment During the Night] and attachment providing extracts from the trade union statements,” December 20, 1974, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL.
72. [SZOT]. The collected opinions and proposals of the various trade union bodies contained in this document would deserve a detailed analysis.
73. SZOTNB, “Vélemény ‘A nőknek az iparban történő éjszakai foglalkoztatásáról’ című Munkaügyi Minisztériumi előterjesztésről [Opinion on the Proposal of the Ministry of Labor Entitled ‘On the Employment of Women in Industry During the Night’],” November 11, 1974, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL. I have not been able to establish beyond doubt whether the “Opinion” referenced here constituted a draft or a final copy.
74. Rózsa József, letter to Margit Czerván, February 17, 1975, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL. I have not been able to establish beyond doubt what SZOT’s conclusive reaction was to the draft proposal circulated by the Ministry of Labor in late 1974, and how this impacted the ensuing decision-making. Munkaügyi Minisztérium, “A több műszakban dolgozó munkásnők szociális helyzete javításának lehetőségeiről [On the Possibilities for the Improvement of the Social Situation of Women Workers Doing Several Shifts],” February 17, 1975, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL; [SZOTNB], “Vélemény a több műszakban dolgozó munkásnők szociális helyzete

- javításáról készített vázlatához [Opinion on the Draft Description on the Improvement of the Social Situation of Women Workers Doing Several Shifts],” February 25, 1975, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1975, box 1, folder 4, PIL.
75. This is taken from SZOTNB’s detailed account of the assessment by the government following the discussion of the report. SZOTNB, “Tájékoztató a nők éjszakai foglalkoztatásának helyzetéről [Information on the Situation Regarding Women’s Employment During the Night].”
 76. “Decree 15/1977 Council of Ministers,” *Magyar Közlöny. A Magyar Népköztársaság Hivatalos Lapja*, no. 40 (May 22, 1977).
 77. The latter demand was repeated the following year. International Labour Office, *Report III (Part 1) International Labour Conference 58th Session 1973. Third Item on the Agenda. Summary of Reports on Ratified Conventions* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1973), 88; International Labour Office, *Report III (Part 1) International Labour Conference 59th Session 1974. Third Item on the Agenda. Summary of Reports on Ratified Conventions* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1974).
 78. International Labour Office, *Report III (Part 1) International Labour Conference 61th Session 1976. Third Item on the Agenda. Summary of Reports on Ratified Conventions* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1976), 85–86.
 79. Timmer József, “A Nemzetközi Munkaügyi Szervezet 61. közgyűléséről és a nemzetközi foglalkoztatási világkonferenciáról [On the 61st General Assembly of the ILO and the World Conference on Employment],” *Szakszervezeti Szemle. A magyar szakszervezeti mozgalom elméleti-társadalompolitikai folyóirata* 5, no. 3 (1976): 84.
 80. *ILC. Sixty-First Session. Geneva, 1967. Record of Proceedings* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1977), 192–193, 203–204.
 81. Topálovich Pál, “Korlátozhatjuk-e az éjszakai munka kedvezőtlen hatásait? [Can We Limit the Disadvantageous Impacts of Night Work?],” *Szakszervezeti Szemle. A magyar szakszervezeti mozgalom elméleti-társadalompolitikai folyóirata* 6, no. 2 (1977): 68–70.
 82. Magyar Lajosné [Mrs. Lajos Magyar], “A termelőkapacitások kihasználására ható tényezők [Factors Impacting on the Utilization of the Production Capacities],” *Szakszervezeti Szemle. A magyar szakszervezeti mozgalom elméleti-társadalompolitikai folyóirata* 6, no. 1 (1977): 31–39; Bán Zsuzsa, “Munkásvélemények a műszakpótlékról [Workers’ Opinions on the Shift Work Bonus],” *Munka. A szakszervezeti mozgalom folyóirata* 37, no. 9–10 (1977): 25–26.
 83. Marton Tamás (Chief of section) letter to István Szigeti (Deputy Labor Minister), February 3, 1977, XIX-C-5-b 1957–1981 MüM, 1977, box 1075, MNL MOL; Tamás Marton (Chief of section, Ministry of Labour), letter to Geréb Sándorné [Mrs. Sándor Geréb] (Deputy Chief of Section

- in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and regular representative of Hungary at the ILC), April 15, 1977, XIX-C-5-b 1957–1981 MüM, 1977, box 1075, MNL MOL; “Határozati javaslat [Proposal for Decision-Making],” March 1977, XIX-C-5-b 1957–1981 MüM, 1977, box 1075, MNL MOL (incl. quote).
84. SZOTNB, “Javaslat a SZOT Titkársága részére [Proposal for the SZOT Secretariat] (on the denunciation of C41),” May 25, 1977, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1977, box 1, folder 2, PIL.
 85. Biró Éva, letter to Júlia Nyitrai, May 7, 1977, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1977, box 4, folder 17, PIL. Biró had long developed and demanded a variety of eminently practical ideas to enable serious steps toward the reduction of the night shift, including, in 1975, constructing the upcoming Five-Year plan around workforce- rather than machinery-capacity, to somewhat reduce the growth plan so as to avoid overtime, disorganization, etc., Éva Biró, “Tapasztalataink, problémáink az érdekösszefüggések feltárásában [Our Experiences and Problems as We Explore the Interest-Connections],” *Szakszervezeti Szemle. A magyar szakszervezeti mozgalom elméleti-társadalompolitikai folyóirata* 4, no. 3 (1975): 17.
 86. SZOTNB, “Proposal for the SZOT Secretariat.”
 87. SZOTNB, “Javaslat a SZOT Elnökség állásfoglalására [Proposal for the Position of the SZOT Presidency],” (on the denunciation of C41), August 23, 1977, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1977, box 1, folder 2, PIL.
 88. Juhász Ottó (Secretary), letter to László Horányi (Chief of Secretariat, Ministry of Labor), July 21, 1977, XIX-C-5-a (5.d.) 1964–1981 Visszaminősített TÜK iratok, 1977, box 5, MNL MOL.
 89. “Jegyzőkönyv [...] SZOT [...] elnökségi üléséről [Minutes of the Meeting of the SZOT Presidency],” August 29, 1977, SZKL SZEln 2. f. 3, 1977, folder 530, PIL.
 90. Trethon Ferenc, “Előterjesztés a Minisztertanács részére. Tárgy: A nők éjszakai ipari foglalkoztatásának tilalmáról szóló 41. számú nemzetközi egyezmény felmondása [Proposal for the Conference of Ministers. Subject: The Denunciation of the International Convention no. 41 on the Abolition of the Employment of Women During the Night], with attachments,” June 30, 1977, XIX-C-5-a (5.d.) 1964–1981 Visszaminősített TÜK iratok, 1977, box 5, MNL MOL.
 91. See, however, Table 1.
 92. This is implied by Marton Tamás, letter to Ferenc Trethon (Minister of Labor), September 7, 1977, XIX-C-5-a 1964–1981 MüM box 1, MNL MOL.
 93. Simonics György (Minister of Labor, Section for international affairs), letter to László Horányi, (in the same house), August 26, 1977, XIX-C-5-b 1957–1981 MüM, 1977, box 1080, MNL MOL.

94. “Az együttműködés lehetőségei [The Possibilities of Cooperation] Interview with József Timmer,” *Népszava*, October 12, 1980.
95. Nyitrai Júlia, SZOTNB, “Jelentés a SZOT Elnökségének a nőhatározat végrehajtásának tapasztalatairól és a további tennivalókról [Report to the SZOT Presidency on the Experiences of the Implementation of the Decision on Women Issues and the Further Tasks],” April 25, 1980, SZKL SZOTNB 2. f. 19, 1980, box 1, folder 8, PIL.
96. Turgonyi Júlia, *Az iparban foglalkoztatott nők foglalkozási, szakmai struktúrája, és a szakszervezetek feladatai (Zárótanulmány) [The Employment and Professional Structure of the Women Employed in Industry, and the Tasks of the Trade Unions (Concluding Study)]* (Budapest: Szakszervezetek Elméleti Kutató Intézete, 1981), 122, 125. Turgonyi had put forward a similar argument already in Turgonyi Júlia, Ferge Zsuzsa, *Az ipari munkásnők munka- és életkörülményei [The Work- and Life-Circumstances of the Industrial Women Workers]* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1969), 61.
97. Zimmermann, “Written Gift.”
98. Moldova, *The Sacred Cow 1980*, 535.
99. International Labour Office, *ILC 89th Session, 2001, Report III (Part 1B)*, 35–38.

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Dance Around a “Sacred Cow”: Women’s Night Work and the Gender Politics of the Mass Worker in State-Socialist Hungary and Internationally

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Online Abstract:

This chapter explores the struggle over the prohibition of women’s night work in industry that took place in state-socialist Hungary and between Hungary and the International Labour Organization ILO during the 1960s and 1970s. In Hungary, dedicated women trade union functionaries advocated for a gendered policy scheme that called for far-reaching special labor protections to be granted to women workers on social grounds and simultaneously ensured that such protections would not translate into gendered disadvantages. In the context of the Hungarian New Economic Mechanism, this feminist-laborist policy vision was overruled by the politics of transforming the woman worker into an economic being who did not deserve special protection, yet continued to suffer from economic discrimination as compared with men workers. This Hungarian development was part of the broader abandonment of (most) restrictions on women’s night work in state-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Internationally and at the ILO, this development served as a forerunner to and an indicator of a larger global trend reversal. The old laborist and laborist-feminist dream that woman-specific restrictions would be superseded by equally strict restrictions for both sexes died in the context of European-wide economic liberalization.