"EQUALITY OF WOMEN IN THE U.S.S.R.," A SEMINAR FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, U. N. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, AND FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL BODIES.

SOVIET WOMEN HAVE EQUAL POLITICAL RIGHTS WITH MEN AND TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN GOVERNMENT

REPORT BY ACADEMICIAN A. M. PANKRATOVA

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In 1945 the United Nations Charter declared in its preamble that the United Nations were determined "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small" and it laid down as one of its aims "to achieve international cooperation. . . in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." Thereby it summed up the progress made and opened up certain prospects for a greater participation of women in political and government affairs.

I consider it my duty to point out the serious efforts which have been made for the solution of this problem by the Commission on the Status of Women, Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, in the persons of representatives of the member countries and the non-governmental bodies taking part in its work.

The Soviet Union has always supported and voted for proposals and recommendations made by the U. N. General Assembly for a speedy solution of the problem of granting women political rights on an equal footing with men in all countries of the world.

The Governments of the U.S.S.R. and the Byelorussian and Ukrainian Republics immediately signed and ratified the International Convention on the Political Rights of

Women, approved by the Seventh Session of the U. N. General Assembly in 1952.

In my report I should like to mention that my country made a big step forward as early as 1917, when the political system now existing in the Soviet Union came into being. The radical changes which occurred in our country's social relations at that time had a decisive effect on the position of women, which was most grievous.

Tsarist Russia, where social and national oppression were at their worst, was necessarily also a country of crying inequality of women. Old Russian legislation relegated women, in both society and the family, to a status that was not only unequal but downright humiliating. Women had no political rights whatsoever. They were deprived even of the scanty electoral rights which the tsarist regime had been compelled to grant the male population after the Revolution of 1905. Women could neither take part in elections nor be elected to any agency of local self-government, to say nothing of the State Duma, which was no more than a poor semblance of a parliament. The Civil Service Code then in force in the Russian Empire explicitly prohibited the appointment of women "to clerical or other offices in any government department where posts are assigned by the decision of a superior or as a result of elections."

It is no coincidence that the foremost Russian writers and progressive thinkers advocated rights for women. *What Is To Be Done?*, a novel by Nikolai Chernyshevsky, devoted to the question of the women's position in society, stirred the Russian reader; moreover, in the seventies it was published and republished in French, and also appeared in Italian and Swedish.

Human progress during the last centuries has been bound up with the problem of the emancipation of women and has been attended by the women's struggle for both general social progress and the right to participate in political and government affairs. Each liberation movement has tackled the problem of women's emancipation, but not each of them has produced positive results in this respect.

The independent women's movements for political rights were mostly narrow in scope and involved few participants.

In Russia the activity of women who sought to gain political rights was never isolated from the general democratic struggle of men and women against autocracy, a system condemned by the whole of civilized humanity. To remove that enemy of progress, Russian women revolutionaries performed heroic deeds along with men.

At the turn of the century women in some countries acquired certain political rights. The Soviet system brought Russia's women full political and all the other rights. All the inequalities in the status of women, envisaged by pre-revolutionary laws, were wiped out in our country. New legislation gave women complete equality with men.

The first "Declaration of the Rights of Women," proclaimed by the French Revolution in 1792, remained, due to the conditions prevailing at the time, a mere appeal. A new declaration was made in Russia 125 years later, under different conditions. *Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People adopted by the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets in January 1918, was the first document of the Soviet state placing women in a politically equal position with men.*

The first Soviet Constitution, passed by the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in July 1918, legalized the women's new political rights by proclaiming in Art. 22, the equality of all citizens of the Soviet Republic regardless of sex, race or nationality, and establishing in Art. 64 the women's right to elect or be elected to the Soviets on an equal footing with men, regardless of nationality, creed, etc.

By a number of further legislative acts the Soviet state granted women complete equality with men in respect of civil, matrimonial, family, and labour laws. Equality under the law initiated the actual emancipation of women. We sought to secure the most extensive participation of women in social production and in social and political affairs by enabling them to work in government and public institutions and organizations at all levels.

Our women, whom the tsarist regime had oppressed and degraded in every way, were unprepared for taking an effective part in government. However, most of the workers and peasants, who had assumed power, were just as unprepared. Rejecting the theories which in many countries still seek to justify the exclusion of women from government by alleging that women are politically backward, the Soviet Government at once set out to teach women how to govern.

It was then, at the earliest stage of the existence of the Soviet system, that Lenin said that every housewife should know how to govern the state—an utterance which gained great popularity.

The political advancement of working women and their training for government work were considerably furthered by the system of "delegates' meetings," to which the women of this or that factory, village, etc., sent their elected representatives. Delegates' meetings were a school for government and public work. The women delegates took part in the activities of the various organs of government and their departments, helping them to improve labour protection, the health services, education and the upbringing of children, set up nursery schools and kindergartens, supply the population with food and manufactured goods and promote municipal development.

On April 11, 1921, the Council of People's Commissars decreed that all institutions and industrial undertakings should introduce probation as a method of drawing large numbers

of women workers and peasants into the work of the Soviets (organs of local government) by enabling them to acquire through practical work the necessary experience.

The probation system made it possible to establish closer links between government agencies and the population, in particular women, improve the work of the administrative personnel and weed out bureaucratic elements. Women probationers were assigned work mostly in those departments of the Soviets responsible for mother and child care, the health services, labour protection, public catering and education, which naturally required the attention of women.

The decree on probation increased the role which women played in the Soviets. In the second half of 1921, the Petrograd City Soviet, for example, promoted 793 women to permanent work and 4,660 to occasional work in government agencies. An appreciable number of women probationers worked in hygienic and cultural institutions. Probationers also had a big share in the work of the newly established Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (now Ministry of State Control), which held a special place as an agency capable of enforcing people's control over the government agencies and enabling large sections of the working population to take part in government, beginning with the simplest forms of investigation and inspection. We wanted two-thirds of the representatives of the population participating in all kinds of inspection or investigation within the state control agencies to be women.

As the Soviet state developed and strengthened women played a more and more important role in government and public affairs.

By the end of the first decade of Soviet rule, the number of women Deputies to the city and town Soviets was 21,221, to the *volost* (rural district) Soviets, 45,741 and to the village Soviets, 146,251. The radical changes brought later by industrialization under five-year plans, as well as collective farming

drew more and more women into socially useful work. The cultural revolution, a concomitant of the far-reaching changes in the social and economic spheres, gave millions of women the knowledge and skills necessary for fruitful work in the leading organs of government. Thanks to the great economic and cultural changes in the Caucasian and Central Asian Soviet Republics, Azerbaijanians, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Kazakhs and women of other nationalities, who formerly had been disfranchised and reduced to the position of pariahs, and in some cases had been unable to go beyond the threshold of their homes without permission from their husbands, came to take an active part in the work of the democratic Soviet state.

In 1936 we adopted a new Constitution, which reflected all the changes that had occurred under the Soviet system in the economic, cultural and social spheres. The 1936 Constitution marked a further democratization of the Soviet system. It introduced universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot, thereby providing even greater opportunities for the Soviet women's direct participation in government at all levels.

Article 137 of the Constitution says: "Women have the right to elect and be elected on equal terms with men." Our state not only proclaimed this right but made it possible for women to exercise it. The Constitutions of the U.S.S.R. and the Union republics, as well as the Soviet electoral laws, give women a real opportunity to both elect and be elected to all organs of government in the Union republic in question or the Soviet Union as a whole.

Women have taken an active part in electoral campaigns ever since Soviet rule was established. They participate in nominating and discussing candidates and in canvassing for the candidates, who are nominated by industrial enterprises, voluntary societies, cooperative associations and other public organizations . Along with men they inform the population on

the electoral procedure, the political structure of the U.S.S.R., the rights which Soviet citizens enjoy and the forms in which those rights are exercised, and so on. A great many women are elected to district, regional, republican and all-Union electoral commissions. These commissions see to it that the lists of the electorate are drawn up properly, that they are complete, that the rules of electoral procedure are strictly adhered to, and so on.

The percentage of women members of commissions for elections to the local Soviets is great. The absolute figure of women participating in their work is quite impressive too. In 1939, when elections to the local Soviets were held under the new electoral system for the first time, as many as 2,154,668 members, or 34.1 per cent of the total membership of the electoral commissions, were women. In 1955 the respective figures for the same territorial, regional, city, district and village electoral commissions were 2,899,325 and 41.3, which meant a 7.2 per cent increase in the women's share. The women's share in the commissions for elections to the Supreme Soviets of the Union republics and the Soviet Union is nearly as great.

Let us see how women exercise their right to elect.

At the elections they show a high degree of political activity. They fully use their political rights to elect the best candidates.

We have no statistics enabling us to establish the exact percentage of men and women, taken separately, in the elections. Nor is that necessary, for generally as many as 99 per cent of the total electorate go to the polls. This percentage is also indicative of the activity of women voters.

Women not only elect but are elected to all organs of state power. Among women nominees there are industrial workers, collective farmers, teachers, physicians, engineers, agronomists, public workers and others. Those are mostly women who

have proved themselves to be efficient in public affairs and, moreover, have shown by their work—intellectual or physical—that they can approach the solution of current problems in terms of the state as a whole.

A large number of women have been Deputies to local or Supreme Soviets since Soviet rule was established. Let us consider the numbers of women who were elected to local Soviets under the all-Union or Union-Republic Constitutions. In 1939 their number was 422,362, in 1947-48, about 482,000 and in 1950, 518,000. In the local Soviets of the latest convocation there are 540,314 women Deputies. The percentage of women has risen from 33.1 to 35.2 during the same period. The total number of women elected to local Soviets since 1939 exceeds 2,500,000. Even allowing for the fact that part of the women Deputies were elected twice or perhaps three times, the total of women participating in our country's political affairs is striking. It turns out that half a million women are constantly engaged as Deputies in the work of the organs of local government—in the village, district, city and regional Soviets.

Many women who have proved their great ability in responsible public offices and shown by their work in the social field and in the industries that they are equal to the task of promoting the interests of people and country, are elected to the Supreme Soviets of Union republics or the U.S.S.R.

The Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. now in office includes 348 women Deputies, which constitutes 25.8 per cent of the total membership of that supreme organ of state power. Of these 348 Deputies, 170 are members of the Soviet of the Union and 178, members of the Soviet of Nationalities, which is the other chamber of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. In the Soviet of Nationalities, which is responsible for safeguarding the special interests of each nationality of the Soviet Union, including the nationalities of the once backward

Eastern republics of the Union, the percentage of women Deputies is 27.9, that is, more than in the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. as a whole.

This feature is even more marked in the case of the various Soviet republics. The Tajik Republic has 25 members in the Soviet of Nationalities, of whom nine are women. Of the 300 Deputies to the Tajik Supreme Soviet, 99 are women. One of the Deputy Chairmen of the Soviet of Nationalities of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet is an Uzbek woman, Masuda Sultanova, assistant professor at the Central Asian State University, and one of the Deputy Chairmen of the Soviet of the Union is a Kazakh woman, Zaura Omarova, an engineer at the Mine Designing Institute in Karaganda Region.

It is noteworthy that women from those territories of the former Russian Empire where they were oppressed and downtrodden as nowhere else hold some of the highest elective government offices. This is a result of the social emancipation and complete social equality combined with the equality of all nationalities and equality of men and women in the political sphere.

Four of the 15 members of the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet are women. They are Varvara Balakina, Director of the Institute of Orthopaedic and Traumatological Research and a Deputy from Leningrad, Vera Boyanova, a Buryat, who is Minister of Public Health of the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Republic, and others.

The women elected to local or supreme organs of government play a most active part in their work. One form in which the Soviets carry out their tasks are the commissions they set up for health protection, education, municipal development, trade, finances, etc. The women on those commissions study the field of work entrusted to the commission in question, inspect various institutions, check up their work in general and the work of their heads in particular. The results

of their study and inspection are discussed at plenary meetings or at meetings of the Executive Commitee of the Soviet in question and proposals for improvement put forward. Many important decisions have been initiated by women. Great numbers of women in town and country have taken part in preparing and discussing many government measures and draft laws of prime importance.

Women Deputies take part in the work of the permanent Mandate, Budget, Legislative Propositions, and Foreign Affairs commissions of both chambers of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet. One of the rapporteurs to this seminar, Nina Popova, is a member of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Soviet of the Union, Tatyana Zuyeva, another rapporteur, is a member of the Commission for Legislative Propositions of the Soviet of the Union. Kuluipa Konduchalova, Foreign Minister of the Kirghiz Republic and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Kirghizia, is on the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Soviet of Nationalities.

A distinguishing feature of the Deputies' work is their constant touch with their electorate. They meet their electors at regular intervals, specific days and hours being set apart for reception and interviews. The Deputies hear statements, complaints and requests from electors bearing on a great variety of problems, and take action on them. They account periodically for their work at meetings of the electorate and lend an attentive ear to the criticisms and suggestions made. In his account a Deputy deals not only with his own work but with the work of the commission of which he is a member, and also with the activity of the Soviet in question. This enables him to know the views of the electorate on specific problems of the Soviet's work and to submit them, along with his conclusions, to a meeting of the Executive Committee or to a plenary meeting of the Soviet. It stands to reason that every Deputy—man or woman—may state his views on any

matter, criticize the work of the government agencies or those heading them, submit proposals, suggest the inclusion in the agenda of questions which he thinks need attention, and so on.

Since women have absolutely equal rights with men and since there is no discrimination, the work of women Deputies in the local or Supreme Soviets does not differ in any way from the corresponding work of men. They discuss the measures to be taken next by local or central organs of government, criticize, amend or correct various draft decisions or laws, state their opinion on the foreign or home policy of the Soviet Government, or put forward such proposals as they see fit.

Here is an example from the work of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, which I am familiar with.

The Session of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, which was held last July, passed a new law on pensions, which was welcomed throughout the country. Among the Deputies who took the floor to discuss N. A. Bulganin's report on the draft law were nine women. As usual, they touched on the whole range of matters bearing on the draft law. Some of them brought up questions affecting above all the interests of women and children. Zofie Bartuškene, a Deputy from Lithuania, stressed the necessity of giving pensions to children who are under age, irrespective of whether they actually depended on their father or mother before he or she died. This implies that if a parent refused to maintain his child, the child would incur no material loss when being allocated a pension after the parent's death. Bartuškene also called attention to the problem of pensioning those who became disabled in their early youth, before they could be employed. Marianna Chudinova, a Deputy from Yakutia where winter lasts eight to nine months, called for additional privileges for the population of the Far North. She also submitted proposals designed to improve the draft law, which did not provide for the procedure of allocat-

ing pensions to students who become disabled while studying and who have no one to keep them. Jeva Paldina, a Deputy from Latvia and Minister of Social Security of the Latvian Republic, sharply criticized certain agencies which failed to create conditions for the work of departments of social security and their institutions, which sometimes were assigned inadequate premises, etc.

I do not propose to deal here with the point of the matter discussed at the session, on which these and other speeches by women Deputies centred; I would like to give an idea of the nature of those speeches, of the ideas which guided the speakers, and to show that they brought up problems of state significance in a concrete and business-like form. As regards the decision taken on pensions, Nonna Muravyova, Minister of Social Security of the Russian Federation, deals with it in her report to this seminar.

The session also adopted an Appeal by the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. to the Parliaments of Other Countries Concerning Disarmament. This matter was suggested for discussion by a group of Deputies, which included women.

The July session of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet was an example of the way in which women take part in the discussion of political and state tasks and in government.

My description of the women's work in the supreme elected bodies would be incomplete unless I mentioned the Supreme Soviets of the Union republics.

In the largest Union Republic—the Russian Federation—269 out of a total of 796 members, or 34 per cent, are women. Two women are Deputy Chairmen of the R.S.F.S.R. Supreme Soviet and another two, of its Presidium.

This state of affairs is typical of the smallest Union republics, for example, the Moldavian S.S.R. The share of women in the political and public affairs of that republic and in its government can be seen from the fact that women members

of the Moldavian Supreme Soviet account for 36 per cent of the total.

Nearly one-third of the Deputies to the Supreme Soviets of the Baltic, Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics are women.

Apart from the women participating in political affairs and in the work of elected bodies as Deputies to local or Supreme Soviets, a great many women hold various government or administrative offices, including the topmost.

In the very first Soviet Government the Minister (then called People's Commissar) of Social Maintenance was a woman—Alexandra Kolontai, a prominent public figure and stateswoman. Later on she headed for many years our diplomatic missions in Norway, Mexico and Sweden. In the Ministry of Education there were many women in charge of departments from the outset. Among them mention should be made of Nadezhda Krupskaya, an outstanding builder of the Soviet state, a prominent theoretician and organizer of public education. Her work was not restricted to education, for she was a member of the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet.

Anna Kurskaya was entrusted with eliminating illiteracy, which in the twenties was a special field of government work. Women also headed other branches of the Ministry of Education, Public Health, etc. Many stateswomen have come to the fore during the last decade. Of all the Deputy Chairmen of Councils of Ministers, Ministers and Deputy Ministers of the U.S.S.R. and the Governments of the Soviet republics, 103 are women, including four Deputy Chairmen of Councils of Ministers, 25 Ministers (the Minister of Public Health of the U.S.S.R among them) and 74 Deputy Ministers. I do not mention women who hold government offices in the Autonomous republics. Among the rapporteurs to this seminar, too, there are women engaged in important work in those fields: Maria Kovrigina, Minister of Public Health of the U. S. S. R., Tatyana

Zuyeva, Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation, Lyudmila Dubrovina, Deputy Minister of Education of the Russian Federation, and Nonna Muravyova, Minister of Social Security of the Russian Federation.

Many women have come to head ministries of finances, the fishing industry, etc., Rozalia Zemlyachka, a prominent Soviet public figure, was a Deputy Minister of Railways of the U.S.S.R., then a leading executive in the Ministry of State Control of the U.S.S.R. and lastly a Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. The present Minister of Finances of Armenia is Larissa Stepanyan, and another woman, Tamara Khetagurova, heads the Ministry of Finances of the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic. In the Tajik Republic a woman—Khamra Tayirova—is in charge of the Ministry of Town and Village Construction and another woman—Munawwar Kasimova—heads the Ministry of the Foodstuffs Industry. In Latvia the Ministry of Justice is headed by a woman—Emilia Veinberg and a Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers is also a woman—Alisa Vindedz.

In the Russian Federation the number of women who work as Ministers, Deputy Ministers, heads of department, or other executives, including the elective chairmen and secretaries of regional, city and village Executive Committees of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies, amounts to a total of 4,534.

In Byelorussia a woman holds the office of Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, another two women are Ministers, and six women are Deputy Ministers.

The situation is similar in the other Soviet republics.

It will be seen from the foregoing that considerable numbers of women have risen to the position of Ministers, Deputy Ministers, heads of department of Union or Union-Republic Ministries or heads of other important departments responsible in great measure for the economic and cultural advancement of the Soviet Union. They enjoy great popularity and authority, and are supported in their work and the measures they initiate by both women and men.

I shall not dwell in this report on women's participation in the management and organization of our economy, since the women's role in the economic sphere is the subject of another report.

It is necessary to mention the place which women hold in the administration of justice. Women are entitled as much as men to hear cases in court and take decisions on them. Like the men, they are elected by direct and equal suffrage with secret ballot to the offices of judges or people's assessors. About half the people's judges are women. As many as 234,000 women take part in court trials as people's assessors.

Along with work in the Soviets, which are political organizations, women are doing a great deal in the numerous co-operative organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, sports societies, etc.

The women's share in trade-union activities is attested by the fact that they constitute 42.8 per cent of the membership of factory trade-union committees, 39.3 per cent of the membership of the Central Committees of trade unions and 32.3 per cent of that of the All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions.

* * *

It will be seen that Soviet women take an active part in political affairs and in government. Of course, we do not imagine that we have done everything in this respect. In our country, too, there are people who are still under the sway of outdated notions regarding women. We are fighting those notions, and the women's own social activities provide sufficient evidence against all prejudice.

The further development of all forms of socialist democracy, which is characteristic of life in the Soviet Union today,

is certain to bring more women into our political affairs and government. This will be largely facilitated by the measures which are being taken in the U.S.S.R. to raise standards of living. To release women as much as possible from household chores, care of children, and so on, we provide them with greater facilities and new housing, improve trade and the municipal services and expand the network of children's institutions. Combined with the existing legal and social guarantees, these measures will make for an increasing participation of women throughout the Soviet Union in political and cultural affairs and in government.

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А. М. ПАНКРАТОВА

СОВЕТСКИЕ ЖЕНЩИНЫ
ИМЕЮТ РАВНЫЕ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРАВА
С МУЖЧИНАМИ
И АКТИВНО УЧАСТВУЮТ
В УПРАВЛЕНИИ ГОСУДАРСТВОМ