

Name: _____

Appendix A: Briefing Document

The First All-Women's Russian Congress: Setting the Scene

This gathering took place in 1908 three years after the first major revolution against the Tsar. At this point Tsar Nicholas II has agreed to the creation of the Duma (legislature), but much remains uncertain and in a state of change. Revolutionary energy is everywhere.

“Thousands of small electric lamps illuminated the spacious Alexander Hall (Aleksandrovskii zal) in the St. Petersburg City Hall on the night of December 10, 1908. A substantial crowd had gathered by eight o'clock, filling the hall to overflowing. The City Hall had been the scene of many other meetings and conferences, but this was the first time that the participants, numbering more than a thousand, were almost entirely female. They had gathered to attend the First All-Russian Women's Congress (Pervyi Vserossiiskii zhenskii s'ezd), held from December 10 through 16.” (Ruthchild, 102)

The congress brought together activists from many different communities. Although they all shared the goal of social change, many had differing ideas about the causes of injustice in Russian society and the best way to address them. Activist Alexandra Kollontai opened her speech at the Congress by saying:

“The woman question’ - say the feminists - is a question of ‘rights and justice.’ ‘The women question’ - answer the women workers - is a question of a crust of bread. Thus began Kollontai's speech at the Women's Congress.” (Ibid., 103)

What do you think Kollontai means by this? What is her view about the priorities of feminists? What is her view about the priorities of the women workers?
