

# Radical and Utopian or Partnership between Men and Women?

Austrian Trade Union Women, Autonomous Feminists and Labour Related Concerns, 1970s–1980s

*Abstract:* This contribution explores the interplay between labour and feminist activism in Austria during the 1970s and 1980s. Focusing on the often overlooked nexus of the women's liberation movement and the trade union movement, the analysis looks into the forms of organisation and protest used by women activists from various political affiliations on the left, including social democrats, communists and emerging alternative and green groups. These protests included the struggle for reproductive rights, conflicting ideas on the inclusion of domestic labour into labour activism, the significance of partnership as an activist concept, and the challenges of joint actions. The material is analysed using a combined source-critical and theory-driven approach, employing hermeneutic methods to reveal specific debates and the complex dynamics of cooperation and distinction in both labour and feminist activism. The study thus shows that the activism of women organised in communist, alternative (radical) left and socialist trade union contexts was part of the activist cycle of feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s.

*Keywords:* reproductive rights, labour movement, feminism, women's work, unpaid work, Austria, trade unionism

*“Denn die moderne Frau bringt wohlhabgewogene Weiblichkeit im Metallberufe und Menschlichkeit ins Parlament, mottet ihre Kochbücher ein und kocht tiefgekühlt, verhütet pillengeknickt das Schlimmste, verantwortet die seelischen Mißbildungen ihrer Kinder, nimmt Ausbeu-*

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Veronika Helfert, Department of Gender Studies, Department of History, Central European University, Quellenstraße 51, 1100 Wien, Österreich; [helfertv@ceu.edu](mailto:helfertv@ceu.edu)

*tung partnerschaftlich-pflichtbewußt auf sich und trottet solidarisch heim, wenn sich die Krise ihrer, statt der Fließbänder und Schreibmaschinen bemächtigt.”<sup>1</sup>*

In 1979, the Austrian feminist magazine *AUF* published an eloquent reckoning with the impositions of the patriarchal and capitalist system under the title “Withheld Speech on May Day”. In this article, the authors accused those involved in the Austrian labour movement – mainly the Socialist Party (Sozialistische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ) and the Trade Union Federation (Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund, ÖGB) – of ignoring the specific exploitation of women during Labour Day protests. In the age of sexual revolution and emancipatory achievements, the text stressed, women were the casualties of job loss due to the economic crisis and continued to bear the double burden of paid and unpaid work – only that they now did so under the name of partnership and equality. This example of a confrontation of the women’s liberation movement with the labour movement allows a glimpse into the previously underestimated nexus of the two social movements, which were of central importance for left-wing politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

Beginning in the late 1960s, a new “protest cycle”<sup>2</sup> of women’s activism in the industrialised western countries became evident: the women’s liberation movement (*Frauenbefreiungsbewegung*) – also known as the autonomous women’s movement (*Autonome Frauenbewegung*). Likewise, in Austria, the women’s liberation movement arose in the early 1970s through publications, the founding of associations and campaigns. While struggles for women’s equal rights or against discrimination in the public sphere or in the workplace were by no means new,<sup>3</sup> feminist activists of

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- 1 “Because the modern woman brings well-balanced femininity in the metal profession and humanity to parliament, puts her cookbooks in the drawer and cooks frozen food, prevents the worst while she is depressed by the pill, is responsible for the mental deformities of her children, accepts exploitation as a partner with a sense of duty and trots along in solidarity when the crisis seizes her instead of the assembly lines and typewriters.” Hanna & Ursula, Zurückgehaltene Rede zum 1. Mai 1979, in: *AUF* 19 (June 1979), 25. All translations from German to English are by the author.
- 2 Kristina Schulz, A Success without Impact? Case Studies from the Women’s Liberation Movements in Europe, in: Kristina Schulz (ed.), *The Women’s Liberation Movement. Impacts and Outcomes*, New York/Oxford 2017, 1–14, 6.
- 3 Criticism of the “wave model” of feminism/women’s movements has been formulated and published for 30 years: Susan Archer Mann/Douglas J. Huffman, The Decentring of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave, in: *Science & Society* 69/1 (2005), 56–91, 57 f.

this wave aimed to organise outside of political parties and their organisations, often used conspicuous forms of protest, and promoted politics rooted in private lives and personal experiences.<sup>4</sup> Autonomous women used their intimate concerns and bodily desires as tools for radical demands for self-liberation, criticism of male dominance and the “power relations close to hand”.<sup>5</sup> It was a way to explore and denounce “the general crisis in the web of relationships in our society”,<sup>6</sup> as a writer in the Austrian feminist journal *an.schläge* put it in 1984.

When the autonomous feminist groups formed in Austria, a country that the editorial team of the journal *Rotstrumpf*<sup>7</sup> felt was one of the “most pronounced traditional and hierarchical societies in Europe”,<sup>8</sup> certain women’s organisations within the parties of the labour movement had already been (re-)founded after the Second World War. The organisations of interest for this contribution are the Women’s Department of the Austrian Trade Union Federation, women organised in the communist trade union faction Gewerkschaftlicher Linksblock (GLB) and later, the trade union faction Gewerkschaftliche Einheit (GE), which emerged in 1971 from the split of the GLB after the Prague Spring in 1968, and the communist women’s organisation Bund Demokratischer Frauen (BDFÖ).

The body of research literature on each of these organisations varies greatly in scope, although there are some similarities. As Stefanie Mayer noted in her 2018 study on the Viennese feminist scene and anti-racist politics, there is an extensive corpus of historiographical and memorial publications from within the movement itself, while academic debate is less common.<sup>9</sup> The same can be said of the women

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4 See Schulz, *Success*, 2017, 2.

5 Quinn Slobodian, *Guerilla Mothers and Distant Doubles*. West German Feminists Look at China and Vietnam, 1968–1982, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 12 (2015), 39–65, 42.

6 N. N., *Wer fürchtet sich noch vorm Feminismus?*, in: *an.schläge* 2/4 (1984), 16.

7 Although the New York group of the same name, Redstockings, is not mentioned, it is possible that the name is a reference, although the same pun could have been used without a direct reference, since *Blue Stocking/Blaustrumpf* is a (derogative) term for nineteenth and early twentieth century intellectual women and their struggle for equal rights, and red is the colour of radical and/or socialist movements. See the manifesto of the US group: Redstockings, “Redstockings Manifesto”; New York, New York; July 7, 1969, in: Penny A. Weiss (ed.), *Feminist Manifestos. A Global Documentary Reader*, New York 2018, 218–220.

8 N. N., *Grundsätzliche Bemerkungen zur Frauenbewegung*, in: *Rotstrumpf. texte zur befreiung der frau* 1 (August 1972), 4.

9 Stefanie Mayer, *Politik der Differenzen. Ethnisierung, Rassismen und Antirassismus im weißen feministischen Aktivismus in Wien*, Opladen et al. 2018, 17. Mayer gives an excellent critical overview of the scholarship on the Austrian autonomous women’s movement (p. 16–41). Also useful for this article were Brigitte Geiger/Hanna Hacker, *Donauwalzer – Damenwahl. Frauenbewegte Zusammenhänge in Österreich*, Vienna 1989; Hanna Hacker, “Mit uns ist kein Staat zu machen!” Politische Entwürfe der autonomen Frauenbewegung, in: *Blaustrumpf ahoi* (ed.), “Sie meinen es politisch!” 100 Jahre Frauenwahlrecht in Österreich. Geschlechterdemokratie als gesellschaftspolitische Herausforderung, Vienna 2019, 249–263; Maria Mesner, *Viele und Verschiedene. Die “neue” Frauenbewegung*

within the Austrian trade unions after 1945.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to this, literature on the BDFÖ and communist trade union women and trade unionists from the “(radical) left”<sup>11</sup> is harder to come by.<sup>12</sup> While the existing literature on the Austrian women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s pays much attention to organisational matters and the issues that were emphasised by the women’s liberation movement (such as sexual and bodily self-determination),<sup>13</sup> its dealings with labour issues has remained underexplored.

This contribution is interested in the organisational and protest forms women activists of the (radical) left used to further labour related issues: where women of several political camps (mainly social democrats, communists, and activists from the emerging alternative, green, left) met to campaign; the consequence of members belonging to multiple activist groups; and the mutual influences of labour and/or feminist women in the specific Austrian corporate state with its strong reliance on the institutions of social partnership to transmit politics and debates between government and interest groups. The five sections of the article explore different aspects of the intersection of labour and women’s rights activism: the multiple engagements of labour women (section 1), the struggle for reproductive rights (section 2), con-

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und die Frauentage, in: Heidi Niederkofler/Maria Mesner/Johanna Zechner (eds.), *Frauentag! Erfindung und Karriere einer Tradition*, Vienna 2011, 171–195; and *Frauenkollektiv RitClique, Zündende Funken. Wiener Feministinnen der 70er Jahre*, Vienna 2018.

- 10 See, for example, Renate Csörgits/Sylvia Ledwinka, 1945 bis 2005. 60 Jahre Frauenpolitik – 60 Jahre ÖGB-Frauen, in: *Das Jahr der Jubiläen. 60 Jahre ÖGB, 60 Jahre Zweite Republik, 50 Jahre Staatsvertrag. Jahrbuch des ÖGB 2005*, Vienna 2005; Martina Fassler, *Ohne uns geht nichts! 60 Jahre ÖGB-Frauen*, Vienna 2005; Gerlinde Leitgeb, *Neues schaffen. Er kämpftes weiterentwickeln! 50 Jahre ÖGB-Frauen*, Vienna 1995; Marliese Mendel/Peter Schissler (eds.), *Wir, die Frauen der Produktionsgewerkschaft*, Vienna 2017. In addition to biographical studies such as Agnes Broessler, “Es hat sich alles mehr um’s Politische gehandelt!” Wilhelmine Moik. Ein Leben für die gewerkschaftliche Frauenpolitik, Vienna 2006, particular attention should be drawn to Sabine Blaschke, *Frauen in Gewerkschaften. Zur Situation in Österreich und Deutschland aus organisationssoziologischer Perspektive*, Munich et al. 2008.
- 11 I subsume under the term “(radical) left” activists from socialist, communist and other Marxist movements, who strive to change socio-economic conditions, including gender-relations, of capitalist societies by altering existing power structures. In turn, I use both the terms socialist and social democratic women for those activists who were members of the Socialist Party (from 1991 Social Democratic Party) or who belonged to one of its affiliated organisations.
- 12 On the history of the BDFÖ see Heidi Niederkofler, *Mehrheit verpflichtet. Frauenorganisationen der politischen Parteien in Österreich in der Nachkriegszeit*, Vienna 2009, 50–103.
- 13 German historiography is also concerned with the debate on the universalisation of the West German *white* women’s movement. See Sara Lennox, *Divided Feminism. Women, Racism and German National Identity*, in: *German Studies Review* 18/3 (1995), 481–502; and on Austria: Mayer, *Politik der Differenzen*, 2018. Ilse Lenz adds to this analysis her history of (sometimes contested) migrant women’s movements within the frame of the autonomous women’s movement in West Germany: Ilse Lenz, *Wer sich wo und wie erinnern wollte? Die Neuen Frauenbewegungen und soziale Ungleichheit nach Klasse, “Rasse” und Migration*, in: Angelika Schaser/Sylvia Schraut/Petra Steymans-Kurz (eds.), *Erinnern, vergessen, umdeuten? Europäische Frauenbewegungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 2019, 255–283.

flicting ideas on the inclusion of domestic labour into labour activism (section 3), the significance of partnership as an activist concept for trade union women (section 4), and the conflictive attempts of joint actions (section 5).

The basis of the analysis are minutes of meetings (such as the ÖGB Women's Congresses), archival materials and publications from different organisations and groups between the late 1960s and 1990. Starting with *Rotstrumpf* (1972–1981), “the first publication of the autonomous women's movement in Austria”<sup>14</sup> and published by activists of the Arbeitskreis “Emanzipation der Frau” (AK Emanzipation) emerging from the Junge Generation of the Austrian Socialist Party in 1970,<sup>15</sup> the following journals constitute the corpus of the analysis: *an.schläge* (1983–1990); *AUF. Eine Frauenzeitschrift* (1974–1990); *die alternative. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Gewerkschaftliche Einheit* (1971–1990); *die arbeit. Monatsschrift der Fraktion Gewerkschaftlicher Linksblock im ÖGB. Kommunisten, linke Sozialisten, Parteilose* (1968–1990); *neue plattform. Katholische Arbeiterjugend (Wien)* (1979–1990); and *Stimme der Frau* (1970–1990). Selected articles via keyword search of the journals *Solidarität, Arbeit und Wirtschaft, Frauenarbeit in der Gewerkschaft*; and *MOZ. Grün-Alternative Monatszeitung* complement the corpus. The selection of sources was designed to cover the widest possible range of feminist and (left-wing) trade union groups. In order to be able to analyse debates and trace activist practices, organisational sources such as meeting minutes were also included. The analysis of the material was guided by an inclusive understanding of labour activism of women on the (radical) left, interpreting the scale and forms of activism, the way of organising, and the demands put forward by women, going beyond the “classical forms” of labour organising (i.e. strikes and trade union activities).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the material was scrutinised with a combined source-critical and theory-driven analysis, using hermeneutical methods that combine the analyses of argumentation patterns with the close reading of selected texts and speeches to reveal not only specific debates, but also changes over time.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Mesner, *Viele und Verschiedene*, 2011, 180.

15 Geiger/Hacker, *Donauwalzer*, 1989.

16 See Eloisa Betti/Leda Papastefanaki/Marica Tolomelli/Susan Zimmermann, Introduction. Thinking the History of Women's Activism into Global Labor History, in: Eloisa Betti/Leda Papastefanaki/Marica Tolomelli/Susan Zimmermann (eds.), *Women, Work, and Activism. Chapters of an Inclusive History of Labor in the Long Twentieth Century*, Budapest 2022, 1–25; and Alexandra Ghit/Veronika Helfert/Ivelina Masheva/Zhanna Popova/Jelena Tešija/Eszter Varsa/Susan Zimmermann, *Women and the Gendered Politics of Work in Central and Eastern Europe, and Internationally, in the Twentieth Century: Activism, Governance, and Scale*, in: *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 31/2 (2024), 227–240, 227–229.

17 See Martha C. Howell/Walter Prevenier, *Werkstatt des Historikers. Eine Einführung in die historischen Methoden*, Cologne et al. 2004, 76–86; Anne von Kwaschik/Mario Wimmer, *Das Werkzeug des Historikers. Ein Vorwort*, in: Anne von Kwaschik/Mario Wimmer (eds.), *Von der Arbeit des His-*

## 1. Multiple belongings in a changing world: women activists in the 1970s and 1980s

Research in the last two decades on the relationship between the women's liberation movement and working-class women in the USA, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, France or Italy has shown the impact feminism had on "women's experience and sense of self",<sup>18</sup> the alliances labour and feminist women forged to further (working) women's causes and their respective influences.<sup>19</sup> These alliances could be joint campaigns and events, or actions such as a letter of protest to the Californian State Attorney against the arrest of Angela Davis, as sent by the Lower Austrian ÖGB Women's Committee.<sup>20</sup> In other instances, the emergence of feminist women's groups pushed women activists organised in parties or trade unions to react, by stressing their own, separate activism, as Maria Mesner has shown in the case of Austria.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, even though feminist movements have been perceived by many as detached from the everyday lives of working-class women, some authors, such as Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, argue that a "vernacular ideology of gender equality"<sup>22</sup> became prevalent among many women in the 1970s. These scholars stress that feminist ideas of that epoch were not merely a middle-class issue, circulating in "academic and student women's groups",<sup>23</sup> but sometimes, and in some places, actually took form as "trade union feminism"<sup>24</sup> such as in parts of Italy or in France, incorporating tactics of organising and demands from the women's liberation movement as the "Wages for Housework" campaign exemplifies.<sup>25</sup>

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torikers. Ein Wörterbuch zu Theorie und Praxis der Geschichtswissenschaft, Berlin 2010, 9–19; Philipp Sarasin, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Diskursanalyse*, Frankfurt am Main 2003, 10–31.

18 Jonathan Moss, *Women, Workplace Protest and Political Identity in England, 1968–85*, Manchester 2019, 7.

19 See Maud Anne Bracke, *Labour, Gender and Deindustrialisation. Women Workers at Fiat (Italy, 1970s–1980s)*, in: *Contemporary European History* 28/4 (2019), 484–499; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement. Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*, Princeton 2005, 180–222; Lisa Greenwald, *Daughters of 1968. Redefining French Feminism and Women's Liberation Movement*, Lincoln 2018, 153–182; Anna Frisone, *Trade Union Feminism in Lyon. Commissions-femmes as Sites of Resistance and Well-being in the 1970s*, in: Eloisa Betti et al. (eds.), *Women, 2022*, 277–297.

20 See *Solidarität für Angela Davis*, in: *die arbeit. Organ der Fraktion der Gewerkschaftlichen Einheit* 25/12 (1971), 9.

21 See Mesner, *Viele und Verschiedene*, 2011.

22 Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite/Natalie Thomlinson, *Vernacular Discourses of Gender Equality in the Post-War British Working Class*, in: *Past & Present* 254/1 (2022), 277–313, 278.

23 Monika Mattes, *Ambivalente Aufbrüche. Frauen, Familie und Arbeitsmarkt zwischen Konjunktur und Krise*, in: Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte*, Göttingen 2008, 215–228, 215.

24 Frisone, *Trade Union Feminism*, 2022, 277.

25 See Bracke, *Labour*, 2019, 489–491.

The sometimes-multiple belongings (or “multiple engagements”<sup>26</sup>) of women activists of the period informed their political ideas and shaped the landscape of both the labour and the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, as Chiara Bonfiglioli has stressed in her comparative study, the 1970s were “characterized by the simultaneous overlap and conflict between different generational paradigms of women’s and feminist activism”.<sup>27</sup> As this paper argues, the simultaneities of groups and the competing perspectives on labour related concerns and women’s issues resulted in complex dynamics of cooperation and distinction. Some contributions in feminist journals show that autonomous women grappled with trade unions, in particular the Trade Union Federation.<sup>28</sup> Feminist women from the Aktion Unabhängiger Frauen (AUF) considered forming trade union groups as a way to transform the patriarchal labour movement<sup>29</sup> and sent an open letter to ÖGB President Anton Benya, in which they criticised him for considering women and migrant workers as second-class employees.<sup>30</sup> They also called for a joint 1<sup>st</sup> of May demonstration together with Gewerkschaftliche Einheit and Marxist groups in 1974,<sup>31</sup> and mobilized for May Day demonstrations in general in the 1970s.<sup>32</sup>

The nexus of labour and women’s movements explored in this contribution is of particular importance in understanding a decade that has gained attention from scholars who aim to explain the longer developments of change in gender and labour relations in industrialised countries of the West.<sup>33</sup> The 1970s were marked by

26 Selin Çağatay/Mátyás Erdélyi/Alexandra Ghiț/Olga Gnydiuk/Veronika Helfert/Ivelina Masheva/Zhanna Popova/Jelena Tešija/Eszter Varsa/Susan Zimmermann, *Women’s Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond. Toward a Long-Term, Transregional, Integrative, and Critical Approach*, in: Çağatay/Erdélyi/Ghiț/Gnydiuk/Helfert/Masheva/Popova/Tešija/Varsa/Zimmermann (eds.), *Through the Prism of Gender and Work. Women’s Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Leiden 2024, 1–80, 37.

27 Chiara Bonfiglioli, *Communisms, Generations, and Waves. The Cases of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Cuba*, in: Anna Artwińska/Agnieszka Mrozik (eds.), *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*, New York 2020, 66–81, 66.

28 See among others: N. N., *unecht arbeitslos ...*, in: *Rotstrumpf 8* (March 1974), 10.

29 See AUF-Mitteilungen 14 ([1973]), 6.

30 See Aktion unabhängiger Frauen AUF, *Open letter to the ÖGB President Anton Benya*, in: AUF-Mitteilungen (4 January 1974), n.p.; Liesl (Textilarbeiterin), *Mode im Akkord. Ein Tag in der Kleiderfabrik*, in: AUF 2 (January 1975), 29–30; Gerti, *Frauen und Gewerkschaft*, in: AUF 11 (June 1977), 26–28; Christine Thorwartl, *Frau und Gewerkschaft*, in: AUF 21 (1979), 4–9; Brigitte R., *Warum ich trotz allem in der Gewerkschaft mitarbeite*, in: AUF 21 (1979), 10; Erica Fischer, *Teilzeit*, in: AUF 41 (1984), 24. On the topic of women migrant workers and trade union women see Veronika Helfert, *A “Special Category of Women” in Austria and Internationally. Migrant Women Workers, Trade Union Activists, and the Textile Industry, 1960s to 1980s*, in: Dirk Hoerder/Lukas Neissl (eds.), *Migrant Actors Worldwide. Capitalist Interests, State Regulations, and Left-Wing Strategies*, Leiden/Boston 2024 (in print).

31 1 May Mobilization Flyer, “AUF zum 1. Mai”, in: AUF-Mitteilungen (1974), n.p.

32 See, for instance, *Frauen-Info. Frauenzentrum Wien 68* (May 1979).

33 See Johanna Gehmacher/Maria Mesner, *Dis/Kontinuitäten. Geschlechterordnungen und Periodisierungen im langen 20. Jahrhundert*, in: *L’Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft 25/2* (2014), 87–101, 94–99.

a “bundle of changes in direction”<sup>34</sup> suggesting the decade was an epochal threshold, even when the nature and effects of the changes remain contested.<sup>35</sup> The shift in employment patterns of both men and women (shaped by deindustrialisation, growing unemployment and labour migration)<sup>36</sup> and economic crisis can be seen in the issues put forward by feminists and women labour activists alike: unemployment and work time reduction (35-hour workweek, part-time work), peace and disarmament, new technologies, vocational trainings for girls and women, and laws for gender equality in the family, workplace, and public life.

## 2. “As a trade unionist and as a colleague”: the fight for reproductive rights

The struggle for self-determined reproductive rights was a visible part of the new women’s liberation movement on a national and international level. While historian Hanna Hacker has emphasised that the new women’s movement groups were adamant to distinguish themselves from existing social and women’s movements,<sup>37</sup> the issue of abortion nonetheless brought activists from different backgrounds together. In fact, the option of a safe termination of a pregnancy, especially for women of the working-class, was a long-time demand of socialist women politicians in Austria and elsewhere; the issue of a reform of the criminal law was put on parliament and party agendas in the 1920s,<sup>38</sup> but lost its importance in the strongly compromise-oriented political culture of the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>39</sup> 1971 marked the point at which reform of the abortion paragraph, § 144, returned to the political agenda in Austria. Socialist and communist youth organisations – such as the AK Emanzipation in 1970 or the Arbeitskreis Emanzipation im Offensiv Links of the communist youth organisation Freie Österreichische Jugend – pushed for a reform. In the autumn of

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34 Konrad H. Jarausch, *Verkannter Strukturwandel. Die siebziger Jahre als Vorgeschichte der Probleme der Gegenwart*, in: Jarausch (ed.), Ende, 2008, 9–26, 12.

35 See Barbara Duden, *Kontinuität oder Epochenbruch? Zeitenwende oder geschichtliche Schwelle? Zur Zeitgeschichte der Integration der häuslichen Ökonomie von Frauen in die formelle Ökonomie*, in: *L’Homme. Z. F. G.* 25/2 (2014), 103–120, 107.

36 See Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor. Workers’ Movements and Globalization since 1870*, Cambridge 2003, 174–177.

37 See Hacker, “Mit uns ist kein Staat zu machen!”, 2019, 252.

38 See on the struggles of social democratic women on the regulations of abortion with their own party (*Fristenlösung* vs. *Indikationslösung*) the study of Karin Lehner, *Verpönte Eingriffe. Sozialdemokratische Reformbestrebungen zu den Abtreibungsbestimmungen in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Vienna 1989.

39 See Maria Mesner, *Frauensache? Zur Auseinandersetzung um den Schwangerschaftsabbruch in Österreich nach 1945*, Vienna 1994, 85–157.



1971, the Aktionskomitee zur Abschaffung des § 144, which was organised by members of the AK Emanzipation, launched a campaign for the definitive abolition of § 144 or, alternatively, for at least a penalty exemption if the abortion was performed within the first three months of a pregnancy (*Fristenlösung*).<sup>40</sup> Together with socialist women, including trade unionists, pressure built up to the point that the *Fristenlösung* was included in a bill that was finally passed under socialist Minister of Justice, Christian Broda, in 1974 following long negotiations.

It is most likely that the role of women trade unionists in Austria was significant for the efforts to reform the paragraph punishing abortions in the criminal code. A lively debate on the topic took place at the women's congress of the ÖGB in mid-September 1971<sup>41</sup> in the run-up to a symposium on family policy and family planning by the SPÖ women in early October.<sup>42</sup> Three motions were put forward, which were then reworked into a compromise proposal that was finally adopted unanimously by all delegates (including those from the Christian resp. Conservative Fraktion Christlicher Gewerkschafter, FCG, and the communist GE). Nevertheless, the compromise was criticised in the debate, as by Kitty Rosenberger (Socialist Fraktion Sozialistischer Gewerkschafter, FSG), who stated that § 144 “should actually be dropped” instead of only offering “wishy-washy relief”.<sup>43</sup> Grete Rehor, former first female minister in Austria (Social Affairs, 1966–1970) for the conservative Volkspartei (ÖVP) on the other hand, objected to the term abortion being mentioned in the resolution, even though she was aware of the hardship many women faced, as she asserted:

“If you ask me as a trade unionist and as a colleague [...] who has spoken with many hundreds of women on this issue [...] I would like to say: I can empathize with those women, what moves them – emotionally, mentally, as a woman, but also socially, whether married or single – when they are expecting another child and don't know how to cope with it materially [...]”<sup>44</sup>

However, although the fronts between trade unionists from different factions were hard, ultimately everyone agreed on the stipulation that women, “who are affected first and foremost, [...] must be given a full say” in reforming the text of the law “to reflect today's realities”.<sup>45</sup> Even if the resolution fell short in its radicalism, especially

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40 Ibid., 176–193.

41 See *Frauenarbeit in den Gewerkschaften. Bericht über das Jahr 1971*, Vienna 1971, 31.

42 See Mesner, *Frauensache?*, 1994, 192.

43 *Stenographisches Protokoll des 6. Frauenkongresses des ÖGB 1971*, Vienna 1971, 109–110.

44 Ibid., 119.

45 Antrag Nr. 67. Antrag des Landesfrauenausschusses Salzburg, “Reform des Paragraphen 144 – Strafgesetz”, in: *Protokoll 6. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1971*, 188.

regarding the demands of young women comrades, and harbours some vague language, its unanimous adoption, including by the delegates from the conservative trade union faction, certainly sent a strong signal to the leading political parties.<sup>46</sup>

Austrian trade union women were not the only voices to be heard on the topic.<sup>47</sup> Family planning (including birth control and the termination of pregnancies) was put on the agenda of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1970.<sup>48</sup> Although the ICFTU/ITS Committee on Women Workers' Questions first "hesitated" to adopt a position, since family planning was not perceived as "a purely trade union problem, but a human problem",<sup>49</sup> it agreed on the importance of the issue for working men and women and became more vocal in supporting women's rights to end unwanted pregnancies over the course of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>50</sup> The issue remained present in Austria as well. Young women trade unionists, who were particularly vocal, were organised within the trade union faction Gewerkschaftliche Einheit (i.e. Olga Makomaski or Leopoldine Heller), as well as communist members of works councils (i.e. Emmi Brichacek). They used their media outlets to mobilise for the issue, participated in demonstrations and public events, and sought to pressure the ÖGB women to further the cause.<sup>51</sup> Union women from the radical left called for easy access to abortion within the legal regulation and problematised cost issues and the fact that clinics were often geographically inaccessible to women in need.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, they raised awareness of the difficulties working women face when taking time off work

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46 See also the parliamentary speeches of SPÖ and ÖVP female trade union members of parliament, such as those of Maria Metzker, Nationalrat (National Council), 84<sup>th</sup> Session, 27 November 1973; Lona Murowatz and Marga Hubinek, Nationalrat 98<sup>th</sup> Session, 23 January 1974; or Rosa Heinz, Bundesrat (Federal Council), 328<sup>th</sup> Session, 31 January 1974.

47 I have not yet been able to establish the extent to which ICFTU discussions influenced Austrian trade union policy on the issue, but it can be assumed that ÖGB women, who had a representative on the ICFTU Women's Committee in Maria Metzker, were well informed about international developments.

48 On the role of women rights activists within the UN in connecting the discourse on family planning with women's rights and human rights see Maud Anne Bracke, *Women's Rights, Family Planning, and Population Control: The Emergence of Reproductive Rights in the United Nations (1960s–70s)*, in: *The International History Review* 44/4 (2022), 751–771.

49 IISH Amsterdam, ICFTU Collection, 1548. ICFTU/ITS Committee on Women Workers' Questions, 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, Brussels, 14–15 May 1970, Brussels, Appendix I. Statements made at the 21<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Geneva, 23 March–10 April 1970) by Marcelle Dehareng, Secretary of the ICFTU/ITS Committee on Women Workers' Questions, 3.

50 IISH Amsterdam, ICFTU Collection, boxes 1531–1593.

51 See, for instance, the GE-monthly *die alternative* (October 1971), 2, or (July/August 1974), 7; and the monthly of the communist faction GLB: *die arbeit* 26/4 (1972), 9; 26/5 (1972), 12; 27/5 (1973), 9; 27/7 (1973), 10; 27/12 (1973), 6, etc.

52 See Gisela Vosol-Streiter (GLB), in: *Stenographisches Protokoll des 8. Frauenkongresses des ÖGB 1979*, Vienna 1979, 123.

to undergo the procedure,<sup>53</sup> denounced the opposition to abortion as a gendered form of capitalist exploitation, forcing women to reproduce the labour force,<sup>54</sup> and passed motions to defend the reformed section on abortion in the criminal code in the late 1980s.<sup>55</sup>

Arguments articulated at the ÖGB women's conferences echoed those raised by women activists since the beginning of the twentieth century, citing the classism (*Klassencharakter*) of the existing regulation, health problems and social misery of women.<sup>56</sup> Yet the debate also reveals that demands, such as those around bodily autonomy and self-representation, which circulated in the women's liberation movement internationally and in Austria were adopted by trade union women. The struggle for a safe and non-punitive option for terminating pregnancy offered a short-term opportunity for activists of women's movements from different factions to agitate together with the autonomous women's movement. The activist and writer Ruth Aspöck, for example, recalls cooperation between party functionaries, labour women and autonomous feminists: posters were printed free of charge in the Communist Party's printing facility thanks to the efforts of Irma Schwager, surely the most prominent communist woman in post-1945 Austria, and flyers were distributed within the Austrian Trade Union Federation and the Socialist Party.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the Women's Congress of the Austrian Trade Union Federation could serve as a platform for representatives of the radical left to take a stand and possibly initiate more far-reaching changes that could spread through the ÖGB to the legislative institutions. Also, some young women trade unionists, who were politically socialised in the communist youth movement, cooperated on the issue of abortion rights with the women around AUF and the AK Emanzipation, such as Olga Makomaski, mentioned above, even though these alliances were not long lasting.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the extent of what was achievable was limited by the majority in the ÖGB, the socialist trade union women of the FSG. The efforts of radical trade unionists to abolish the more restrictive legal regulation were in vain.

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53 See Olga Makomaski, *Meinungen, Argumente, Stellungnahmen zur Abtreibungsfrage*, Vienna 1975.

54 See Leopoldine Heller (GE), in: *Stenographisches Protokoll des 7. Frauenkongresses des ÖGB 1975*, Vienna 1975, 55.

55 Antrag Nr. 171, in: *Stenographisches Protokoll des 10. Frauenkongresses des ÖGB 1987*, Vienna 1987, 239.

56 See Karin Lehner, *Verpönte Eingriffe. Sozialdemokratische Reformbestrebungen zu den Abtreibungsbestimmungen in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Vienna 1989.

57 See Frauenkollektiv RitClique, *Zündende Funken*, 2018, 60.

58 *Gegen den Strom*, Documentation in 3 Parts, DVD-PAL, 354 minutes (AUGE, 2013). Olga Makomaski, in Part 3, 01:27:30.

### 3. Two modes of patriarchal exploitation: housework and gainful employment

In a recently published recollection of some of the protagonists of the autonomous women's movement in Austria, reflection on gainful employment played only a minor role.<sup>59</sup> However, a reading of the feminist journals of the 1970s and 1980s shows that from the very beginning, inequality within the labour market and in professional life, educational opportunities, struggles for better working conditions and strike movements nationally and internationally, as well as women's multiple burdens due to family work, had their place alongside articles on feminist organising, body and sexuality politics, and international solidarity.<sup>60</sup>

The unpaid labour of women inside and outside the home was at the core of feminist criticism of the labour movement. The Wages for Housework movement ("Lohn für Hausarbeit") in the 1970s was an important, even if not uncontested part of that. At the beginning of the 1970s, feminist Marxists and social scientists, like Silvia Federici or Mariarosa Dellacosta, started a broad conversation about the economic role of care work.<sup>61</sup> They understood the shared experience of (unpaid) housework as the reason for political and economic struggles of women. Therefore, unpaid domestic work must be treated as any other labour. Thus, housework was proposed to be seen as a unionised labour relation, with the option to bargain payment and working conditions.<sup>62</sup> One author, writing in the magazine *AUF*, understood the Wages for Housework campaign even as the theoretical and practical basis for separate trade unionising for women.<sup>63</sup> (Socialist) Feminists in Austria picked up the topic, although its discussion was quite controversial,<sup>64</sup> fearing, for instance, that

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59 See Frauenkollektiv RitClique, *Zündende Funken*, 2018.

60 See, for example, the call for participation in a campaign against discrimination of women in the workplace, published in: *Rotstrumpf* 8 (March 1974), 8–9; or the articles: Frau – Lohn – Gewerkschaft, in: *Rotstrumpf* 35 (September 1980), 4–8; Erica Fischer, *Textverarbeitungsgeräte: EDV bringt Akkordarbeit ins Büro*, in: *AUF* 24 (June 1980), 19–20; issues on "Woman and the World of Work", in: *AUF* 32 (January 1982) and 33 (March 1982); Frigga Haug, *Zukunft der Frauenarbeit*, in: *AUF* 42/43 (May 1984), 31–36. The journal *an.schläge* even started its first issue with the topics of labour and reduction of working hours, see *an.schläge* 1/1 (1983).

61 Maud Anne Bracke, *Between the Transnational and the Local. Mapping the Trajectories and Contexts of the Wages for Housework Campaign in 1970s Italian Feminism*, in: *Women's History Review* 22/4 (2014), 625–642; Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework. A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77*, London 2018.

62 *Wages for Housework*. New York Wages for Housework Committee; New York; 1975, in: Weiss, *Feminist Manifestos*, 2018, 262. See also Ronald E. Day, *Value and the Unseen Producers. Wages for Housework in the Women's Movement in 1970s Italy and the Prosumers of Digital Capitalism*, in: *The Information Society* 31 (2015), 36–43; and Marina (Triest)/Erica, *Lohn für – Lohn gegen Hausarbeit*, in: *AUF* 2/6 (January 1976), 16–25.

63 See Gerti, *Frauen und Gewerkschaft*, 1977, 28.

64 See for example *Lohn für Hausarbeit*, in: *Frauen-Info* 52 (June 1977), 2–4; or letters of readers, printed by the *AUF* magazine in the numbers after the appearance of an article on the subject.

the women's position as the caretaker of the household and economic dependence on men would be hereby reinforced.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the autonomous women's movement, Austrian women trade unionists rarely discussed the Wages for Housework movement or the economic value of domestic work during this period.<sup>66</sup> One reason for this could have been a question of class: choosing to stay at home was not easily affordable to many working women. Given the increasing number of part-time jobs in the 1970s,<sup>67</sup> most trade unionists were also keen to preserve the right to full-time work for women. The lack of importance many ÖGB women gave to these topics prompted some women to organise within the workplace outside of the traditional trade union structures. In the pharmaceutical company Sandoz in Vienna a feminist group named Kritische Strickgruppe (Critical Knitting Group) picked up the Wages for Housework slogan and formulated a range of demands addressed to trade unions, their employer and the wider public alike, including paid care work (by men and women), bodily autonomy (*Selbstbestimmung*), the right to work less (arguing that long working hours prohibit a fulfilling sexual life), and menstruation as valid reason to take a sick day.<sup>68</sup> "We call for corporeality as opposed to objectivity",<sup>69</sup> was the summary of their politics. While it is not clear to what extent and in what kind of workplaces other autonomous women's groups existed, it can be assumed that this was not an isolated occurrence. In other countries, like France, these "groups-femmes d'entreprise" challenged the unique right of representation of trade unionists in companies and factories.<sup>70</sup>

As already indicated in the "Withheld Speech on May Day" quoted at the beginning of the article, autonomous women denounced the insufficient activities of the Trade Union Federation in the field of reproductive work. Under the slogan of "1<sup>st</sup> of May: Day of Women's Work: Have you pre-cooked lunch?" they argued in 1977 that trade unionists had completely failed to acknowledge women's unpaid labour at home,<sup>71</sup> alleging that the "private' problems of the reproduction sphere"<sup>72</sup> were

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65 See for instance Zur Diskussion. Müttergehalt, in: Rotstrumpf 12 (January 1975), 23–24; Emmi Brichatschek, Über das falsche Leitbild ..., in: Marxismus – Frau – Familie – Gesellschaft. Enquete der KPÖ, 22. November 1969, Protokoll, Vienna 1969, 50–51.

66 Except for the demand of recognition of the economic value of the work of housewives and mothers in a discussion on the reform of the family and marriage law, Stenographisches Protokoll des 5. Frauenkongresses des ÖGB 1967, Vienna 1967, 45.

67 Veronika Helfert, Part-Time Work. The Co-production of a Contested Employment Model for Women in Austria and Internationally, 1950s to 1980s, in: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe 31/2 (2023), 363–383.

68 Thorwartl, Frau und Gewerkschaft, 1979, 8.

69 Ibid.

70 See Frisone, Trade Union Feminism, 2022, 282; Suzy Roitman, Féministes! Luttes de femmes, luttes de classes, Paris 2022, 29–60.

71 Mobilization Flyer, Frauenkongress der autonomen Frauenbewegung, 14–15 May [1977].

72 Frauen in Österreich: Chancenlos?!, in: Rotstrumpf 26 (June 1978), 12–14, 13.

absent in the debates within the ÖGB. Furthermore, trade union women would neither demand “sharing housework and raising children among partners”<sup>73</sup> nor offer childcare facilities during trade union training, accusations that were certainly not altogether accurate. Around the same period, for instance, the trade union regional women’s committees launched initiatives such as the “Aktion Tagesmütter” (Daycare Campaign) to deal with the problem of childcare and offered supervision during works council’s educational courses, as a report from Upper Austria reveals.<sup>74</sup> The fact that measures like these were more widely undertaken beginning towards the end of the 1970s may nevertheless have been caused by increased pressure from feminists.

#### 4. Intimate debates: labour activists and the politics of partnership

In 1983, the delegates to the ÖGB Women’s Congress, together with the members of the ÖGB Women’s Department, did something they had not done since their foundation: they discussed and adopted a joint women’s programme that would integrate the overall socio-economic and workplace-related goals of all individual unions and trade union factions. The fact that a joint programme was drafted was the result of the changing presence of feminist groups and women’s issues in the public sphere since the 1970s. Organisations in the tradition of the proletarian women’s movement since the 1880s had come under increasing pressure to either distance themselves from or to cooperate with autonomous women.<sup>75</sup> Not only for the communist BDFÖ were the 1970s and early 1980s a watershed period, characterised by conflicts between the younger generation and older activists, triggered by a different understanding of the role of intimacy, bodily autonomy and violence alongside labour related and party political issues.<sup>76</sup> A different understanding of feminist politics, which Maria Mesner has described as a “sometimes rather admiring, sometimes rather distanced wonder”<sup>77</sup> on the side of socialist functionaries.

The task of building a joint programme was not easy. Even though there was a clear majority within the socialist faction of the ÖGB, it was in precisely the individual unions in which many women were organised (textile, public service, or pri-

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73 Erica Fischer, *Frauenbewegung zehn Jahre danach*, in: AUF 45 (December 1984), 7–9, 8.

74 *Frauenarbeit in den Gewerkschaften. Bericht über das Jahr 1978*, Vienna 1978, 46 f. and 72.

75 See Mesner, *Viele und Verschiedene*, 2011, 187–190.

76 See Alfred Klahr Gesellschaft, *Archive of the Austrian Communist Party, Collection Bund Demokratischer Frauen*, 7<sup>th</sup> Federal Congress of the BDFÖ, 16–17 May 1981, Linz. Assessment by the Regional Secretariat of Upper Austria.

77 Mesner, *Frauensache?*, 1994, 180.

vate employees) that delegates from FCG, GE and GLB made their presence felt. Gabrielle Traxler, the Women's Secretary of the ÖGB and member of the majority of the FSG, highlighted the "intensive work" that had been done to prepare the programme and revealed that there were three binders of motions and statements to be considered.<sup>78</sup> The cornerstones of the programme were politics addressing the trend of rising unemployment among women, the impact of new technologies on women's jobs, the demand of a general reduction of working hours, regulating part-time work, and the effects of the Equal Treatment Act passed in 1979 – a major success for trade union women as it abolished women's wage groups and established anti-discrimination legislation.

The insufficient representation of women and their causes on committees and in leading positions of the Trade Union Federation was another matter of concern. Two years before a quota requiring twenty-five percent women holding party positions and on lists of candidates in elections was introduced at the 1985 Socialist party congress,<sup>79</sup> the demand for a quota was "vehemently" voiced by "autonomous women's groups" at the ÖGB women's congress,<sup>80</sup> yet it was refused as a "radical and utopian"<sup>81</sup> proposal. In the words of Gabrielle Traxler:

"And while the majority of women organized in the ÖGB still live in patriarchally structured families and many only dream of partnership – some do not –, autonomous women often prefer to live alone rather than accept traditional family structures. Their demands are therefore not based on the wider social reality, but on their own desires [...]."<sup>82</sup>

At the core of her remarks were not only a difference in opinion on strategies and organisational principles, but also a political and gendered concept of private relations that separated feminists from "the majority" of working women and, consequently, trade union activists. Ursula Margulies (GE) defended autonomous women and their political agendas: the "distancing and disqualification of women who are willing to put radical demands and radical utopias into practice is damaging to the entire women's movement".<sup>83</sup> She rejected the implicit accusation that autonomous women were unaware of the hardships of women workers by refer-

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78 See Gabrielle Traxler, Programm der Frauenabteilung, in: Stenographisches Protokoll des 9. Frauenkongresses des ÖGB 1983, Vienna 1983, 98 f.

79 Katharina Hajek/Birgit Sauer, Von Krücken, Tabus und Seilschaften. Aushandlungen, Effekte und Grenzen von Geschlechterquoten in Parteien, in: Blaustrumpf ahoi (ed.), "Sie meinen es politisch!", 2019, 285–297, 287.

80 See Traxler, Programm, 1983, 106.

81 See Ursula Margulies, in: Protokoll. 9. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1983, 123.

82 Traxler, Programm, 1983, 106.

83 Margulies, in: Protokoll. 9. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1983, 122.

ring to her own activities as those of a working woman and as a member of a works council.<sup>84</sup>

Partnership and patriarchy were a central pair of opposites used in the discussion by Austrian women trade unionists not only to mark ideological affiliation, but also to talk about personal, labour, and trade union relations – in contrast, for example, to the debates of the ICFTU/ITS Committee on Women Workers' Questions, where the term 'partnership' was completely absent. Metalworker Unionist Irma Barl, for instance, stressed in 1979 that partnership "at home" was the base for partnership in the workplace.<sup>85</sup> In 1987, Gabrielle Traxler similarly lamented, "patriarchy instead of partnership is still deeply rooted in our society"<sup>86</sup> when "Partnership = Equal Rights, Shared Responsibility" was the motto of the trade union congress.<sup>87</sup> Many of the motions made by trade union fractions or individual unions at the women's congresses in the 1970s and 1980s were justified on the grounds of partnership or had partnership as their goal.<sup>88</sup> Partnership stands for the distinctive Austrian corporatism (*Sozialpartnerschaft*) and was heavily criticised by feminists and trade unionists from the communist or green-alternative camp.<sup>89</sup> In line with social democratic reform politics in many European countries,<sup>90</sup> SPÖ and trade union women, such as Johanna Dohnal or Franziska Fast, were crucial in the development and implementation of reforms to labour and family law,<sup>91</sup> thereby pursuing progressive politics within state institutions. Socialist politicians assured women trade unionists that "partnership between men and women is not utopian, but a very real goal", even when it "requires a lot of time and adaptation".<sup>92</sup>

Notwithstanding, partnership served as an organisational strategy that could be used to distinguish social democratic trade unionists from autonomous women and

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84 Ursula Margulies stated in an interview in 2013 that she "never was a feminist", although she recalls participating in numerous feminist demonstrations at the time. See *Gegen den Strom, Dokumentation*, 2013, Uschi Margulies, in Part 2, 01:31:00.

85 See Irma Barl, in: *Protokoll. 8. ÖGB-Frauenkongress*, 1979, 104–105.

86 *Tätigkeitsbericht der Frauensekretärin Gabrielle Traxler*, in: *Protokoll. 10. ÖGB-Frauenkongress*, 1987, 43.

87 The women's congress of the Trade Union of Chemical Workers even had their keynote lecture on "Partnership" with a motto of "partnership – a model for the future" in 1973. See *Frauenarbeit in den Gewerkschaften. Bericht über das Jahr 1973*, Vienna 1973, 33.

88 See Antrag Nr. 170, in: *Protokoll. 10. ÖGB-Frauenkongress*, 1987, 239.

89 See Nika M. Sommeregger, *Denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun – Frauen im ÖGB*, in: *MOZ. Grün-Alternative Monatszeitung* 29 (April 1988), 18–19; or the *Mobilization Flyer 1 May*, "Mit uns ist kein Staat zu machen", 1979.

90 Mathieu Fulla, *Socialists and Civil Servants. Introduction to Part II*, in: Mathieu Fulla/Marc Lazar (eds.), *European Socialists and the State in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Cham 2020, 121–127.

91 See Maria Mesner, *Die "Neugestaltung des Ehe- und Familienrechts". Re-Definitionspotentiale der Aufbau-Zeit*, in: *zeitgeschichte* 24/5–6 (1997), 186–227.

92 *Frauenarbeit in den Gewerkschaften. Bericht über das Jahr 1975*, Vienna 1975, 39.



to reassure them in their own position. With a generally very low percentage of trade union functionaries being women,<sup>93</sup> they were dependent on “integration and cooperation with men”<sup>94</sup> to push through their demands and to avoid being “identified with extreme feminism also within the trade unions”<sup>95</sup>. Therefore, the debate can also be understood as an argument about what standpoints on women’s issues and organisational strategies should look like. While – often under the term of solidarity – joint organising with men was characteristic of SPÖ women’s activism, autonomous women and trade unionists from the radical left have criticised both the notion of partnership and of equality, as they would imply voluntary collaboration in one’s own exploitation in labour relations, the state, and the family.<sup>96</sup>

## 5. Marching together apart: cooperation and conflicts

In the 1980s, trade union women networked with women from the autonomous and other women’s movements on several occasions, not only at events on International Women’s Day on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. Both sides stood to profit from this alliance, as the German journalist Claudia Pinl argued in a book about the “workers patriarchy” (*Arbeitnehmerpatriarchat*), published in 1977.<sup>97</sup> Some feminists aimed to participate in international (and national) congresses, to raise issues relating to women’s labour<sup>98</sup> and, in particular, discussed cooperation with the trade union faction Gewerkschaftliche Einheit.<sup>99</sup> This also applied to individual communist and social democratic trade union women. One notable occasion was the *Frauensommeruniversität* (Women’s Summer University in Austria), an educational week with feminist content organised by women, for women, at which labour was often a topic.<sup>100</sup> Anita Lerchner, a former textile worker and head of the women’s department of the Austrian Trade Union Federation in Tyrol, chaired, for example, a working group at one of these summer universities in the province’s capital, Innsbruck. Although

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93 See Sabine Blaschke, *Frauen in Gewerkschaften. Zur Situation in Österreich und Deutschland aus organisationssoziologischer Perspektive*, Munich/Mering 2008, 128–162.

94 Traxler, *Programm*, 1983, 106.

95 Gabrielle Traxler, *Zaungäste*, in: *Solidarität* 638 (1983), 21–23, 23.

96 See Interview with State Secretary Johanna Dohnal, in: *Rotschneise* 34 (June 1980), 7–8; Ruth A., *Partnerschaft & I. Mai*, in: *AUF* 19 (June 1979), 26–27.

97 Christa Vogt, *Review of Claudia Pinl, “Das Arbeitnehmerpatriarchat. Die Frauenpolitik in den Gewerkschaften”*, in: *Rotstrumpf* 28 (December 1978), 18.

98 See announcement of date and participation of a Trade Union Congress in Oslo on the “Situation of Women in the World of Work”, in: *Frauen-Info* 52 (June 1977), 1.

99 See *Protokoll vom Plenum*, 8 November 1978, in: *Frauen-Info* 65 (December 1978).

100 See Hanna Hacker, “Anomie im Stau” – die sechste: “Kommentar zu Autonomie in Bewegung”, in: *L’Homme. Z. F. G.* 2/1 (1991), 120–121, 120.

sceptical at first, as she recalls, she perceived the exchange with the women as “enjoyable” and stressed the benefits of the debate: “In this way, the problems of working women and women who are just about to enter or wish to re-enter the workforce can also be solved together.”<sup>101</sup> Another event was International Women’s Day – for many years a collaborative, if often contested, effort.<sup>102</sup>

In contrast, the peace movement, which mobilised a considerable part of society across political and class affiliations and was sustained institutionally by members of trade unions, religious communities, and local networks,<sup>103</sup> sparked more severe conflict among communist and autonomous women. Autonomous women groups did not want to march together, as some of them condemned the BDFÖ’s peace campaign as hypocritical.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, in June 1987, forty-four women took up the opportunity to travel to the capital of the Soviet Union and to participate in a congress that was set out to continue the United Nations Decade for Women (1975–1985), organised by the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).<sup>105</sup> Apart from the members of the BDFÖ, many of the delegates were activists in the peace movement, the autonomous women’s movement or had other party and trade union backgrounds, spanning a broad spectrum of political affiliations including members of catholic associations and social democrats. A preparatory committee coordinated the delegation and tried to “clarify different points of view and consolidate common ground”.<sup>106</sup>

As the women’s liberation movement nationally and internationally transformed during the 1980s, it turned into “a multiplicity of networks, associations, institutions, and politicized milieus”, as historian Kristina Schulz observed.<sup>107</sup> Cross-party actions marked the decade in Austria as well. One of the joint labour-related con-

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101 Anita Lerchner, *Frau und Gewerkschaft*, in: Anni Bell/Eva Fleischer/Hildegard Knapp/Itta Tenschert (eds.), *Furien in Uni-Form? Dokumentation der 3. Österreichischen Frauensommeruniversität Innsbruck* 1986, Innsbruck 1987, 262.

102 The few minutes of the March 8 Action Committee in Vienna (*Aktionskomitee für den 8. März/Internationalen Frauentag*) in the 1980s, for example, preserved in the *Stichwort* archive (Vienna), provide insight into organisational and policy conflicts. See for example *Stichwort* Archive, Vienna, G 35, Letter by Aktionskomitee Frauentag, 23 March 1987; “8 March – International Women’s Day 1987: 500 Years of the Hexenhammer: Proposal for a More Offensive Leaflet”; Letter by Aktionskomitee Internationaler Frauentag 8. März 1987, 13 January 1987.

103 See, for example, the Catholic Workers Youth: *Entwicklung zum Friedensmarsch*, in: *neue plattform* 22 (1982), 2, 4.

104 See, for example, *Frauzentrum Wien*, *Auch heuer gab es wieder zwei Demos*, in: *Rotstrumpf* 33 (January 1980), 4–6.

105 Celia Donert, *Women’s Rights and Global Socialism. Gendering Socialist Internationalism during the Cold War*, in: *International Review of Social History* 67/4 (2022), 1–22, 7 f.

106 Maria Kranzl, *Nicht abwarten ...*, in: *stimme der frau* 6 (1987), 5. See also invitation flyer to form a Coordinating Committee for the World Congress of Women held in the collection of the Women for Peace Association, *Stichwort* Archive, Vienna, G 14, “Frauen für Frieden Wien”.

107 Schulz, *Success*, 2017, 3.

cerns put forward by autonomous women and trade unionists, especially from the left, was the 35-hour workweek.<sup>108</sup> A shorter workweek has been a traditional demand of labour movements since the nineteenth century<sup>109</sup> with the potential to unify workers and segments of populations that otherwise wouldn't easily find common ground.<sup>110</sup> Due to the "additional burdens imposed on women by their social position as housewives and mothers", a reduction of working hours was of "particular urgency" for women workers.<sup>111</sup> In France, where the campaign for the 35-hour week was especially vocal, the trade union women were at the forefront of the struggle.<sup>112</sup> In Austria, the campaign was widely supported, but was not discussed without some doubt among trade union women who feared negative effects: "[T]he shortening of working hours has led to the fear that people are withdrawing more and more into the family",<sup>113</sup> Emmi Brichacek voiced the concern that women would be pushed back into domestic work.

Ultimately, the 35-hour week without loss of pay became a leading labour topic in the 1980s. But even before the ÖGB addressed it as a major issue, it was a prominent demand raised at events on International Women's Day from the late 1970s onward.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to the continuing campaigning for a shorter work day as an important women-related issue by autonomous and left trade union women, including the Catholic Workers Youth,<sup>115</sup> socialist ÖGB women were cautious about adopting the 35-hour week at the 1983 congress already mentioned, despite pressure from women trade unionists of the GLB and GE, who stressed the "radical" nature of the demand.<sup>116</sup> Maria Metzker and others hesitated in promoting the 35-hour week as a separate cause, to not "predetermine" the decision of the organisation as a whole (*Gesamtorganisation*) "in any way".<sup>117</sup> Four years later, the demand was officially adopted at the Women's Congress, but with votes against by delegates from the GLB, who felt that the regulation proposed by the Trade Union Federation was not suf-

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108 See Mendel/Schissler, *Wir*, 2017, 377.

109 See Colin Creighton, *The Ten Hours Movement and the Working-Class Family in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain*, in: *International Labor and Working Class History* 100 (2021), 136–157.

110 See Kathi Weeks, "Hours for What We Will": Work, Family, and the Movement for Shorter Hours, in: *Feminist Studies* 35/1 (2009), 101–127, 124.

111 Antrag Nr. 7. Antrag des Frauenausschusses der Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten. "Betrifft: 40-Stunden-Woche", in: *Protokoll. 5. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1967*, 170.

112 See Frisone, *Trade Union Feminism, 2022*, 288–291.

113 Brichatschek, *Leitbild*, 1969, 50.

114 See 8 March flyers in the *Stichwort Archive*. For instance, G 705, *Frauenaktionseinheit 8. März*, Flyer 8, March 1979.

115 See Eva Fuchs, *Mobilisierungstext*, in: *neue plattform* 18 (1982), 12–13; *Für die 35-Stunden-Woche*, in: *die alternative* (Mai 1979), 2.

116 See Gerti Doppler, Ursula Margulies, or Katharina Ramsner, in: *Protokoll. 9. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1983*. Also, Leonore Hostasch took a clear stance in favour of a reduction in working hours.

117 Maria Metzker, in: *Protokoll. 9. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1983*, 58.

ficiently rigorous.<sup>118</sup> “We have always supported the bold demand for a reduction in working hours for **everyone** in solidarity, and in the process, women have fallen by the wayside”,<sup>119</sup> criticised Inge Rowhani, head of the Women’s Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs, in 1988, in light not only of the unsuccessful campaign for the 35-hour-week, but also the rise of “part-time work as a new alternative employment model” for women.<sup>120</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

An analysis of joint and concurring activities of autonomous and trade union women (i.e. the fight for legal abortions or the shortening of the 35-hour week) brings to light the mutual impact of activists campaigning for women’s rights and the growing importance of what Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson called a “vernacular ideology of gender equality” and which found a specific expression within the trade union movement in the form of the concept of partnership. From the perspective of activists of the autonomous women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s, women who were organised in parties, trade unions or religious organisations did not pursue women’s issues in a radical (or “offensive” as some put it) enough way, be that due to ideology or practical restraints. Although the history of International Women’s Day shows that there were repeated efforts to create a common platform to promote certain issues, especially in the 1980s in the form of action committees (*Aktionskomitees*), these efforts are rarely mentioned in the history of the movement, and work-related demands (such as the 35-hour week without loss of pay) that were not only very present, but specific and numerous, got lost in the narrative.

While autonomous and social democratic women were hesitant to cooperate with communist trade unionists, the latter took the opportunity to use International Woman’s Day and other networks forged by the communist women’s organisation to campaign beyond the workplace and in addition to the trade union networks. As can be seen in the joint fight for reproductive rights or the campaigns on International Women’s Day, contact between trade union women and feminists put issues on the agenda that affected working women as women (rather than as workers).<sup>121</sup> It was especially the activists from the newly formed alternative trade union list, GE, who were successful in establishing lasting, even if changing, contacts with autono-

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118 See Protokoll. 10. ÖGB-Frauenkongress, 1987, 48 f., 194–196.

119 “Macht Frauenarbeit frei”? Ein Streitgespräch zum Verhältnis der Erwerbsarbeit von Frauen und weiblicher Produktivität, in: MOZ (December 1988), 41–45, 44. Emphasis in source.

120 Helfert, Part-Time Work, 2023, 375–377.

121 See on this also Frisone, Trade Union Feminism, 2022, 297.

mous women, who were occasionally part of lists of candidates for elections, as, for example, with the Chamber of Labour. They, together with communist trade union women, introduced new demands and organisational politics into the debates of the women's congresses of the ÖGB.

Last, but not least, the complexity of the relations between women organised in multiple networks – sometimes together with men, sometimes not – demonstrates that the activism of women organised in communist, alternative (radical) left and socialist trade union contexts was part of the activist cycle of feminist movements. This activist cycle was characterised by a “global dynamic”<sup>122</sup> that had not only shaped the practices of the autonomous women's movement, but also of trade union women – additionally triggered through international networking and UN campaigns. Trade union women who dealt with the concerns of women workers and raised these within the ÖGB and other institutions of Austrian corporatism played an important role in the renegotiation of gender and labour relations in the 1970s and 1980s, and sometimes acted as a relevant transmission belt between grass root movements and policy making within state and governmental institutions.

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122 Magali Delaloye, *Transnationale Feminismen*. Editorial, in: Magali Delaloye (ed.), *Transnationale Feminismen – féminismes transnationaux*, Zurich 2016, 7–15, 12.