

Appendix C: Alexandra Kollontai

Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai was born in 1872 to a Ukranian family in St. Petersburg, then the capital of the Russian empire. At 19 she met her future husband, Vladimir Ludvigovich Kollontai.

As an adult, Alexandra became passionate about socialist revolution through liberation and education of Russian peasants. She dedicated herself to this goal, helping to deliver illegal writings to revolutionaries and teaching workers to read. Her political work led her to separate from her husband and study economics in Zurich. She left Russia during WWI but came back following the October revolution of 1917. After the revolution Alexandra became the People's Commissar for Social Welfare, and started the "Women's Department" in 1919 which worked to make sure women could read, write, and were educated about new laws for marriage, education, and work.

Alexandra believed strongly that class inequality was the root of women's oppression, and that wealthy or bourgeois women could never be true allies to women like herself who were fighting against this oppression. She argued fiercely against the idea that women from different class backgrounds could work together, and worried that fighting for the right to vote without fighting against economic injustice was only a distraction from more important goals.

Quotes:

"The struggle to achieve political equality for proletarian women is part and parcel of the overall class struggle of the proletariat; when it becomes an independent militant aim in itself it eclipses the class objectives of women workers. The inventive bourgeoisie, who love to hide their real desires behind a screen of splendid-sounding slogans, put the world of women and its objectives in opposition to the class cause of women workers. However, as soon as the women's cause is put above the proletarian cause, as soon as women workers allow themselves to be seduced by fine-sounding phrases about the community of women's interests regardless of class divisions, they lose their living link with their own class cause and thus betray their own particular interests." (The First International Conference of Socialist Women, 1907)

"When arming themselves against the indifference, or even hostility of men towards the question of female equality, feminists turn their attention only to the representatives of every shade of bourgeois liberalism, ignoring the existence of a large political party which, on the issue of women's equality, goes further than even the most fervent suffragettes."
The Social Basis of the Women's Question (1908)

"It is only in revolutionary struggle against the capitalists of every country, and only in union with the working women and men of the whole world, that we will achieve a new and brighter future-the socialist brotherhood of the workers."

Appendix D: Olga Shapir

One of nine children and the daughter of an army desk clerk, Olga Shapir was one of the few activists before the revolution who came from a peasant family. A writer and a revolutionary, she was married and lived communally for a short time in St. Petersburg with other activists. In the 1890's she became a passionate defender of feminism, joined the Russian Women's Mutual Philanthropic Society and was one of the organizers of the Women's Congress. The rights of women as well as poor and working people became important themes her fiction including "matters of the heart and family."

Olga was sympathetic to socialism but not a member of any party. Although she saw women's political rights as an important part of larger social change, she also felt strongly that there were fundamental differences between men and women, and that activists should pay attention to these differences. Olga felt that motherhood and maternal instincts gave women important and particular values that made them different from men.

During the congress she was accused of using her power as an organizer to silence talks that were more radical than she would like.

Quotes:

Of themes in her writing Olga emphasized "the aspirations of common people to escape from their dependent position, from poverty and ignorance, and become somebody." (Ruthchild, 14)

Olga hoped that in the fight for equal rights, Russian women did not lose "those specific characteristics of female psychology, inculcated through the centuries of familial self-sacrifice."

"This is not a political meeting, but a congress." (ibid, 119)

Appendix E: Vera Figner

Born in 1852 to an upper class family, from an early age Vera Figner felt very aware of the privilege that came with her family's money and status. As a young person she wanted to work on behalf of Russian peasants, and later hoped to become a doctor. She was at first forbidden to follow this dream by her father, but after marrying was able to move to Switzerland and begin medical school. In 1873 she joined the Fritsche circle, a group made up of thirteen young, activist women, and became increasingly aware of the ways that her own privileged background contributed to the oppression of Russian peasants. Although she had been dedicated to becoming a doctor, she now felt that working for the revolutionary cause was more important. She reluctantly left medical school without her degree, and returned to Russia.

After working for the revolutionary movement, and developing what was eventually a successful attempt to assassinate Tsar Alexander II, Figner was arrested in 1883 and imprisoned for 20 years at Schlüsselburg. A staunch advocate for women's rights, in 1917 Vera took part in a coalition of feminist leader who met with the provisional government about women's right to vote. After her brief presentation on women's rights and a request for formal clarification on the issue, Prime Minister L'vov promised the activists that a law providing full political equality for women was being drafted (Ruthchild, 228-229)

Quotes:

"Thus, before my eyes stood, on the one hand, millions of human being condemned to endless labor, to poverty and everything that went with it... while on the other there was a small handful of people enjoying all the good things of life because others were laboring for them.... And I, Vera Figner, was one of those people on top; like them, I was responsible for all the misery of the vast majority... If it was all true, then I would have to renounce my position, for it would be unthinkable to recognize that you are the cause of others' suffering and still retain your privileges and enjoy your advantages." (Quoted in Engel and Rosenthal, 14-15)

In 1873 Vera learns of an order from the Russian government forbidding women students from remaining in Moscow, saying that women studying science had been engaging in immoral behavior. She notes that some of the more radical students wanted to protest this decree, while some of her more conservative classmates disagreed.

"We first and second-year students energetically defended the idea of protest, while the party of 'complacent bourgeois liberals'... tried to prove how inadvisable, dangerous, and futile such a step would be. Not only would we have to endure public insult without a murmur, we had been beaten down by our own comrades." (Ibid, 24-25)

Appendix F: Ariadna Tyrkova

Ariadna, one of seven children from an aristocratic family, was born November 26, 1869 in St. Petersburg. Her father was a minor official and politically conservative, while her mother was more sympathetic to liberal and even revolutionary ideas. But it may have been her grandfather that influenced Ariadna's politics the most. It was while rummaging through an old trunk of his in the family attic when she was thirteen that she found books on the French Revolution which she read over and over, mesmerized by the revolutionary activities of the "knights of freedom." She later found examples of revolutionary activism in her own family when her older brother Arkadii was exiled to Siberia for revolutionary activity in connection with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881.

After finishing her studies Ariadna married but later divorced, leaving her alone to support herself and two children in St. Petersburg. Through great struggle and perseverance she eventually became a writer and journalist, though she struggled with financial difficulties throughout her life as a single mother. At the beginning of the 20th century Ariadna was heavily involved with movements for liberation, making public speeches, demonstrating, and even being arrested for smuggling revolutionary journals.

As a participant in the Women's Congress Ariadna argued passionately that women must work together with men, and warned against the dangers of creating a movement divided by gender.

Quotes:

"...the division of humanity into two classes – men and women – is beneath criticism. Russian women have already moved beyond this point of view... No one will join that class of women who seek struggles with men. If we look for our enemies in the democratic organizations, if we look where there are none, we will doom the woman question... Supporters of women's rights "have friends and enemies in all parties."

"As participants in the Liberation movement, Russian women have shown their maturity. Political rights have only been given to men but together we struggled, together we went to jail, sometimes even to the scaffold." (ibid, 70)

Appendix G: Maria Blandova

Maria Blandova became a feminist activist in 1905 and was active in women's philanthropic organizations. At the women's congress she delivered a speech titled "Contemporary Situation of Russian Women."

Maria's talk acknowledged class differences among women (that poor and working women have different experiences than wealthy women) but argued that all Russian women suffered equally from a lack of civil and political rights. While socialists argued that women could not be liberated until poor and working people gained rights, feminists like Maria argued that until oppression between men and women was resolved poor and working women (along with wealthier women) would never be free. (122)

Quotes:

"Existing laws give men unlimited power, and women - submission." (Ruthchild, 122)

"The [gender] questions will be resolved in the proper sense only when women win their rights." (Ibid, 122)

Appendix H: Anna Kal'manovich

A Russian, Jewish woman, Anna Kal'manovich married and had several children with the Jewish radical lawyer Samuil Eremevich Kal'manovich who was known for defending revolutionary assassins and other who fought against the tsar. At first Anna tried to work for political change through government approved groups like charities such as the Jewish Section of the Society for Poor Relief and later the Ladies Committee of the Society for Poor Relief. An outspoken and ambitious woman, Anna eventually moved away from general philanthropy and focused on international female solidarity.

At the Women's Congress she delivered a speech titled "The Women's Movement and the Relationship of the Parties to It." In her talk she traced the history of women fighting for their own rights, and strongly criticized the role of political parties in this struggle. She argued that women could not depend on these groups, which included men, to work for gender equality. Instead she called for unity among women, regardless of class, in separate women's organizations. (Ruthchid, 143)

Quotes:

"Men of all parts of the population, of all classes, are too interested in the enslavement of the woman, and most importantly, they have humiliated her too much, to decide immediately to give her equality with them." (Ibid, 123)

"[The social democratic party] pretends that it always sincerely wants equal rights for women, that it embodies justice. I want to show that even here women's rights serves only as an adornment to their program." (Ibid, 130)

"There are patriots for the fatherland, I am a patriot for women." (Ibid, 124)

Appendix I: Paul Miliukov

A leader in the revolutionary Kadet party, Paul was a key figure of opposition to women's suffrage. He argued that it was too soon to give women the right to vote and that it would anger peasant men, making them not want to take part in the revolution.

Paul and his wife, Anna Miliukov, were present and in October of 1905 when the Constitutional Democratic Party met to decide whether to include women's right to vote in their platform. The husband and wife strongly disagreed on this subject, and began to debate one another in this public setting. Paul argued that the party platform was already "overloaded" and that advocating for women's suffrage was "unrealistic." (Ruthchild,

Quote:

"[Women's suffrage is a distraction from the] much more important questions of principle, such as republic versus monarchy, the formation and use of a general land fund... and others [which] were either avoided or pushed into the background." (Ruthchild, 66)

Appendix J: Nikolai Chekhov

Nikolai and his wife, the feminist activist Maria Argamakova, both came from gentry backgrounds. Each grew up in families of educated professionals including doctors and teachers, and both Nikolai and Maria became educators themselves. Their marriage was modeled on equality and companionship, with husband and wife often working side by side on progressive causes that reflected their shared values. Both Nikolai and Maria taught at the Prechistenskie courses (the first Russian “Workers University”) and Nikolai was the only man on the Equal Rights Union’s Central Bureau.

Maria Chekhov was very outspoken about reaching out to working class and peasant women. She and Nikolai’s activism demonstrated a commitment to rights for women as well as the goals of worker and socialists groups to which they were connected.

Nikolai attended the Women’s Congress along with husbands of other prominent feminists. The presence of men who were supportive of feminist goals illustrated the key theme of solidarity at the congress. (Ruthchild, 48-49)

Appendix K: Ivan Schleglovitov

Ivan Shcheglovitov headed the Justice Ministry from 1906 to 1915. Although he believed that there were natural differences between men and women, at one point he used this as an argument for women's right to become lawyers, saying that their "honesty, persistence [and] empathy" would be a great benefit to the profession. His feelings about women's rights and activism in Russia toughening, however, after the discovery of an assassination attempt against him involving female students.

He was strongly opposed to a proposal for women's suffrage in the Third Duma. He used examples from elsewhere in the world (he noted that only four U.S. States and four other countries had given women the rights to vote) and argued that women's natural differences from men made them unfit to take part in politics.

Quotes:

"[Women] by their very nature are inclined to passion, [and] could only encourage even more the development of political fervor, hindering the quiet and mature discussion of complex legislative matters." (Ruthchild, 168)

"For the majority of women there remains an extraordinarily significant real barrier to the realization of these rights, namely their duties as mother of families and housewives." (Ibid, 168)